Chapter 14
Leadership Convergence and Divergence in the Era of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

To sustain or enhance corporate competitiveness in the 21st century, it is important for organizations to comprehensively understand the influences of globalization on their businesses. The purpose of this study is to review and analyze existing literature about globalization trends and their impact on leadership, and to integrate major themes to present what constitutes effective leadership behaviors emerging as convergent and universal, or divergent and contingent. This chapter provides an overview of global convergence, divergence, and crossvergence in Human Resource practice and leadership. It also suggests a definition of global leadership and reviews global leadership competency models in the current literature. Utilizing content analysis, this chapter analyzes the existing literature and presents emerging themes for effective leadership behaviors that include universal and converging, and contingent and diverging. Finally, future research directions as well as practical implications are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is an undeniable phenomenon. Kofi Anan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, noted that, “arguing against globalization is like against the laws of gravity” (2009). The rapid advances in communication and transportation technology have compressed time and space and intensified the social, economic, political inter-dependence and reciprocity across national boundaries (Keohane &
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Nye, 2000). With technological innovation and acceleration in the 21st century, capital, goods, services, people, and information rapidly flow around the world with the momentum of “a one-day life” or even just a few hours or minutes.

Often characterized as the integration of economies, cultures, and governance, globalization, on the one hand, has made the globe culturally homogeneous as it has created a “collective experience for people everywhere” (Marquardt & Berger, 2003, p. 284). On the other hand, what is being globalized also highlights indigenousness and locality, acknowledging the cultural diversity (Bhawuk, 2008). In this sense, the process of globalization provides the impetus to two contradictory forces: universality and indigenousness, or uniformity and diversity.

Globalization has impacted and challenged every aspect of Human Resource (HR) and organizational practices. One of the greatest challenges in the field concludes to leadership (Marquardt & Berger, 2000) because it has long been considered a key determinant of organizational success (or sabotage). The concepts and perceptions of effective leadership are not static, but have been dynamically reshaped over time in response to the environmental, cultural, and value changes and demands in society (Rondinelli & Heffron, 2009). The power of globalization has transformed the context within which leadership operates, and thus has changed leadership practices. The exponentially increasing body of literature on global leadership reflects the attention to and importance of these relevant changes.

With greater exposure to globalization, there has also been a convergence of what is perceived to be effective leadership around the globe, which has become more aligned with that of western-driven ideas (Ford & Ismail, 2006). At the same time, identifying divergent, indigenous leadership that is effective in a specific culture has also been increasingly emphasized. Responding to these two paradoxical thrusts, the global leadership literature has suggested that a wide range of leadership skills, attributes, and mindset may exist for global leaders to adapt to the growth, necessarily including components of both globally acceptable and indigenously unique characteristics (Morrison, 2000).

To operate as an effective leader in an era of globalization, it is imperative to understand which leadership behaviors are universally perceived as effective or idiosyncratically applicable to a certain culture. Although the current global leadership literature has offered a wide array of competencies in terms of traits, mindsets, knowledge, and skills in order to be an effective global leader (Kim & McLean, 2015), it has not done a good job of suggesting those competencies in behavioral terms. In other words, it is yet unclear what leadership behaviors are considered effective in a global context. In addition, Morrison (2000) pointed out that there is a lack of research identifying which effective leadership behaviors are shared across cultures or which behaviors are identified as indigenous in some cultures.

The purpose of this study is to review related literature about effective leadership and to integrate the major themes to address what effective behaviors emerge as convergent and universal, or divergent and contingent. Pertinent to its discussion, this chapter attempts to do three things in each section. The first section describes the definition and dimensions of globalization and its impact on HR practice, including leadership convergence and divergence issues around the globe. The second section focuses on the definitions and core features of global leadership and relevant competency models suggested in the current literature, and then provides critiques. In the third section, we explore what effective leadership behaviors have been identified across nations, or what behaviors are specific to a nation in the literature.