

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN LEADERSHIP EDUCATION: KEYS TO EDUCATING GLOBAL LEADERS

(Keynote address from February 2009 ASBBS Conference)

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INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure to be with you this evening. I bring you warm greetings from the cold state of Minnesota and Bethel University where I serve as an administrator and faculty member. In addition to extending my gratitude to colleagues at Bethel University for providing a community in which my academic interests may be expressed, I wish to offer my special thanks to the leadership of the American Society of Business and Behavioral Science, and to Wali Mondal in particular, for providing this ongoing avenue for scholarly engagement with colleagues from around the world.

The theme of this year's conference is focused on *Globalization and the Future of Business Education*. In light of the current market realities we are facing in 2008 and 2009, this audience need not be convinced of the realities of globalization. More than ever before in history, the effects of globalization are being experienced around the world. Even as I originally drafted my work for this presentation in the fall of 2008, an RSS News Feed from MSNBC announced on my computer's desktop, "World Stocks Fall on Economic Fear." This news feed went on to note that "European stock markets opened sharply lower Wednesday following losses in Asia amid spreading pessimism over corporate earnings around the world." As one such report among many in our time, it is easy to quickly identify the interdependent nature of our world and global economies.

With the rise of globalization, so rises the need for leaders with global perspective and intercultural competence to meet these growing challenges and opportunities. In light of this, in our time together this evening we will be focused on four areas: (a) understanding the effects of globalization, (b) exploring theoretical approaches to the understanding of culture and the development of intercultural competence in global leaders, (c) presenting one school's approach to educating leaders in intercultural competence, and (d) providing recommendations for leadership educators aiming to meet the urgent need of preparing leaders to serve well in the face of globalization.

GLOBALIZATION

While cross-cultural interactions have been taking place for thousands of years, it is only within recent decades and the past century that the societies of the world have become more accessible. Advances in aviation arguably served as one of the first quantum leaps toward the present state of globalization we now experience. Alongside advances in transportation, however, the quantum advances in technology and communication—driven by the introduction of the World Wide Web to public use—have provided a powerful host for bringing the peoples of the world into closer proximity and accessibility. Advances such as these are increasing the ease with which peoples and societies may learn from and work together with people from other cultures.

In a treatment of negotiation in cross-cultural contexts, Beneke (1983) provides an early look at globalization trends. In this work, Beneke cautions the international business traveler to not mistake the presence of touristic fares that make people feel at home with a universally homogeneous global culture. As I have taken in many of these fares myself—experiences such as Pizza Hut and McDonalds on multiple continents, or Kentucky Fried Chicken in Shanghai—I have had to remind myself that while there are an increasing number of global brands, this does not translate into a homogeneous global culture. The presence of globalization forces us to see and embrace an increase of both similarities and differences in such intercultural interactions. With the addition of such complexities, it becomes even more important that global leaders understand the unique skills needed to lead in a global environment.

Javidan (2008a) argues that those working cross-culturally in a global environment have two major responsibilities. First, these individuals need to understand their own cultural lens. Second, and based upon the first, if individuals want to influence cross-culturally, they need to understand the other's cultural lens. While these reminders may be fairly basic, when missed, things can go very wrong. Javidan reminds us that cultural lens are like electricity; we really only pay attention to it when we don't have access to it. But to be effective in unique cultural contexts, we must begin with a commitment to learning about other cultures, and then bring with this learning a willingness to adapt our behavior in light of what we have learned. Such skills are not always intuitive for leaders engaged in globally oriented work, and reinforces that the need for specialized education—whether formal or informal—focused on developing intercultural competency is vitally needed in our day.

Noting that no American corporation is immune from the impact of globalization, Javidan, Dorfman, Sully de Luque, and House (2006) argue for the priority of understanding global leadership as a critical success factor for large multinational corporations. Arguably, these comments are not just for the large multinational. Even smaller companies and organizations are increasingly touched by the impact of globalization. Large and small organizations alike are facing the reality that the global perspective of their leaders and managers is not sufficient to meet the demands of globalization. In fact, one report indicates that

while the demand for global business understanding continues to grow, nearly 85% of fortune 500 companies have reported a shortage of managers with the necessary global skills (Gregersen, Morrison, & Black, 1998). This same report indicates that having competent global leaders was a highest priority concern for corporations when looking at factors for business success. In fact, the need for competent global leaders was rank higher than even adequate financial resources or technology, showing just how significant this consideration is for prominent corporations working to meet the demands of globalization.

CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

When looking at the discipline of leadership studies, it is easy to see why a focus on intercultural competence is necessary for successful initiatives in the global context. Klenke (2008) argues that leadership is essentially a relational practice. The relational dimension of leadership is further emphasized by ASBBS' own Stone and Patterson (2006) in their overview and history of leadership studies' movement toward follower-focused orientations. As follower-orientation in leadership becomes more of a dominant leadership paradigm—and this coupled with the widening cultural spectrum of followers and organizational constituencies—the need for intercultural competence grows dramatically. As a relationally-focused endeavor, leadership and leaders must be able to understand and effectively communicate with individuals of their own and divergent cultural backgrounds.

Lest we quickly dismiss this discussion of intercultural competence as something only needed for organizational leaders who physically travel to foreign sites, we must remind ourselves of the increasing cultural diversification within and around our organizations. With the onset of virtual and multinational teams, organizational members need to quickly learn a new set of competencies in how leadership within such teams is effectively carried out. Marquardt and Horvath (2001) argue that, “Leaders around the world are now recognizing the critical importance of global teams as the key to future competitiveness and productivity in today’s new networked-style global organization” (p. 3). The need for globally minded and interculturally competent leaders is not only a reality in virtual global teams; it is needed in the multicultural context of regional teams and organizations as well.

With the cultures of the world around and within even local expressions of our organizations, some authors are beginning to utilize the creative language of “glocalization” to emphasize that global influence is now a local reality. The central question for leaders then is how do we best prepare our organizational members to meet this unique opportunity? In order to engage this question, we will focus on the nature of culture and intercultural competence, and I will argue that preparing leaders to become interculturally competent is one of the best approaches to meet this challenge of our day.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES: HOFSTEDE

Hofstede's approach to the study of culture is based on the concept of culture as consisting of dimensions that may be predictive of behavior. In his original study, Hofstede focused on a group of IBM middle managers across 53 countries. In his groundbreaking work, Hofstede found four primary cultural dimensions: (a) power distance, (b) individualism-collectivism, (c) uncertainty avoidance, and (d) masculinity-femininity. As Hofstede continued to study cultural dimensions, he eventually identified a fifth dimension, which was labeled long-term orientation. Hofstede's work has been criticized for, among other things, being focused on only one company and inattentive to in-country differences, even with such criticisms in view, Hofstede's work was groundbreaking and has been a dominant paradigm in the study of culture and leadership up to the time of the GLOBE project.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES: GLOBE

The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project is the most extensive study of leadership from a global perspective to date. With 160 social scientists and management scholars from over 60 cultures—representing most, if not all, major regions in the world—the GLOBE project worked with over 17,000 middle managers from over 900 corporations in these 60 plus countries. Focused on the food processing, finance, and telecommunication industries, the GLOBE project engaged in a long-term programmatic series of cross-cultural leadership studies. As such, GLOBE is described as “a multi-phase, multi-method project in which investigators spanning the world are examining the interrelationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership” (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002, p. 4).

In discussing the notion of culture, Javidan (2008a) emphasizes that without common experiences, there is no common culture. One of the unique components of the GLOBE study is the differentiation of cultural values and cultural practice. In other words, GLOBE desired to evaluate both how things are done in a culture, and how that culture describes how they should be done. It is a contrast between the “*should be*” and the “*as is*,” and what the GLOBE project refers to as *modal values* and *modal practices*.

Built upon Hofstede's study of culture, the GLOBE project utilized nine dimensions of culture. In addition to the nine dimensions of culture, the GLOBE project utilized six global leadership dimensions of culturally endorsed implicit theories of leadership. In examining the relationship between cultural and leadership dimensions, substantial evidence has been established indicating that leader behavior, attributes, and influence significantly vary due to the influence of unique cultural dimensions in diverse contexts (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997).

