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## Global Skills and Competency Training for Developing Global Talent: Implications for International Human Resource Management

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# **Global Skills and Competency Training for Developing Global Talent: Implications for International Human Resource Management**

Gyongyi Konyu-Fogel, Walsh College

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*Organizational development initiatives that focus on developing long-term capabilities within the firm are crucial to build core competencies and competitive advantage. This paper examines training and development factors of global competencies in global business and leadership development. The study determines the demographic and organizational factors that increase global mindset capabilities based on empirical research using quantitative measures of global mindset in business. Participants included 158 senior business executives from five continents in 14 industries responding to an online survey. Global mindset of the leader is found to significantly improve leadership behavior in global business. Recommendations are made for training and global skill development through a variety of training methods to foster cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity, global mindset capabilities, and improve leadership behavior in global business. Implications are made for international human resource practice.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Training and development has many implications for International Human Resource Management. Human resource and organizational development practitioners often encounter the task of developing global talent and cross-cultural skills and competencies for employees who are involved in foreign travel and international assignments. In my recent role as Director of Programs at the Center for Global Leadership at a Midwest University, I worked with business and community organizations to identify critical factors in developing effective international training programs. By conducting formal surveys and inquiries, the following main factors emerged as primary training needs necessary for developing global talent in today's economy:

- Encourage participation in international assignments as these allow employees gain intensive experience in working with foreign nationals in foreign business environments.
- Working overseas or by conducting business with foreign nationals who work and operate in a foreign country, sometimes in virtual environments, can provide valuable experiences that seem to increase global skills and global mindset capabilities.
- Offering opportunities to learn a foreign language and encouraging employees to engage in speaking foreign languages conversationally in formal and informal settings could create a greater understanding of cultural differences and appreciation of other cultures.
- Providing opportunities for increasing cross-cultural understanding through diversity training, experiencing bilingual/multi-ethnic environments, participating in social, cultural, family, and work-related events may increase an understanding of differences in cultures and their impact on business practices and leadership behavior by improving global mindset skills and competencies.

As organizations continue to increase their involvement in global markets, there will be an increasing demand for leaders who are able to integrate global operations. Human resource managers should develop training programs to help employees understand cultural differences and develop skills and competencies to operate effectively in global environments as these factors can create competitive advantages and improve individual performance and productivity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Working in global operations is noted to be more complex than leading traditional domestic or national operations (Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, & Maznevski, 2008). There is an on-going debate in the literature on what differentiates global leaders from traditional leaders (Beamish & Calof, 1989). Some scholars contend that while most competencies associated with leadership from the traditional or domestic leadership literature are necessary to lead globally, the global context places additional demands on certain leadership competencies and skill development that are different from those used in traditional leadership (Beechler and Javidan, 2007).

It is argued that global leaders differ from domestic leaders because they operate in a global context which is a transformational experience that produces new mental models in the individual including new worldviews, different mindsets, perceptual acumen, and perspectives that do not exist within people who have not gone through the experience of living and working globally. Morrison (2000) notes that:

For a company to become global, its leaders must develop global competencies that go beyond the familiar in the home country. Globalization is all about overcoming national differences and embracing the best practices from around the world. Something more than a global model that can be applied throughout the world, a model that transcends and integrates national schemes and becomes an essential tool for hiring, training and retaining the leaders of tomorrow. (p. 120).

This approach is consistent with Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) and Adler and Bartholomew's (1992) notion that global leaders work in global organizations, executing global strategies across rather than within borders. Bird and Osland (2004) note that the transition from domestic to global is a "quantum leap" because the greater complexity of the leader's environment necessitates a greater need for cultural understanding, as well as an increased need for broad knowledge spanning functions, more frequent boundary spanning across national and organizational boundaries, more stakeholders to consider in decision-making, higher level of tensions and ambiguity on and off the job, and more challenging ethical dilemmas (p. 4).

However, while understanding the global nature of the leader's job is helpful, it does not provide a clear insight in to what is unique about global leadership (Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006). There seems to be a lack of clarity in using the term global leader. It seems that what many describe as leadership is actually the organizational tasks performed by global executives. Table 1 presents a summary of the differences in the environment, business tasks, and leadership competencies of national and global leaders as discussed above.

