

Deconstructing the Successful Global Leader



From shared values to cultural intelligence, the global leader of today needs to be the total package.

By Maureen Rabotin

The world is flattening, and globalization is rampant. To be successful in this environment, executives must be well-versed in communicating and operating within a variety of cultural contexts. Many global executives do their due diligence before embarking on an international assignment.

They attend cross-cultural and intercultural training classes with one objective—obtain a list of dos and don'ts to be as effective as possible in overcoming future challenges. This list, however, would probably be more useful as a cocktail napkin on their international flights. Just because one knows the right actions does not mean that he will apply them at the right times and in the right situations.



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So, how can leaders garner this additional layer of information—those essential cultural, emotional, and social intelligence dictates that act as guides for navigating unfamiliar business landscapes?

“What could be so different?”

A British executive took a breath, marking his successful turn around of the company’s international office in Japan. When he moved his family to Kyoto, he warned them that life was going to be different. But, if they stuck it out and he was successful, a promotion was almost guaranteed. He soon was promoted to global finance director at his company’s European headquarters located in Paris, France.

Time passed, and the executive’s exhalation of relief quickly became a gasp of anxiety as his company mandated cross-cultural training. The employers wondered how this executive could succeed halfway around the world but fail to be effective in France—just across the English Channel from his home. After all, what could be so different?

As it turns out, a lot.

Effective and efficient

In global coaching, consulting, and training, the same question must be asked: What do you need to be successful in your new leadership role? Increasingly, clients answer, “I need to be effective.” Some, however, will say, “I need to be efficient.” The difference between those two replies gives insight into the executive’s style; in fact, based on the answers, one could determine which executive is truly capable of becoming a global leader.

Random House dictionary defines the word efficient as “performing or functioning in the best possible manner with the least waste of time and effort.” It defines effectiveness as “capable, competent; adequate to accomplish a purpose; producing the intended or expected result; producing a deep or vivid impression.”

Executives who desire to be more than efficient set the foundation for a fruitful and rewarding coach-client relationship. The highly sought-after return-on-investment has just met the ROE—return on expectations. These executives have a self-expectation of effectiveness in their new roles.

Managing and mobilizing a team that produces results requires a commitment to being both effective and efficient. In today’s flattened world, the global playing field is a ruthless environment where teams compete on equal terms with no time-outs. Thus, if doing things the right way the first time makes us efficient, and doing the right things all the time makes us effective, then the need to combine the two is self-evident.

A long view either way

When a person holds up a mirror, presumably, she can see her reflection. But she can also look beyond the mirror to view what is in front of her, and can use the mirror to look at what is behind her. By holding a mirror up to oneself, one has a long view either way—an enhanced perspective on self and surroundings.

As a professional, you know how to analyze what has been referred to as the “hard Ss” of how a corporation

operates—its strategy, structure, and systems. When defining these factors within your native country where you have spent most of your formative years, the challenges of the “soft Ss” are less obvious. They only become more palpable when your strategy, structure, and systems are shipped overseas, across both linguistic and cultural borders, and you are faced with the challenge of aligning geographically dispersed teams for a successful outcome.

The soft Ss include shared values, skills, styles, and staff. And when they are combined with the hard Ss, they form a management model referred to as the “seven Ss,” which was first mentioned in *The Art of Japanese Management* by Richard T. Pascale in 1991. This model must be taken into consideration in a holistic and interdependent manner to ensure success of a company’s strategy. In today’s world of knowledge workers, the soft Ss of shared values, skills, styles, and staff can be regrouped and redefined as

- Know thyself (cultural intelligence).
- Know how to inspire and motivate others (emotional intelligence).
- Know how to style switch to leverage diversity (social intelligence).

Before we define how these other forms of intelligence interact, let’s first hold that mirror up and see what looks back:

- your personality—who you are
- your national culture—how you do things
- your job—your functional company culture
- your perspectives and ideas—how you think things are done around the world
- your accomplishments
- your past, present, and future.

Who you are contributes to your cultural, emotional, and social intelligence. For example, consider how one’s background and native culture would influence the answers to the following questions:

- How do I show respect if I have been brought up in an egalitarian environment where everyone is treated informally and as equals, as opposed

to a hierarchal environment where privileges and status are respected and expected?

- In which ways should I recognize a team leader in an individualist culture as opposed to a group-oriented culture, whereby a single person being recognized may very well diminish if not destroy the team spirit instead of motivating it?

As we add in more layers, the situations become more complex. Our British executive’s idea of being respectful was to not interrupt people who were talking, arrive early, get on with his work, take short lunch breaks, and be friendly. This efficient work ethic may very well be the reason he was successful in Japan, but not in France. His style didn’t work with “la vie à la française,” and ultimately, he ended up leaving the company.

Our next example is of a French-Canadian woman, Sue, who had recently arrived in France. She was still having a hard time getting over a recent incident she’d had with her manager until she explored her values and expectations when it came to building trust.

Prior to her promotion to global IT director, she had had the opportunity to work with Jean-Antoine on various

projects. When she was promoted and moved to France, she felt sure that prior misunderstandings with Jean-Antoine would be fixed now that they were in the same location, speaking the same language.

The night before a meeting, Jean-Antoine asked her to show him the slides she planned on presenting at the next day’s meeting. The conversation ended as follows:

Sue: I didn’t realize you wanted the planning schedule for the wi-fi rollout across Europe for tomorrow’s meeting.

