

# Global Leadership and the Call to Authentic Christian Leadership

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[Leadership Advance Online](#) – Issue XXIII

by Sharmane C. Miller

The increasingly globalized environment of the 21st century is rapidly changing the way business is conducted and reshaping the requirements of effective leadership. Leaders who possess a global perspective with global competencies are being called to the forefront of organizations. An understanding of globalization is tantamount to an exploration of the theories and approaches to global leadership. More importantly, global leadership must be examined in light of the Biblical directive of authentic and moral Christian leadership.

Globalization is characterized by the adoption of a global frame of reference or global level consideration for activities that would normally occur at a local, national or regional level (Hicks, 2010). It can be seen as a set of processes encompassing cultural, social, technological, ethical, political and economic developments. Globalization, therefore, is an intricate network of countries, institutions and people that has given rise to an interdependent world (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2005). It is this closer integration of countries and the prospect of free-trade-for-all (Stiglitz, 2006) that evokes a closer examination of the concept of global leadership with a comparison to the Biblical call to moral Christian leadership.

## Seeking to Define Global Leadership

Unlike the extensive literature available on the definition of leadership (Stogdill, 1974) global leadership is a nascent field that has little to offer in terms of systematic research into its theory, definition and concepts. Suutari (2002) contends that the term ‘global’ should be reserved to refer to leaders within a global organization that have global

integration responsibilities. With this conceptualization, global leadership, therefore, should encompass the ability to motivate and impact the thinking of people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Adler, 1997).

Many leadership theories, even the ones that are not U.S.-based, tend to be domestic in nature (Adler, 1997). They highlight the cultural context of a particular country, limiting their domain to issues and people of a specific cultural environment. Instead, the focus of global leadership should be on cross-cultural interaction, requiring a shift to globally encompassing geographies, with a transnational leadership that goes beyond the nation-state to address all human beings (Gardner, 1995). Adler and Bartholomew (1992) also refer to transnational leadership as a more sophisticated global strategy that surpasses international and multinational leadership.

Global leadership has been identified by the geocentric stance taken by various organizations. Ket de Vries and Florent-Treacy (2002) note that geocentrically-oriented companies are those whose major leaders have abandoned the ethnocentric predisposition characterized by making strategic decisions based on the values and interests of the headquarters or home country. These leaders have moved beyond a polycentric predisposition to a geocentric one. They “recognize the differences in opportunities, environmental constraints, competition, consumer sophistication and technological innovation between different countries” and have consequently modified the structures and processes of their organization (Ket de Vries & Florent-Treacy, p. 297). Global leadership in their view is exhibited in companies where multiculturalism and geographic diffusion are commonplace.

In addition to an organizational perspective, global leadership has been examined based on the leadership styles of individual leaders. However, this perspective may prove fruitless since styles vary greatly around the world. For example, participative management approaches that are touted by American researchers may be counterproductive in numerous other cultures (Hofstede, 1991). Therefore, multicultural or global leaders should be those who possess a myriad of skills and competencies that enable them to function effectively in

any global setting. Before exploring this view of global leadership, the aforementioned definitions of global leadership are examined from a Christian perspective.

Much of what is being communicated about Biblical or Christian leadership is incorporated in the growing body of literature that describes spiritual, servant, ethical and moral leadership theories. To this end, a look at the mandate given in Matthew 28:19 clearly articulates the Christian leader's call to influence on a global scale. It speaks to leadership without boundaries in all spheres and areas of discipline. Using the corresponding passage of Mark 16:15, Jameison, Fausset and Brown (1961) posit that this sphere is universal or worldwide in its scope, thus substantiating further the call to global impact.

### **Global Leadership as a Way of Thinking**

Geert Hofstede asserts, "the survival of mankind will depend to a large extent on the ability of people who think differently to act together" (2001, p. xv, preface). This way of thinking is what global researchers have been unearthing over the past twenty years as a major key to effective transnational leadership. The "global mindset," as it is commonly referred, enables leaders to interpret cross-cultural environments and choose the best action under the appropriate cultural conditions (Leininger & Javidan, 2010). It includes individual qualities that can heighten a leader's ability to influence groups, organizations and systems that are different from their own.

Transnational or global leadership is being characterized by a global mindset that is needed for observing and interpreting the dynamic economic environment of globalization. Leaders with this global mindset are not only aware of and open to diversity across cultures and markets, but are inclined and able to synthesize across this diversity (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). This mindset requires leaders to understand differences and commit to blending these differences in order to develop a more integrative perspective. It underscores the ability to be sensitive to the needs of others and to make them feel as though they belong (Srinivas, 1995).