THEORETICAL APPROACHES: GLOBAL MINDSET

Based upon the GLOBE study, Javidan and the Thunderbird School of Global Management have begun work on the construct of Global Mindset. In this work global leadership is viewed essentially as the process of influencing culturally distinct individuals and groups. Javidan argues that *global mindset* is an essential key to successful *global leadership*. Based upon this, he defines global mindset as, “the ability to influence individuals, groups, organizations, and systems that are unlike the leader’s” (Javidan, 2008c), and further notes that global mindset is essentially a set of individual attributes that enable and facilitate global leadership.

What are the core attributes associated with global mindset? Presenting on the theme of global mindset, Javidan (2008b & 2008c) provided a summary of the three essential core attributes of the construct: (a) Intellectual Capital, (b) Psychological Capital, and (c) Social Capital. While multifaceted, *Intellectual Capital* is focused largely around industry specific knowledge, cognitive complexity, and general cultural acumen. *Psychological Capital* includes themes such as passion for diversity, self-efficacy, and quest for adventure. Also multifaceted, *Social Capital* includes both structural dimensions such as global connectivity and relational dimensions such as interpersonal competence, which is focused on the priority of building trusting relationships in multiple cultural contexts. Based on this work, the Thunderbird Global Mindset Inventory (GMI) has been developed as a means of self-assessing global mindset. In the field of cultural studies, there is sure to be more attention brought to the work of global mindset and the GMI in coming days. The study of global mindset is moving in a particularly interesting direction as GMI results are being compared to leader brain maps through neurologically driven studies.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES: INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

A theoretical approach to culture that has gained increasing attention over the past two decades is Bennett’s (1986, 1993b) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Bennett’s model is designed to provide an interpretive grid for understanding an individual’s development in their orientation toward cultural difference and is inclusive of three ethnocentric and three ethnorelative categorical orientations. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) argue that the DMIS constitutes a progression of an individual’s worldview. The model begins with the ethnocentric categorical orientations of (a) Denial, (b) Defense/Reversal, and (c) Minimization. As one’s worldview shifts to ethnorelative categories, the orientations in the DMIS are (a) Acceptance, (b) Adaptation, and (c) Integration.

As a model of intercultural sensitivity focused on the development of intercultural competence, it is important to understand how core terms are utilized. *Intercultural sensitivity* may be understood as the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences. Related to this, *intercultural competence* may be understood as the ability to think and act in interculturality

Irving

appropriate ways (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). Central to the DMIS is the understanding that increased *intercultural sensitivity* is associated with increased *intercultural competence* (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman). In light of this, those interested in the development of intercultural competence within leaders rightly are to be focused on the development of intercultural sensitivity focused on the leader's ability to identify and experience relevant cultural differences.

While this snapshot of the DMIS is helpful, it is important to understand the basic definitional categories in the model. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) provide a helpful overview of these categories. In the DMIS, the ethnocentric category of *Denial* refers to a state in which one's own culture is experienced as the only real culture, and thus, cultural difference is not really experienced at all. Beyond Denial, the ethnocentric category of *Defense* refers to a state in which one's own culture is experienced as the only viable culture; while a person in this category is able to discriminate cultural difference, the cultural difference is usually interpreted from a perspective that is negative, stereotypical, or polarizing. A variation on Defense is *Reversal*—a state in which a person's adopted culture is experienced as superior to one's initial cultural experience. The final ethnocentric category of *Minimization* refers to a state in which one's own cultural worldview is experienced as universal. In this state, cultural difference is subordinated to global similarities, and thus distinct cultures tend to be either trivialized or romanticized.

Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) go on to describe the ethnorelative categories. The ethnorelative category of *Acceptance* refers to a state in which one's own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex worldviews. Individuals with this worldview are able to experience others as different from themselves, but equally human. Next, the ethnorelative category of *Adaptation* refers to a state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture. Individuals with this worldview can engage in empathy, and are able to express alternative cultural experiences at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. This state becomes the basis for biculturality and multiculturalism. The final ethnorelative category of *Integration* refers to a state in which one's experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews. At this category, the themes of encapsulated and constructive marginality are emphasized by Bennett (1993a).