As shown in Table 1, operating globally is more complex than operating domestically. This requires that employees who work in a global environment perform tasks that integrate different cultural, political, economic, and social environments. To be successful in global business, the employee must have an ability to understand foreign country environments and differences in cultural values to be able to work with global customers and complex networks. The proponents of globalization hold that effective global leaders must operate with a global mindset that is characterized by the ability to understand the business, industry sector, and a particular market segment, or a business function on a global basis (Jeannot, 2000).

In a recent study on the effects of global mindset on leadership behavior, a significant relationship was found between global mindset competencies and leadership behavior in global business (Konyu-Fogel, 2011). This study contributes to research significantly as it empirically measures global mindset competency and determines its effects on leadership behavior.

**TABLE 1. DIFFERENCES OF ENVIRONMENTS, TASKS, AND COMPETENCIES IN DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL BUSINESS**

Factors	Domestic Business	Global Business
Environment Context of Job	Live and work in home country. Experience home country political, societal, cultural, and economic environment.	Live in home or host country. Work in various countries in different political, social, cultural, and economic environments.
Business Tasks Employee Roles	Responsibility for domestic business. Serve local domestic markets and home country customers. Meet local business objectives.	Responsibility for global business operations. Serve global markets and international customers. Meet global business objectives.
Responsibilities Competencies Skills and Abilities	<p>Establish and maintain relationship with home country staff.</p> <p>Lead/work with employees in home country location.</p> <p>Understand home country organizational processes, politics and procedures.</p> <p>Understand local culture.</p> <p>Motivate employees with same cultural values.</p> <p>Operate within hierarchical structure of local organization.</p>	<p>Establish and maintain networks between home and host-country operations.</p> <p>Lead/ work with employees across countries and cultures.</p> <p>Understand host country organizational processes, politics, and procedures.</p> <p>Understand foreign country environments and culture.</p> <p>Motivate employees with different cultural values.</p> <p>Operate in global structures.</p>

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research instrument of the study was designed to assess the participants' global mindset competency to measure the level of intellectual intelligence and cultural intelligence of leaders via 16 items organized in seven subscales (see Figure 1). The instrument tested strong on internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = 0.819$ ) and high on validity, showing a strong model fit for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA):  $\chi^2 = 161.060$ ,  $df = 90$ ,  $p = .000$ ; RMSEA (90% CI) = .078 (.058-.098); CFI = .887, factor loading scores from CFA significant at  $p < .05$ .

Intellectual intelligence in the study was composed of multiple items related to the ability to classify diverse information into categories of meanings to make decisions in global environments. The subscales of intellectual intelligence include managing uncertainty, pattern recognition, thinking globally, and ability to differentiate and integrate complex information.

The main components of the intellectual intelligence dimension of global mindset in the study include *Differentiation* as it relates to the narrowness or breadth of knowledge and information that the individual selects and considers in his/her decision-making. Global mindset is assumed to be high on differentiation (Govindarajan, & Gupta, 2002). Another component of intellectual intelligence is *Integration* as it refers to the leader's ability to understand differences and integrate these differences into meaningful categories. Global mindset is likely to exhibit not only the willingness to learn new concepts and information but has an interest and appreciation for diversity and exploring new and novel things and situations.

*Managing Uncertainty* is another component of intellectual intelligence that refers to the ability to tolerate risk and uncertainty in unfamiliar situations. Global leaders are confronted with many unknown situations that require them to manage uncertainty. Tolerance for ambiguity requires an ability to be open to new ideas and experiences. Those high in tolerance of ambiguity generally enjoy complexity, are not threatened by it, and see it as a natural part of life, and are not hindered by making decisions in conditions of ambiguity (Kozai Group, 2008). Gregersen, Morrison, and Black (1998) note that global leaders not only have the ability to manage uncertainty but they embrace it and find it challenging and motivating.