Leaders with a global mindset have a tendency to see the world from a broad perspective (Srinivas, 1995). They see goals and objectives on a larger scale and are able to rethink boundaries and change their behavior accordingly. Also, they possess the ability to be open

to themselves and to others, being oriented to the world (Rhinesmith, 1992). Globally-thinking individuals must exhibit reliable and confident behavior which must first be anchored in their appreciation and value for their own heritage and culture (Srinivas, 1995).

A closer look at what constitutes a global mindset underscores three main elements: intellectual capital, psychological capital, and social capital (Leininger & Javidan, 2010). Intellectual capital highlights the knowledge and cognitive ability to understand global business and the global political system. Psychological capital includes characteristics like flexibility and openness to risks, other cultures and different ways of doing things. Social capital encompasses communicative skills, diplomacy and the ability to empathize with others. Additionally, it focuses on the ability of leaders to foster trust relationships, particularly with people who are different from them.

In describing their competency-based model for global leadership, Gregersen, Morrison and Black (1998) highlight inquisitiveness as an essential mindset of global leaders. This state of mind generates the action associated with learning, and learning is crucial for developing an understanding of global markets. This mindset fosters an eagerness to learn about employee conditions, new cultures and values in order to assist in connecting with people and making complex ethical decisions (Morrison, 2000). Moreover, an inquisitive mindset pushes global leaders to ask questions about industry conditions, customer value, competitors and other critical issues.

### **The Mindset of Moral Christian Leadership**

The critical role of the mindset is also emphasized in Biblical teachings, as well as within the general field of leadership that speaks to its importance. An examination of the original conceptions of all religions unearths the ultimate goal of making followers into accommodating, open-minded and broadly-focused individuals (Srinivas, 1995). This broadening of one's perspective as expressed within global leadership theory, is also fostered within Christian leaders through scripture. So critical is the mind in the lives of Christian leaders that they are instructed to renew and even guard it (Ephesians 4:23; 1 Peter 1:13). Paul also admonished followers to adopt a particular frame of reference in

order to live successful lives (Philippians 2:5; 4:2; Romans 12:16), noting that having a similar mindset is indeed advantageous. Such benefits would be manifested in a person's character, for as Proverbs 23:7 declares, the way a person thinks reflects his or her true character. This is further accentuated in the words of James Allen (1984) who explains:

A man is literally what he thinks, his character being the complete sum of all his thoughts.

As the plant springs from, and could not be without, the seed, so every act of a man springs from the hidden seeds of thought, and could not have appeared without them. (p. 3)

This crucial view of the mind as a mirror to a man's character underscores its significance in developing effective Christian leaders.

Though global leadership theory and moral, Christian leadership both accentuate the role of the mindset in effective leadership, there is a slight difference. Not only must Christian leaders seek to have a broad and open perspective, but they should constantly submit to renewing their minds (Romans 12:2) since "the conversion of the mind amounts to the renewal and transformation of human intellectual capacities" (Kretzschmar, 2007, p. 28). Furthermore, to facilitate the formation of a leader's moral character, they must be willing to reevaluate their own moral frameworks through reflection on study and experience (Kretzschmar, 2007). This constant renewal or conversion of the mind will engender a state of readiness within these authentically moral Christian leaders as they navigate through the global environment, making a positive impact.

### **Essential Competencies of Global Leaders**

Researchers are concerned with the unique competencies that enable global leaders to rise to the strategic challenge of globalization. In this regard, competencies are looked at as descriptions of the behaviors and personal characteristics that are essential for on-the-job effectiveness (Bingham, 2002). There is no single list of competencies that applies to all environments, but many studies point to the need for important personal characteristics in order to ensure success on the international scene (Cant, 2004; Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999).

Brownell (2006) argues that fundamental, observable competencies that can be acquired via a regular classroom setting are inadequate for preparing global leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. They require a distinctive set of competencies such as creating community among international members, making appropriate adjustments to business contexts, and inspiring numerous stakeholders to pursue a shared vision. These competencies also involve personal qualities such as flexibility or resourcefulness, but they are impacted by situational variables like organizational goals and location limitations. However, character is one distinctive competency that seems to be crucial to all global leadership contexts (Brownell, 2006). Gregersen, et al.'s (1998) study also emphasizes the need for displaying character, but highlights the need for demonstrating savvy, exhibiting duality and possessing unrestrained inquisitiveness.