While the university as a whole where I serve utilizes multiple models for the development of cultural awareness among its students, faculty, and staff, the particular school at which I serve within our university has adopted the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity as the primary theoretical basis in our work in addressing the needs of globalization. Beyond the DMIS being a theoretically rich model, it also provides a model that is tied to research instrumentation that may be utilized developmentally with individuals. This instrument—the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)—has been developed based on the DMIS in order to provide a reliable and valid measure of the

model's constructs. As such, it takes that which can be a subjective area of study and provides more objective measures for organizational members to consider as they work on their own developmental progress around intercultural competence. Because of this, the DMIS and the IDI have played a significant role in our university's approach to addressing the need for intercultural competence among our students, faculty, and staff.

EDUCATING FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

While most business leaders and leadership educators agree that preparing people for the demands of globalization is vitally important, the question of how this education is best carried out is often not as clear. While our institution is by no means a perfect example of how to approach this need, we are aiming to take the reality of globalization and the need to develop intercultural competent leaders seriously. In light of this I will briefly present some of the features of our school's approach for the purpose of encouraging other institutions in their journey toward intercultural competence along with us.

As we look at this one example, I first want to emphasize that a need of this magnitude will likely not be addressed through a single method approach. Rather, educating for intercultural competence must take a holistic and multi-dimensional approach that focuses both on the often intrapersonal cognitive and affective levels as well as the relational and behavioral levels of interpersonal experience. In reality, the line between the intra- and inter-personal realms is often not as clear in practice; ultimately, a holistic approach encourages both personal reflection and relational engagement. Practically, the focus on intercultural competence in our institution takes on complementary, but distinct approaches for our faculty and students. The following is an overview of our efforts as a school in this area.

- **Strategic Initiatives:** Our school has adopted a focus on increasing intercultural competence at the level of our strategic initiatives. This strategic initiative—one of six current strategic drivers—was proposed by our Provost and approved by our President and Board of Trustees. We have found that this institutional level of ownership and support has been vital in making a focus on intercultural competence a priority from a systems perspective. Without broad ownership and support, such initiatives will face many challenges institutionally.
- **Intercultural Development Inventory:** The IDI has been taken by the entire faculty in our school. Faculty level discussions on the results from the IDI have been ongoing, and faculty members have had the opportunity for reflective work on their own intercultural development. This has been very important as the IDI has been administered to our students as well. In addition to providing a common language for faculty and students dialoging around this vital topic, faculty involvement at this level has emphasized for our students the priority of attending to our own development around intercultural competence. Students and faculty alike have been encouraged to thoughtfully and reflectively process the results of the IDI, and most have

affirmed the valuable role of the IDI in addressing this focus on intercultural development.

- **In Class Emphasis:** As a culture is being developed around the use of the DMIS and the IDI among faculty, staff, and students, it has become easier to incorporate topics addressing intercultural competence into the classroom experience for students. While we have one required class wholly focused on issues surrounding intercultural relations and intercultural competency development, this common focus has also provided our school with a capacity for faculty to include conversations around intercultural competence in courses focused on other subject areas. For instance, in a course focused on developing students' understanding and capacity for working in team-based and collaborative environments, concentrated attention is given to the global dynamics surrounding virtual and multinational teams.
- **Intercultural Experience:** While the school's commitment at the previous levels is significant, these commitments are incomplete without also encouraging intercultural experiences for faculty and students alike. At a faculty level, the school has provided a grant fund to which faculty may apply for funds for the purpose of engaging in cross-cultural teaching experiences. Through this—in conjunction with global partner institutions—faculty members are provided a means for gaining significant intercultural experience. This program has been one of the most effective ways of providing faculty with a means for applying their intercultural development studies. More significantly, the experiences that faculty have naturally find their way back to the classroom at the university, thus providing students with the benefit of globally influenced faculty and helping to work toward our aim of developing interculturally competent leaders.

In addition to this, students are likewise encouraged to engage in intercultural experiences both locally and internationally. These experiences come in the form of both formal and informal opportunities. Some of our students join faculty or travel independently for short-term international experiences, while others select longer term cross-cultural learning experiences. Additionally, students are encouraged to engage in local intercultural opportunities as well, and through some of our courses, students participate in organizational and community oriented site visits in culturally diverse settings. Through these and other formal and informal intercultural experiences, the school aims to reinforce student learning that has taken place in the classroom setting through outside intercultural experiences.