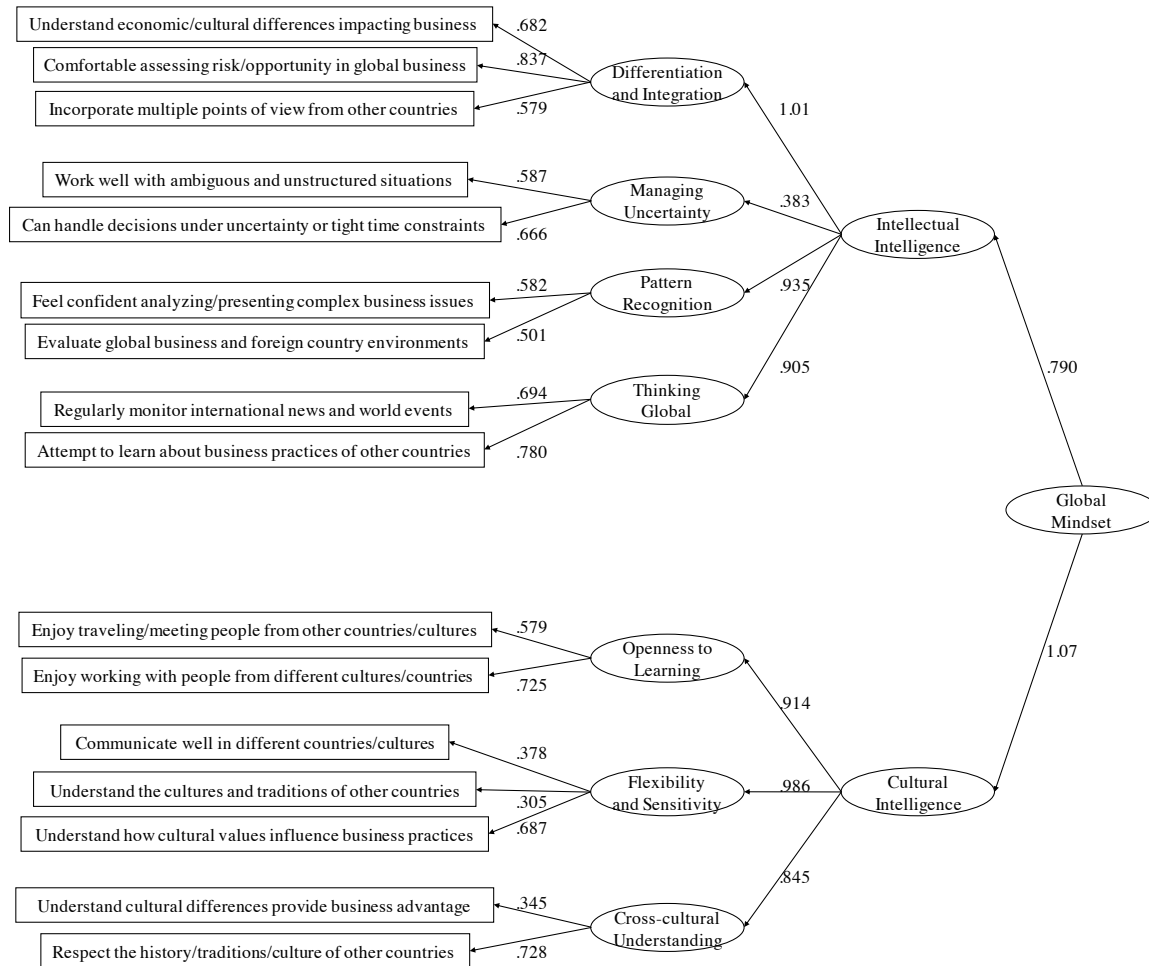
Another component of intellectual intelligence of the leader's global mindset here is *Pattern Recognition* which refers to the process of sense-making and interpreting the information into meaningful constructs that allow the leader to respond to differences in business environments. The process of meaning-making varies by culture and individuals. Affective interpretation is the emotional or feeling response triggered by the message. Emotional responses may be positive (upbeat, exciting, warm), neutral (disinterested) or negative (fear, anger, frustration). Similar to cognitive interpretation, emotional responses are often culture-specific and context-based.

