



# 23

## The Need to Consider the Context When Offering Bachelor Programs in Leadership

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Is leadership a constant? Is it subject to inviolable principles that govern its success or failure, or is it a fluid concept that must evolve to meet changing conditions? One difficulty with discussing leadership as a field of study is that leadership on the ground usually demands the involvement of one or more other disciplines. Leaders, by most definitions, are meant to focus a group of followers on common goals (Silva 2016; Rost 1993). A leader cannot lead without a purpose, and the existence of common aims implies some other area of necessary knowledge beyond simply understanding how to lead. Furthermore, there is evidence that different situations call for different leadership and decision-making styles. Marques (2015), for example, suggests that the bureaucratic style of

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leadership adopted by Western nations in the twentieth century was well adapted to a stable domestic corporate environment with a slower rate of change, but is ill-suited for a hyper-connected digitized environment. Authoritarian styles are seen as preferable in emergencies where confident decisions must be made quickly (Rauf 2014), but followers often show greater commitment to organizations over the long term when they feel they are contributing to the decision-making process (Richter 2016). As a result, a given leadership strategy will not always be applicable in different situations, times, or organizations, and leadership is not easily reducible to a set of tips or tricks that can be universally applied.

Good leaders may have some common traits, but mastering leadership is context-dependent. In light of that fact, should universities be offering degrees in leadership or developing courses and certifications within departments to be taught alongside their normal curriculums? There has always been some tension between the need to choose leaders who are experts on their organization's needs and leaders who are experts on leadership itself. Companies debate whether to promote from within or hire someone with less knowledge of their business who has proven successful in comparable leadership roles. A strong leader usually demonstrates some level of familiarity with the industry as well as leadership skills, but it is rarer to find someone with a strong background in both. With successful leaders coming from either side of this divide, where should a well-designed education system place its emphasis, industry-specific training or leadership skills?

One factor that needs to inform any decision made on this subject is the way in which the nature of leadership is changing as a result of the development of a global marketplace and the long reach provided by the internet and other telecommunication technologies. The number of businesses with international relationships increases every year. Analysis comparing the 2015 CIA World Factbook and the Fortune Global 500 reveals that 69 of the world's 100 most economically powerful organizations are multinational corporations, exerting more influence than most nations (Global Justice Now 2016). As a result, local or even domestic control of any given enterprise can no longer be reasonably assumed. Economic network analysis done by Swiss researchers revealed in 2011 that 40 percent of the global wealth controlled by transnational corporations is

concentrated in only 147 entities, and 80 percent in just 737 (Vitali et al. 2011). Additionally, the number of employees worldwide operating under foreign leadership is growing. According to the most recent estimates from the United States' Bureau of Economic Analysis, businesses based in the US alone directly employed approximately 26.56 million workers abroad, an increase of over 3.5 million from 2009 (United States Bureau of Economic Analysis 2017a). Foreign businesses in which US companies are the majority shareholders saw their employment figures jump from 10.79 million to 13.8 million, a nearly 28 percent increase over the same five-year period (United States Bureau of Economic Analysis 2017b).

This type of globalization has major implications for the development of leadership studies. The wide-ranging 2004 Global Leadership & Organizational Effectiveness study (House et al. 2004) evaluated perceptions and implications of 112 different dimensions of leader behavior across 61 countries, and though some commonalities were detected, the effectiveness of individual styles and specific behaviors differed significantly between cultures and regions. After identifying six styles of leadership, team-oriented, participative, humane, autonomous, and self or group-protective, the study examined leadership preferences across ten cultural clusters. For example, the Anglo, Nordic, and Germanic clusters showed the highest preferences for an autonomous leadership style, but the lowest preferences for a self or group-protective style, whereas the Confucian, Southeast Asian, and Middle Eastern groups were exactly opposite. However, while the Anglo cluster showed a high preference for the humane style, the Germanic cluster was more ambivalent and the Nordic cluster expressed the second-lowest preference for it. Similarly, the Middle Eastern cluster's preference for the team-oriented style was the second lowest, while the Confucian and Southeast Asian preferences were the two highest (House et al. 2004). These results reveal a world with complex, interrelated, but ultimately distinct ideas about the nature of leading. Failure to understand and account for these differences has the potential to lead to ineffective leadership, failure of international partnerships, and even diplomatic incidents.