J-A: I see. Don’t worry, I’ll cover for you.

Sue: Excuse me. Cover for me? I don’t need anyone to cover for me!

J-A: Don’t be so upset. It would have been better if we could have told them when we planned to launch the system, but if it is not possible, it’s not possible. I’ll handle the problem when it comes up at the meeting.

Sue: I don’t see why you should handle what is my responsibility. I am quite capable of explaining to everyone that the planning schedule is based on their input and availability.



For many of us, our values are part of who we are. We don't take the time to analyze them until someone has transgressed our values, and we experience an uncomfortable feeling based on what we think is the difference between right and wrong.

What led to this miscommunication? Lack of cultural intelligence.

Cultural, emotional, and social intelligence

Early in our formative years, all human beings learn about respect, recognition, trust, and acceptance—four universal values. How these values contribute to our cultural intelligence, however, is through the learned behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that express these human values.

Cultural intelligence is defined as the ability to interact with others from diverse cultural backgrounds, being aware of our cultural values that drive our attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs.

In certain cultures, trust is built quickly and is based on competence, proactive sharing of information, and integrity. In some other cultures, the preference is for deep trust that develops over time, and that is based on compatibility, benevolence, and security. In these cultures, relationships, reputation, and influence are the building blocks for trust.

For many of us, our values are part of who we are. We don't take the time to analyze them until someone has transgressed our values, and we experience—as Sue did—an uncomfortable feeling based on what we think is the difference between right and wrong. Consider the following list of values:

- individualism; equality
- formality; informality
- directness or frankness; modesty
- authority; freedom of choice
- materialism; competition
- practicality, pragmatism; privacy
- honesty; hierarchy
- consensus; reputation.

In the example, Sue was basing her reactions on individual competency, directness, and pragmatism. Jean-Antoine was reacting according to his values of hierarchy (“I’ll handle this,” “I’ll cover for you”), authority, and reputation (Sue was not well known in the European operations, and Jean-Antoine’s reputation, having chosen her to head up the division,

could be questioned if she wasn’t more authoritative in asserting herself).

The other two pillars for effective global leadership are emotional and social intelligence. Emotional intelligence was first described by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He said, “Anyone can be angry; that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy.”

Emotional intelligence is defined as a sign of leadership based on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, and can be a key ingredient to global success. Take one team building conference, for example, where the participants were British and Spanish, and they were discussing the corporation’s “sense of urgency” value. A Spanish woman emotionally expressed her idea of how others should react when launching products. Watching her British counterpart recoil in his chair, the subject of emotional intelligence was mentioned.

It turns out that this Spanish woman would consistently get more and more emotional when faced with an issue requiring a “sense of urgency,” and her British counterpart would get more and more introverted in reaction to her outbursts.

Putting this example into a cultural perspective, one learns that an emotional outburst is acceptable behavior in the Spanish woman’s culture, and only requires recognition or empathy for it to subside. So stating, “I see this is upsetting you,” would be a simple fix. Unfortunately, being culturally unaware, the British colleague did his best to avoid the issue and wait for her emotions to subside. Each walked away from the encounters feeling mistreated and misunderstood.

Gaining knowledge about a higher sense of self-awareness, both cultural and emotional, is not complete without an exploration of social intelligence. Social intelligence is loosely defined as the intelligence that

lies behind group interactions and behaviors. This includes the answers to questions such as

- How do we motivate teams?
- How are we perceived by others?
- How do we lead and inspire others?

Different cultures motivate and inspire in different ways because concepts about social intelligence vary from one culture to another. Take, for example, Paul's story.

After what he had hoped to be an interactive presentation to the European subsidiary on a new process he was responsible for, Paul felt disappointed that no one had asked any questions, and no feedback or input was given by the department manager as to how his ideas were received. Paul's internal reaction was: "Well that shows you how committed they are! They could care less if this process is successful or not!"

Following the presentation, people waited to catch him alone in his office, to take him off to the side, invite him for coffee, and ask questions on a one-to-one basis. Paul realized that staying a few days more before heading back to headquarters in the United States gave everybody the time to better familiarize themselves with both him and the new process. Buy-in was guaranteed through the effective way in which Paul socialized with the team responsible for implementing the new process.

Social intelligence is important, but as competitive markets require global companies to be more and more cost conscious, it is becoming expendable. By cutting back on travel, relying on global conference calls, and pressuring executives to get results at all costs, companies tend to forget what really affects the bottom line—face-to-face, one-on-one interactions; quality time spent to develop the relationships that foster buy-in; and time spent for effective reasons, outweighing the diminished efficiency in the long run.

To be a truly effective leader, followers need to believe in you and the company, and you can't achieve that through a conference call.

As our world continues to evolve, and the geographical boundaries



become increasingly transparent, it is imperative that managers and executives understand the composition of a global leader. A global leader knows and accepts that an international assignment will be difficult, and is prepared to do the work required to rise to the occasion.

The global executive understands her persona, perspectives, strengths, and weaknesses, and is enthused at the prospect of adding cross-cultural layers of knowledge to her business repertoire. Ultimately, today's global executive is both effective and efficient because she has a high level of cultural, emotional, and social intelligence. She is ready for the challenge. **T+D**

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