The construct of cultural intelligence includes four subscales comprised of openness to learning, emotional sensitivity, behavioral flexibility, and cross-cultural understanding. *Openness to Learning* refers to the leader's interest and ability to learn new concepts, ideas, values, and encounter unfamiliar situations. It involves a willingness to seek to understand the underlying reasons for cultural differences and to avoid stereotyping people from other cultures. Openness to learning also refers to the leader's capacity to actively engage and seek opportunities for growth and learning. The ability to learn new and unfamiliar information is important for a global mindset. *Emotional Sensitivity* is the ability to perceive emotions, recognize the underlying reasons for the emotions, and manage interpersonal relationships to adjust leadership behavior to accommodate others by listening to different points of views, demonstrating empathy, respect, and appreciation of cultural differences. *Behavioral Flexibility* is the leader's ability to adjust leadership behavior to accommodate differences in the workplace and in business encounters caused by the interactions of multiple stakeholders, differences in cultural value systems, cultural norms and business practices. *Cross-cultural Understanding* refers to the leader's ability to understand cultural cues and differences and their implications to business and the ability to integrate the different cultural norms, values, and behaviors effectively in varied leadership situations.

Leaders with a high level of cultural intelligence not only desire to understand differences in political, social, cultural, and ethical issues, but often strive to experience diversity in human relations, work environments, and personal adventures (Mendenhall et al., 2007). In summary, to be effective in a global environment, leaders must have a cross-cultural perspective that understands and extends beyond one's local milieu and can cross over time, space, and physical boundaries. Cultural intelligence allows leaders to exhibit culturally appropriate behaviors and it provides a regulating mechanism and cultural knowledge that is essential to expand the leaders' repertoire of cultural understanding.

As shown in Figure 1, the global mindset scale factor loadings on the higher-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were all significant at the 95% probability ( $p < .05$ ), which shows a high construct/content validity of the 16-item Global Mindset scale. The two main dimensions of global

mindset both had high factor loadings: intellectual intelligence (0.79), cultural intelligence (1.07), with cultural intelligence appearing to contribute slightly more to the Global Mindset scale than intellectual intelligence.



**FIGURE 1. SECOND-ORDER CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL MINDSET SCALE**

Leadership behavior was assessed via 20 items that measured six dimensions of leadership behavior related to planning, coordinating, leading, motivating, communicating, and collaborating across cultures and countries. The instrument tested strong on internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha = 0.960. Additionally, all of the six Leadership Behavior subscales had high reliability: Planning ( $\alpha = 0.915$ ), Coordinating ( $\alpha = 0.921$ ), Leading ( $\alpha = 0.942$ ), Motivating ( $\alpha = 0.943$ ), Communicating ( $\alpha = 0.939$ ), and Collaborating ( $\alpha = 0.911$ ). Validity of the Leadership Behavior scale was established by evaluating construct/content validity of the 20 survey items that were used to measure leadership behavior. Factor loadings showed high construct/content validity: Planning (0.772), Coordinating (0.900), Leading (0.948), Motivating (0.895), Communicating (0.927), Collaborating (0.850). The survey also assessed 13 demographic and organizational factors and the qualitative characteristics of global mindset and leadership behavior via 4 open-ended questions.

The survey was administered to a sample of senior business leaders from Fortune Global 500 corporations and Forbes' Global 2000 firms across various industries. The industries represented include manufacturing, aerospace, defense & homeland security, business services, information technology, banking and financial services, telecommunications, materials, composites and chemicals, food manufacturing, insurance services, travel and transportation, office equipment, automotives, household & personal products, consumer durables, oil & gas operations, pharmaceuticals, and electronics.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 16 and *Mplus* version 6 statistical software packages. All inferential statistics were conducted using parametric procedures based on the general linear model (e.g., analysis of variance, multiple regression, and multivariate statistical analysis), and rejection of the null hypothesis for all inferential statistics was based on type 1 error rates less than  $p = .05$  (two-tailed tests).

## FINDINGS

According to the stepwise regression analysis, three demographic factors (number of countries worked in/conducted business with, raised by/live in a bilingual/multi-ethnic family, and number of foreign languages spoken) and one organizational factor (percentage of employees working overseas) were found to be significant predictors of global mindset.

Based on the results, 30.2 percent of the variation in global mindset may be accounted for by the four predictors (three demographic factors and one organizational factor) noted above (Adjusted R square = 0.302,  $F_{(4, 109)} = 13.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests a positive relationship between the leaders' global mindset and the four predictors, implying that global mindset is expected to increase significantly when the predictors' values increase.