Whether a definitive list of global leadership competencies ever materializes, Brownell (2006) believes that it is important for companies to be mindful of several factors. They must remember that acquiring distinctive competencies is a process that must be cultivated over time. Also, these characteristics are best demonstrated in authentic situations of the field rather than in simulated, contrived scenarios. Finally, global companies must note that the attainment of high level competencies varies significantly from one individual to the next. However, despite adhering to these admonitions, cultivating high-performing, sensitive, compassionate global leaders will demand more than the acquisition of a set of common competencies.

### **Values, Morals and Ethics as Core Competencies**

From the Christian perspective, leadership at any level should be morally sound and ethical in order to transfer successfully across cultures. Hence, moral leadership is tantamount to the wellbeing of society itself (Kretzschmar, 2007). With myriad challenges facing the people of the world, there is a clarion call for leaders of integrity who can be trusted to seek the good of others. Hence, global leaders who simultaneously respond to the call to impact and change the world must seek to maintain and demonstrate high moral values and ethical judgment.

Moral leadership is being regulated by moral values that advance what is good (Kretzschmar, 2007). In Psalm 15, and numerous other scriptures, the values of speaking

the truth, being trustworthy, displaying integrity and many others, are enumerated as the standard for leaders of moral integrity. Gerhold (2007) goes further to explain that everyone stands under a moral obligation to do what is good, right and just, without the intent of pursuing personal gain as a primary motivation. This aspect of having a pure motive is also emphasized in Matthew 6:1 where Jesus admonishes that we not seek to be seen of men when we do righteous deeds. The mandate to ascend to moral authentic leadership is a higher call that goes beyond the acquisition of core competencies to the internalization of core values.

Similarly, ethical leadership builds on moral principles and encompasses how leaders use their social power in the decisions they make, behaviors they engage in and the way they influence others (Gini, 1997). Ethical leaders must show a respect for the rights and dignity of others. There are six competencies that seem to be characteristic of this type of leadership: character and integrity, ethical awareness, community or people orientation, motivating, encouraging and empowering, and managing ethical accountability (Resick, Hanges, Dickson & Mitchelson, 2006). Many similarities exist between these competencies and those outlined as essential characteristics of global leaders. The call for character and integrity has surfaced repeatedly, with emphasis being placed on the need for integrity in order to promote a sense of trustworthiness for the leader (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The need to be people-oriented, fully aware of how their actions affect others, has further blurred the distinction between global and ethical leadership. However, the component of serving the greater good (Trevino, Brown & Hartman, 2003) by engaging in altruistic behaviors to help others without expecting any external rewards, may be a distinct difference of ethical leadership.

Another difference may emerge in the management of ethical accountability which encompasses a transactional element of establishing ethical standards and expectations for followers (Trevino et al, 2003). Leaders must use the available system of rewards and consequences to hold subordinates accountable. On numerous occasions, Paul's communication to the early church conveyed this same system of ethical accountability (e.g. Corinthians 5).

In his exploration of the Beatitudes and their relevance to leadership, Winston (2002) also highlights the significance of exhibiting godly traits in every sphere of one's life. He contends that leadership begins with values, and that these values are based on agapao love. This is a moral love that enables leaders to do the right thing with the right intent and at the most appropriate time. Winston further enumerates several values that can be considered core competencies of Christian leaders. These include the value of being poor in spirit, having controlled discipline, seeking what is right, showing mercy, possessing integrity and focused purpose, and making and keeping peace. Such attributes have the ability to distinguish genuine Christian leaders from others in every discipline.

Further to the distinctions between global leadership competencies and those espoused by Biblical, Christian leadership, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) outlines ideals that supplement such differences. DeSilva (2004) explains that this account gives a comprehensive view of the character and philosophy that Christians should adopt. He further outlines that the fundamental teaching of this sermon is that the followers of God are to reflect the character of God. These character traits become the catalyst for developing moral leaders who can rise to the call of changing the world. However, they must be mindful of the multiplicity of obstacles that are inherent in the arena of global leadership.

### **Challenges of Global Leadership**

Though organizations are implementing programs to help their leaders develop the appropriate mindset and competencies required to function globally, their effectiveness is being tested by multifarious challenges that are indicative of the times. Whether or not there is agreement on what constitutes a global leader or what skills and competencies should be possessed by them, one thing is certain: they must be equipped to embrace a business landscape that is characterized by interdependency (Hicks, 2010).

