

Global Leadership: An Overview of Global Leadership Competencies¹

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Introduction

This series of Ask IFAS publications provides an overview of exemplary global leadership practices and explains how Extension professionals can prepare the future workforce with essential global leadership competencies. This first publication in the Global Leadership series introduces global leadership concepts and describes the process of designing effective global leadership training programs based on the competencies covered in the subsequent publications.

This series will offer practical recommendations that Extension professionals can adopt to equip organizations and their workforces with global leadership and intercultural competencies. These recommendations will include actionable steps that ensure the series remains relevant and adaptable for various settings. These recommendations are significant for Extension professionals who work with diverse clientele, providing concrete strategies for fostering leadership in multicultural environments. Understanding global leadership competencies is critical in the agricultural and natural resources industry because it equips the workforce with the knowledge and skills needed to work in multicultural environments, particularly for organizations that develop solutions and products for global markets.

Understanding Global Leadership

Leadership, often defined as guiding others towards a shared goal (Northouse, 2018; Wren, 1995; Yukl & Gardner, 2020), has distinct principles in the global arena. According to Mendenhall et al. (2018), global leadership involves "the process and actions through which an individual influences a range of internal and external constituents from multiple national cultures and jurisdictions in a context characterized by significant levels of task and relationship complexity" (p. 23). This definition highlights key competencies that integrate multiple cultural perspectives, emphasizing task and relationship management across diverse cultural contexts. Leadership approaches vary due to cultural nuances, including time orientation, communication styles, and nonverbal communication (Hills, 2002; Hofstede, 2001; House et al.,

2004). Cultural differences and awareness of these variations significantly impact how individuals approach leadership, particularly in diverse organizations (Raithel et al., 2021; Steers et al., 2013). Understanding how leadership is facilitated in a global work environment is especially relevant for Extension professionals, who work closely with multicultural communities and must understand and adapt to these differences.

What Are Global Leadership Competencies?

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a consistent need for qualified individuals to fill global leadership roles in both corporate and nonprofit organizations operating in the multinational arena (Folkman, 2014; Heinert & Roberts, 2016). This need has only grown with the increase in globalization (Perruci, 2022), with approximately 60% of companies expressing intentions to expand their global presence (Maranga & Hudspeth, 2016), yet still struggling to find the right workforce to perform optimally in culturally diverse environments. A survey study of 256 nominated global leaders from 17 countries in a UK firm, conducted by Caligiuri and Tarique (2009), found that global leadership effectiveness was predicted by high-contact leadership development activities moderated by the personality characteristic of extraversion. Some high-contact activities that helped harness global leadership competencies included structured rotational leadership development programs, short-term expatriate assignments, long-term (i.e., longer than one year) expatriate assignments, global meetings in other countries, membership in global teams, and mentoring by people from other countries.

To prepare the future workforce for the new role shifts, it is important to design programs and adopt training that emphasize developing global leaders to increase their ability to perform optimally in various settings, in the workplace, and alongside automated machines or systems (Osland et al., 2022; Rotatori et al., 2020). Some of the new role shifts we anticipate in the future will require the workforce to have higher education degrees and relevant previous experiences that help develop skills such as strategic thinking, cross-cultural communication,

interpersonal skills, integrity, resilience to stress, and inquisitiveness, which are essential global leadership competencies for a thriving workforce (Manyika et al., 2017; Mendenhall et al., 2018; Reiche et al., 2022). In subsequent publications in the Global Leadership series, the different global leadership competencies and the processes for designing effective global leadership training programs will be discussed.

Challenges in Developing Global Leaders

As the world becomes more interdependent, job roles are shifting. Organizations, particularly those in the agri-food sector, need employees who possess a business and organizational understanding and are capable of managing people, relationships, and themselves. The need to scale globally or hire global talent has driven a shift toward globalization, underscoring the need for more global leaders (Hassanzadeh et al., 2015). Now more than ever, the workforce requires leaders who know how to interact with people from various backgrounds and are also trained to motivate and guide individuals from various backgrounds (Maranga & Hudspeth, 2016; Perruci, 2022). To be a global leader, one must navigate challenges and connect the opportunities that arise within a dynamic, diverse global setting (Jenkins, 2012).

1. Cultural Intelligence and Adaptability

Global leaders must operate across diverse cultural contexts, which require more than surface-level awareness. They need to develop cultural intelligence, the ability to interpret unfamiliar behaviors, adapt communication styles, and make culturally sensitive decisions. For example, leadership styles that are effective in hierarchical cultures may not resonate in egalitarian settings. Without this adaptability, leaders risk miscommunication, reduced team cohesion, and ineffective decision-making (Maranga & Hudspeth, 2016).

2. Managing Complexity and Ambiguity

Global environments are inherently complex, involving multiple stakeholders, regulatory systems, and market dynamics. Leaders must be comfortable with navigating ambiguity, making decisions with incomplete information, and balancing competing priorities. This is especially true in the agri-food sector, where global supply chains, climate variability, and trade policies add layers of uncertainty (Jenkins, 2012).