To verify that the same four predictors found in the stepwise regression remained significant with age and gender included as covariates, a simultaneous regression was conducted with age and gender as covariates. This analysis found that the percentage of employees working overseas was no longer a significant predictor of global mindset ( $\beta = 1.018$ ,  $p = 0.057$ ) however the three demographic factors: number of countries worked in/conducted business with ( $\beta = 2.182$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), raised in bilingual/multi-ethnic family ( $\beta = 2.869$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ), number of foreign languages spoken ( $\beta = 1.399$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ) were significant predictors of global mindset.

The results of hypothesis test to identify the relationship between global mindset and leadership behavior found a significant relationship between global mindset as a predictor of leadership behavior, indicating that up to 42.5 percent of the variability in leadership behavior may be explained by global mindset (Table 3,  $\beta = 1.492$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This suggests that global mindset has a significant effect on leadership behavior. Specifically, the relationship between global mindset and leadership behavior was found to be a direct, positive relationship indicating that leaders with high global mindsets are expected to have high scores of leadership behavior. This implies that an increase in global mindset is likely to increase leadership behavior significantly.

Based on the results of the regression analysis the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative research hypothesis was accepted, suggesting that that leaders with a high global mindset are likely to use behaviors that demonstrate high levels of global planning, global coordination, and high abilities in leading, motivating, communicating, and collaborating across cultures and countries in meeting global tasks. The study provides statistical support for the influence of global mindset on leadership behavior.



**TABLE 2. TRAINING FOR DEVELOPING GLOBAL MINDSET CAPABILITIES**

Goal	Recommendation	Desired Effect	Methods of Development
Increase global mindset	Provide opportunities for gaining experience in working overseas and conducting business with foreign countries as these experiences are likely to increase the leaders' global mindset significantly.	Engage in international assignments. Gain intensive experience in working with foreign nationals. Increase ability to work effectively in foreign business environments.	Organizational orientation. Expatriate training. Coaching. Mentoring. Cross-cultural Leadership Development.
Increase global mindset	Learn to speak foreign languages. Engage in speaking foreign languages conversationally. Practice speaking foreign languages formally and informally.	Engage in speaking foreign languages with clients, employees, and other stakeholders to show respect for other cultures and appreciate differences.	Global talent management. International staff training. Foreign language coaching. Mentoring.
Increase global mindset	Provide opportunities for increasing cross-cultural understanding, diversity training, and experiencing bilingual/multi-ethnic environments. Participate in social, cultural, family, and work-related events.	Increase understanding of differences in cultures and their impact on business practices and leadership behavior. Engage in bilingual/multi-ethnic events to show respect.	Human resource programs. Company picnics, international holiday celebrations, social/cultural programs International staff training.
Increase global mindset	Provide opportunities for international assignments to work in other than the leaders' home country.	Immerse leaders in experiencing living and working outside their home country.	Global talent management. Expatriate training. Coaching/Mentoring
Increase the intellectual intelligence domain of global mindset	Offer short term, medium, and long-term workshops to increase intellectual intelligence, differentiation and integration skills through exercises, role-plays, and experiential learning in global business.	Increase abilities in differentiating, integrating, managing uncertainty, and thinking globally. Engage in action learning globally.	Case studies/projects 360 Feedback. Coaching/mentoring. Global business training/development Professional seminars/workshops.
Increase the cultural intelligence domain of global mindset	Provide cultural orientations, formal and informal events, action learning, and leadership development programs in global business	Increase abilities in openness to learning, flexibility and sensitivity, and cross-cultural understanding and self-reflection.	Coaching/Mentoring Cross-cultural Leadership Development. Diversity training. Networking.

## IMPLICATIONS

Human resource professionals should develop training for improving global mindset capabilities as these are likely to improve effectiveness and success in global business. Organizations with large percentages of employees working overseas should develop training for employees to understand differences in economic, political, legal, cultural, and ethical business environments. Developing training

for improving abilities in differentiation and integration skills are critical as these may contribute to increasing global mindset competencies that are crucial in assuring effectiveness and success in global business.

In order to achieve success in international assignments and projects, it is necessary to increase the employee's understanding of global business processes, cultural differences, and sensitivity and ability to respond effectively to political, social, cultural, and economic differences in business. Table 2 below illustrates the training goals, recommendations, desired effects, and methods of development for global skills and competencies that are crucial in international work environments.

The training and leadership development programs designed to increase global mindset capabilities must be continuous and should offer frequent and on-going feedback with opportunities for experiencing differences in leadership practices in a global environment.