As one point of empirical support for our school's use of the IDI and a specific course focused on the development of intercultural competence, a comparison group quasi-experimental study was used to measure student growth in intercultural competence. In this evaluation, we found that the data indicated significant student growth in intercultural maturity. While 92% of the students in this study were categorized in ethnocentric categories in the DMIS during pre-tests, following the course intervention, zero percent of the students were found

to be in the DMIS categories of Defense and Denial, and over 50% of the students were found to be at a satisfactory level of intercultural competency, up from 8% prior to the course intervention (Harden & Sandage, 2008).

A COMMITMENT TO BUILDING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

House (2004) reminds us that, “Ample evidence shows that cultures of the world are getting more and more interconnected and that the business world is becoming increasingly global” (p. 1). With this reality facing leadership educators, we cannot afford to ignore the need and opportunity before us. In light of this, allow me to provide some recommendations for leadership educators who care about preparing students to serve in our world during this time of increasing globalization.

First, and quite basically, doing something for our students is better than nothing. It is easy to compare our educational institutions to other schools. While this is beneficial for the purpose of gaining new ideas and finding encouragement for addressing the needs of globalization with our students, it can also lead to a type of institutional paralysis that makes us feel we cannot compete with larger faculties or larger endowments. When this perspective sets in, we must remind ourselves that our students desire the best we can offer them as faculty and as educational institutions. We must do what we can with the resources that are available to us. As LaFasto and Larson remind us, "the fundamental law of success is this: Action is more likely to succeed than inaction" (2001, p. 22).

Second, aim for a holistic approach that engages both the cognitive and experiential needs of developing intercultural competence. Experience without insight can be helpful, but it may lead to reactions driven by stereotyping and result in further resistance to intercultural engagement. Similarly, cognitive engagement without experience can stretch students intellectually, but runs the risk of leaving students with unrealized theories that are uninformed by relational and intercultural encounters. When intercultural competency development takes the cognitive and the experiential dimensions of education seriously, there is great promise for students maturing in intercultural competence.

Finally, it's important that we measure what matters. Successful businesses do not fail to measure their bottom lines. Educational institutions must not exempt themselves from measuring what matters around intercultural competence. If the development of interculturally competent global leaders is one of the highest priorities for today's organizations, educational institutions need to identify ways of measuring student learning outcomes around this area. In our school, we have identified the IDI as the primary tool for accomplishing this. Your institution may land on another tool for measurement, but I would challenge institutions to ask the hard question of how they are measuring what matters in this realm of student intercultural development.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

As organizations continue to experience both the opportunities and challenges surrounding globalization, the need for intercultural competence—and

Irving

leaders who possess this competence—will be increasingly important. In this article, intercultural competence has been presented as an essential skill necessary for leaders and organizations that desire to meet the unique demands of global interconnectedness. In addition to engaging the unique features of globalization and several key approaches to understanding culture and leadership, special attention has been given to recommendations for how educational institutions may approach the development of interculturally competent emerging leaders. As institutions of higher education continue to prepare these leaders for diverse organizational roles, the importance of strategies such as these will become increasingly vital. I trust that the recommendations provided in this article will help educational and organizational leaders as they work to meet the unique challenges and opportunities of globalization during this time in history. God bless you, and thank you very much.

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- Intercultural Competence in Leadership Education: Keys to Educating Global Leaders**Justin A. Irving
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Intercultural Competence in Leadership Education: Keys to Educating Global Leaders Justin A. Irving.....	3
The Role of Positive Organizational Behavior: A Conceptual Model Renin Varnali	14
The Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act and the Accounting Information: Is Information Resulting in More Equity? Carol Sullivan.....	26
Virtue as a Foundational Element in Global Business Education Mark W. McCloskey	36
A Transdisciplinary Andragogy For Leadership Development in a Postmodern Context: Preliminary Findings Elaine M. Saunders.....	50
Developing Online Customer Trust David R. Wheeler and Susan Atherton.....	62
Opportunities in International Accounting Education Presented by the Current Financial Crisis John E. Simms.....	69
Globalization of the Anglo-Saxon Model of Higher Education: Implications for Growth and Development of the Knowledge Economy Stephen P. Wanger, Zarrina K. Azizova, and Meng Wang.....	81
Requisite Values for the New Global Instructor Gary Oster and A. Gregory Stone	94
Education and Emancipation of Kenyan Women in the Modern Era James M. Mbuva	105