

Management Through Collaboration: Teaming in a Networked World, Emerald Group Publishing, UK (2011)

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4-A) WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM GLOBAL LEADERSHIP?

A global context often changes the way leaders think and behave. Living and working in a global environment means that one is continuously exposed to complex and paradox problems. That can trigger transformational changes. Empirical studies show that global leaders often produce new mental models (e.g. worldviews, mindsets, perceptual acumen). Multinational companies often need to develop new organizational capabilities as well. Global Leadership needs to anticipate these new demands and develop the ability to deal with more complex realities.

The following are main functions of global leadership and associated strategies:

Dealing with ambiguity: The global context will always and continuously evoke insecurity. A global leader will be confronted with a general sense of ambiguity, insufficient knowledge, and orientation loss. This requires developing a clear ego-strength based on self-reflection, which at the same time allows for adaptability in the environment (a process called chameleonity). This appears to be a classical paradox frequently encountered in the global context.

Dealing with complexity: In a global context complexities are continuously increasing as leaders are facing different problems in different geographic with different constituents from different cultures. To deal with such complexity, a global leader needs to have a clear notion of personal identity to better deal and communicate with other people including relevant stakeholders. Creating trust is a crucial element for global leadership as it helps to reduce complexities and to decrease monitoring and control costs.

Balancing Diversity and Unity: Every system needs a balance of diversity and unity. This balancing act becomes a principal task in a global leader's everyday handling of complexity. It is of vital importance to develop a meta-knowledge in "working in an intercultural context". This means to continuously question what encountered cultural differences could stand for (e.g. is it just a conflict between two departments, or a question of who has more power etc.).

Mindfulness: As a global leader you need to develop trustful networks within your global organization and within the worldwide community of global leaders that you are – suddenly - part of. As a global leader you must always reflect and consider the impact you have on others, a process that requires time. As time is very limited, it helps if you have the ability to quickly observe, absorb, and analyze differences present in your environment (diversity in values as personal, cultural, religious, gender; and diversity in skills and knowledge as education, language, hierarchy, functional experience, socio-economical status).

Multilinguality: The global context will always and continuously require you to be sensitive to different communities and cultures. Understanding those cultures and possibly speaking several languages can only help in the process of successfully managing. In each context you will have to develop different communication strategies to deal with different stakeholders such as political parties, investors, media, NGOs, and employees.

Indirect Leadership: Traditional leadership styles based on strategic planning and controlling do not fit very well in a complex global context. Rather it seems that successful global leaders open up opportunities and employ trial and error strategies, knowing that they “do not know for sure” what will work.