Figure 2 presents the types and methods of global skill development and their value to increasing global mindset capabilities according to the impact and duration of activity. According to Figure 2, developmental training for short and medium-term may include lectures, speakers, formal classes, business seminars, case studies, books/films, and self-study of other countries' political, economic, social, and cultural environments and their implications to business, cultural briefings, as well as global networks/exchanges, global task force or project teams, and international trips. The short-term training programs may be used to create awareness and understanding of differences in global business environments.

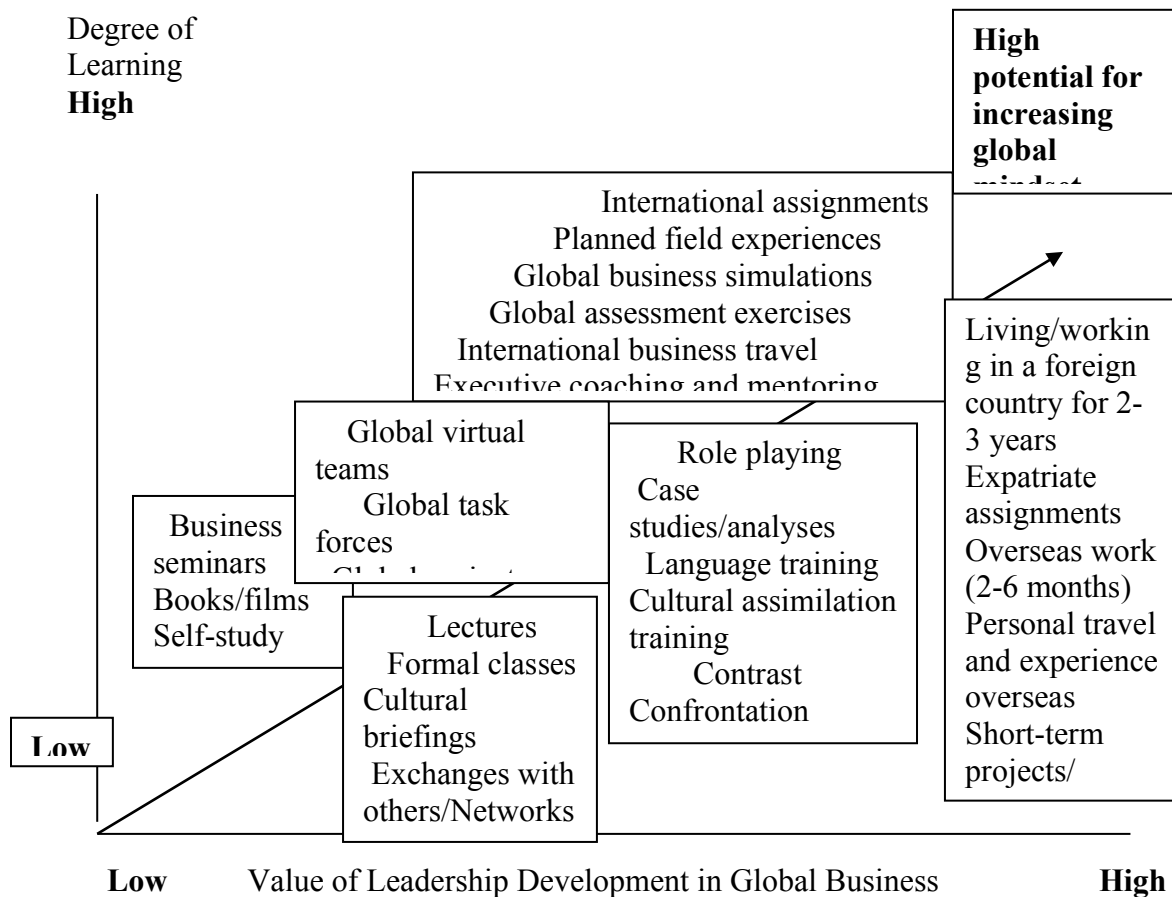
Medium range leadership development may include planned field experiences, global business simulations, global assessment exercises, short-term (1-2 weeks) and medium-term (1-6 months) international assignments/business travel, executive coaching and mentoring, role playing, case studies, foreign language training, and cultural assimilation training that includes contrast, confrontation, and replacement of established values and behavior. Simulation and role-playing exercises allow participants to compare and evaluate differences in their beliefs, attitudes, cultural norms, and leadership practices relative to that of other countries and cultures. The global assessment exercises may be used to incorporate self-reflection of leadership behavior and cultural understanding exercises in relation to global business tasks and environments. Planned field experiences offer opportunities for visiting international organizations and global company sites, where participants can gain experience by talking to global executives and observe leadership practices in global operations first-hand.