3. Ethical and Social Responsibility across Borders

Global leaders face ethical dilemmas that vary across regions. Practices considered acceptable in one country may be frowned upon in another. Leaders must navigate these differences while maintaining organizational integrity and social responsibility. This requires a nuanced understanding of local norms, stakeholder expectations, and global ethical standards (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

4. Developing a Global Mindset

A global mindset involves openness to cultural variability, curiosity about other communities, and the ability to integrate multiple perspectives. Developing this mindset is not automatic and requires intentional exposure to international experiences, reflective learning, and mentorship. Leaders must learn to see global challenges as opportunities for innovation and collaboration (Perruci, 2022).

5. Talent Identification and Development

Organizations often struggle to identify and nurture individuals with global leadership potential. Traditional leadership pipelines may prioritize technical expertise or local performance, overlooking cross-cultural competencies. Effective global leadership development requires targeted programs that include international assignments, cross-cultural coaching, and experiential learning (Mendenhall et al., 2018; Perruci, 2022).

6. Virtual Leadership and Communication

With global teams working remotely, leaders must master virtual communication across time zones, languages, and digital platforms. Building trust, maintaining engagement, and resolving conflicts in virtual settings are significant challenges. Leaders must be skilled in digital collaboration tools, asynchronous communication, and inclusive practices that ensure all voices are heard (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

Identifying Key Global Leadership Competencies

The list of global leadership competencies is extensive, with over 200 competencies identified across numerous scholarly works from 1993 to 2016 (Mendenhall et al., 2018). Based on the extended list of available competencies, this series will highlight global leadership competencies discussed by Mendenhall et al. (2018). The identified 15 competencies fall into the following three categories.

Category 1: Business and Organization Understanding

This category focuses on individuals' ability to understand business and organizational realities and on the ways they can get things done efficiently and effectively. The competencies that are part of this category are:

1. **Vision and strategic thinking:** Developing and articulating a global vision while implementing strategic plans that align with organizational goals.
2. **Leading change:** Implementing organizational change effectively while fostering a culture of adaptability.
3. **Business knowledge:** Demonstrating general business knowledge, technical expertise in

operational processes, and value-driven, creative solutions.

4. **Organizational knowledge:** Designing and navigating effective organizational structures and processes to enhance efficiency and impact.
5. **Managing communities:** Building and maintaining relationships with diverse stakeholders, influencing key players, and fostering a cohesive and engaged global network.

Category 2: Managing People and Relationships

This category focuses on the ability of individuals to manage people and sustain relationships with individuals from many cultures. The competencies that are part of this category are:

1. **Valuing people:** Demonstrating respect for individuals and their differences, fostering trust, and cultivating inclusive work environments.
2. **Cross-cultural communication:** Demonstrating mindfulness in communication across cultural boundaries and maintaining general cultural awareness.
3. **Interpersonal skills:** Building rapport, fostering trust, and navigating social dynamics effectively in professional settings.
4. **Teaming skills:** Leading and contributing to high-performing multicultural and virtual teams.
5. **Empowering others:** Coaching, mentoring, and delegating authority effectively to foster self-efficacy and professional growth.

Category 3: Managing Self

This category focuses on an individual's personal management ability. The competencies that are part of this category are:

1. **Inquisitiveness:** Embracing curiosity, openness to learning, and humility in interactions with diverse perspectives.
2. **Global mindset:** Combining cognitive complexity, cosmopolitanism, and strategic thinking to navigate international leadership challenges.
3. **Flexibility:** Adapting leadership styles, decision-making approaches, and behaviors to fit varied circumstances, including:
 - a. **Cognitive flexibility:** Shifting between different worldviews and approaches to problem-solving.
 - b. **Behavioral flexibility:** Adjusting leadership and communication styles to diverse cultural and organizational contexts.
4. **Character:** Upholding integrity, self-awareness, accountability, and clarity of personal values in leadership roles.
5. **Resilience:** Developing behavioral strategies to manage stress and remain effective in high-pressure global environments.

More details on these categories and the associated competencies will be highlighted throughout the Global Leadership series.

Summary

This publication is the first in the Global Leadership series. This series is designed for Extension professionals to help organizations develop exemplary global leadership competencies among their workforces. Subsequent publications will provide information, examples, and activities to grow global leadership competencies based on each category: 1) business and organization understanding, 2) managing people and relationships, and 3) managing self.

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Appendix A: Global Leadership Series Overview

Global Leadership: An Overview of Global Leadership Competencies

This first publication in the Global Leadership series introduces global leadership concepts and describes the process of designing effective global leadership training programs based on the competencies covered in subsequent publications.

Global Leadership: Business and Organization Understanding

This second publication introduces the foundational competencies required to understand and navigate business and organizational realities. It emphasizes strategic thinking, changing leadership, and organizational design as essential tools for effective leadership. Readers will explore how to align vision with strategy, lead transformation, and build systems that support efficiency and innovation. The publication also highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement and community-building in global contexts.

Global Leadership: Managing People and Relationships

This third publication focuses on the interpersonal and cross-cultural skills needed to lead diverse teams and foster inclusive environments. It explores how leaders can

build trust, communicate effectively across cultures, and empower others through coaching and mentoring.

Global Leadership: Managing Self

This fourth publication emphasizes personal leadership development, including self-awareness, adaptability, and

resilience. It explores how leaders can cultivate a global mindset, remain curious and open to learning, and maintain integrity and effectiveness under pressure. The publication also introduces cognitive and behavioral flexibility as critical tools for navigating complex leadership challenges.

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