Interdependency gives rise to issues related to cultural diversity, organizational structure and the rapidly advancing technology. Hence, global leaders must accept the fact that moving to the 21<sup>st</sup> century means moving into an age of rapid change and unpredictability. With this mindset of readiness, global leaders are able to accept erratic changes as



opportunities for growth and development and capitalize on the economic shift to globalization.

One of the most far-reaching and complex challenges for global leaders is the need to successfully maneuver through the diverse and complex work environment. In addition to the growing number of women, older workers and people with disabilities, leaders must be cognizant of the increase in racial and ethnic groups in the workplace (Labour Force, 2003). Within America alone, organizations that were once homogenous are now bustling with a fast-growing mix of African Americans, Hispanics and Asians (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson, 2005). On a more global scale, many economic borders are diminishing, bringing with it an emergence of cultural barriers that offer challenges and opportunities in business (Javidan & House, 2001).

Therefore, global leaders must move to foster a positive and diverse work environment that undergirds the transformation of their company's demographics (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). In order to do this, leaders must institute best practices with full inclusion of all cultures and self-affirmation at the center. This would minimize discord and tension and highlight interracial interactions as opportunities for learning and developing supportive relationships (Stevens et al.). Some companies use a "colorblind" approach where they seek to disregard cultural group identities or rather connect them with an overarching identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Emphasis is placed on a superordinate goal or identity, which while increasing an individual's organizational identity, decreases the relevance of individual differences (Chatman & Flynn, 2001). Unfortunately, this practice downplays the viewpoint of various groups by discouraging them from thinking or performing in accordance with their social group.

To minimize resistance from non-minority and minority organizational members who feel excluded by either a multicultural or colorblind approach, Stevens et al (2008) propose an AIM approach which stresses that diversity encompasses everyone within the company whether they are minority or non-minority. Differences are acknowledged and noted as significant while non-minorities' feelings of exclusion are addressed. Leaders implementing such an approach would seek to uphold subgroup identity, but would remain mindful of

developing a climate in which everyone feels as though they belong. To do this, global leaders must engender a sense of respect, empathy and sincerity among all workers.

No matter the approach, it is imperative for leaders to communicate a value for diversity. By seeking to understand and appreciate individual differences, diversity can be viewed as an advantage to competitiveness rather than a barrier to productivity (Finley, 1998). Global leadership that effectively attracts, maintains and motivates people from different cultures would yield great dividends regarding cost structures, creativity, problem-solving and adapting to change (Mead, 1998). Can moral, Christian leadership then engender the same kind of motivation across cultures?

### **Diversity: A Biblical View**

Christianity is symbolized by a body of diverse parts carrying out different functions for a common purpose (1 Corinthians 12), suggesting that diversity is an essential component of a Christian leader's experience. This analogy of the body also speaks to the interdependency that characterizes the global environment. With numerous references to various cultures throughout the Old Testament, Paul's letters to the early church, perhaps, offer a more focused look at how Christian leaders should handle diversity. In one situation, he explains to the church in Corinth how he seeks to be all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9: 22). Similarly, leaders with a Biblical mandate of affecting change globally must be able to relate to myriads of people with colorful backgrounds.

Similarly, Becker (2007) points out that moral leadership incorporates respect for human dignity and the recognition of basic human rights. Moral leaders must see people as unique individuals who possess distinctive skills and abilities that can be harnessed with the right leadership. Just as Paul admonishes us to be accepting of others, even those who may seem weak (Romans 14), authentic Christian leaders are called to do the same.

### **Conclusion**

There is a growing need for highly-skilled global leaders who can take organizations to higher levels of productivity. Such leaders must adopt a mindset that is broad in scope and open to

the ideas and perspectives of others. Additionally, they must develop essential competencies that set them apart and propel them into global competitiveness. Authentic Christian leaders must reciprocate by beginning to assume the right paradigm of humility and servitude. Keeping the Biblical principles at the forefront will enable them to smoothly implement this shift in thinking. Hence, the values of honesty, integrity, respect and simply doing what is right can prevail throughout the world, bringing the change that Christian leaders have been mandated to invoke.

### About the Author

Sharmane Miller is an educational consultant and lecturer in the School of Education at the College of The Bahamas.

Email: [sharmi1@regent.edu](mailto:sharmi1@regent.edu)

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