The highest potential of leadership development to increase global mindset may include long-term immersion experiences that offer a high degree of learning about foreign country environments and business practices in other cultures/countries, such as: living/working in a foreign country for 2-3 years, expatriate assignments working at regional branches of the company operating in foreign locations for 4-5 years, overseas work of 2-6 months in duration, personal travel and experience overseas, and working on projects/assignments with foreign nationals overseas.

Human resource professionals in international organizations should develop short-term, medium- and long-term leadership development that has a high potential for increasing global mindset capabilities. Classroom and professional seminars/workshops may be short-term or medium-level programs designed to facilitate learning through case studies, role plays, experiential exercises, 360 feedback, leadership assessment exercises, and cultural assimilation training.

Experiential exercises can expose leaders to managing actual business operations in global environments to experience cultural differences and real-life business situations and make complex decisions that impact performance. International travel and long-term (1-3 years) international assignments provide exposure to foreign business and culture and offer a high degree of opportunity for

interaction with foreign nationals and the culture, requiring high integration of differences in economic, political, social, legal, and cultural environments, and high sensitivity and flexibility to adjust to these differences in global business.



**FIGURE 2. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT METHODS FOR GLOBAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCY**

In summary, in order to increase global skills and competencies of employees and improve success in international assignments, the following HR practices are recommended:

- Offer short-term, medium-range, and long-term workshops and seminars.
- Conduct simulations, role-plays, and experiential learning in global business.
- Provide cultural orientations, formal and informal cross-cultural events, global business training, and leadership development programs in global business.
- Offer planned field experiences, global assessment exercises, expatriate assignments, global task forces, projects, cultural briefings, and cultural assimilation trainings to increase global mindset.
- Study foreign languages and live/work in a foreign country if possible.

## CONCLUSIONS

Training is crucial in global business as it provides the support needed to increase the global understanding and competencies that can improve job performance and employee behavior in international work environments. Training to increase global mindset capabilities should focus on facilitating organizational practices that improve global mindset capabilities, including developing differentiation and integration skills (ability to understand complex global issues and competencies in decision-making/problem solving in global business), managing uncertainty, ability to think globally, openness to learning, flexibility/sensitivity to differences in working across cultures and countries, and cross-cultural understanding. Human resource professionals should help employees acquire these experiences through leadership development and organizational training programs. Specifically, foreign language training may help leaders learn about differences in cultures and foreign business practices. Greater exposure to bilingual/multi-ethnic environments may help develop skills in flexibility and sensitivity, managing diversity, and thinking globally. Increased opportunities for working in foreign countries and conducting business with foreign nationals will assist leaders to gain experience in cross-cultural understanding, sensitivity, managing global tasks and uncertainty. In addition, employment in overseas locations may facilitate improving differentiation and integration skills and an ability to accommodate to the differences in global business.

Training to increase global competencies should focus on developing and improving the leaders' differentiation and integration skills that enable individuals to make meanings based on many categories to recognize similarities and linkages across categories. In global business, differentiation and integration includes the ability to understand economic, political, social, legal, and cultural differences and their impact on conducting business globally. As global organizations increasingly depend on global networks of value chains, it is important to train leaders who can respond to differences in country environments by accommodating local responsiveness while developing global capabilities to strengthen the firm's competitive position. Training to develop differentiation and integration skills, managing uncertainty, pattern recognition, and thinking globally may help employees working with foreign nationals to understand complex concepts, possess skills in global business, and analyze global problems from multiple points of views. Examples of training and development programs to improve success in global business may include executive coaching/mentoring, global task force/project teams, planned field experiences, global business simulations, role plays, leadership assessment exercises, case studies, cultural training, exchange visits/global networks, cultural briefings, cultural assimilation training, language training, and international travel trips/work experience in other countries.

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