One of the arguments against leadership studies programs revolves around the simple fact that the average university has not had them until

quite recently, and society has not collapsed for lack of leaders. What this view overlooks, however, is that the nature of business is evolving in such a way that old models of leadership are unlikely to be successfully or easily generalizable into a one-size-fits-all model. Leadership is heavily dependent on the relationship between leaders and their subordinates; indeed, that relationship defines leadership in concept.

When the relationship between leaders and followers is a straightforward one, like, say, a CEO, a middle manager, and an entry-level employee working in the same building for the same business, a large part of their working relationship has already been established via their shared cultural and environmental background. Individual styles may vary, but from birth, people deal with authority figures from parents, teachers, and coaches to doctors, police officers and politicians. By the time an individual gets a first job, their cultural conditioning has firmly established a range of acceptable behavior for leaders, one which gets further developed and codified by the time they reach their first position of authority. Everything from how and when feedback should be delivered to the tone and frequency of commands to the level of involvement management should have in a given task, as well as numerous other factors, is reliant on societal background. One examination of 55 countries revealed a correlation between nations' average education level and the prevalence of participative vs. team-oriented leadership styles (Rossberger and Krause 2014). Another suggests that psychological factors like the ability to remain nonjudgmental and consider multiple factors have special implications for leaders seeking to operate effectively across international borders (Vogelgesang et al. 2014). Other research has found differing cultural impacts and influences of factors as diverse as perceived gender roles (Snaebjornsson et al. 2015; Bullough and de Luque 2014), poverty (Reade et al. 2008), climate (Van de Vliert 2006), physical appearance (Harms et al. 2012), and conceptions of leadership itself (Wang et al. 2013; Pellegrini et al. 2010), all of which have significant implications for perceived leader effectiveness and leadership behavior internationally. One effort to integrate the research on the incredibly expansive field of global leadership into a coherent model concludes "[a]lthough this undertaking is just the beginning regarding the formation of a global leadership framework, enough research has already been conducted such

that incorporating all the findings into a global contingency model would create such complexity as to make intellectual control extremely difficult, thereby frustrating and discouraging practitioners, researchers, and students” (Muczyk and Holt 2008, p.284). In light of the difficulties and the range of potential variance that exist, specialists in the field are ever more necessary to manage and interpret this data for practical use under real-world conditions.

In a monocultural society, shared experiences with authority make leadership, if not easy, then at least subject to a common understanding and set of expectations. Future leaders typically have many examples to model themselves on, and this kind of experiential, on-the-job leadership training has been the standard in many Western nations for centuries. However, if instead of a boss, manager, and employee working in the same place, a British company hires a Singaporean to oversee its operations in Japan, there may be no useful example for those leaders to model themselves on. On the topic of education, what happens when an American school partners with a Chinese institution to teach exchange students from Laos and Malaysia? At this point, even the most conscientious leader cannot safely rely on traditional mentors for the simple reason that comparable lived experiences may not exist locally.

At this point, the leadership discipline has only recently begun wide-ranging examination of the best practices for international, interdisciplinary approaches, but what is clear is that the subject is complex and fraught with perils. Differences in leadership culture have been cited as factors in the German Daimler-Benz corporation’s merger with the American Chrysler company (Appelbaum et al. 2009) and its partnership with Japanese Mitsubishi (Pandey and Rhee 2014), which coincided with a multi-billion dollar reduction in value of the corporation.

When leadership inconsistencies and conflicts happen, who should bend? How? When? Without knowing the answers to these questions, or at least having the tools to find them, it’s difficult to imagine how a leader could be successful in an increasingly globalized world. Under these conditions, leadership is moving away from being something with which everyone will have a basic level of familiarity by a young age and toward being a field of expertise involving practical skills, intercultural competency, and esoteric knowledge that will need to be consciously learned

and formally taught. Universities have an opportunity to do the ever smaller world a necessary service by exploring this field now instead of forcing the leaders of tomorrow to fumble blindly toward the future.

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