



Twenty-first century leadership: international imperatives

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leadership

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to identify the core issues that organisational leaders are facing internationally, as a result of a globalised and rapidly changing international economic environment. Appropriate leadership competencies and skills that enable organisational leaders to effectively deal with these core globalisation issues are examined in detail and are further explained through a conceptual model developed for the purpose of this study.

Design/methodology/approach – Conventional content analysis of extant literature in the leadership, management, organisational development and human resource management fields delimited this study to the identification of three core issues, their sub-dimensions and associated organisational leadership effectiveness strategies.

Findings – This study presents a conceptual model consolidating current scholarly understanding of the international imperatives affecting twenty-first century organisational leaders and describes “best practice” leadership skills, competencies and models that will enable managers to lead effectively in a rapidly changing, globalised market-place.

Originality/value – The simplicity and explicitness of the descriptive-based conceptual model represented in this review offers an original approach to the link between theory and practice in international organisational leadership, while acting to simplify the perplexing array of viewpoints on leadership approaches. A number of research alternatives are suggested that may lead to the formation of a more predictive “international imperative” model.

Keywords Leadership challenges, Global imperatives, Ethics, Change, Crises, Leadership strategies, Transformation, Innovation, Decision-making protocols, Leadership, Decision making

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

The recent global financial crisis (GFC) is a tangible archetype of the outward effects of globalisation, a phenomenon that has wrought substantial changes to the global economic landscape. Other examples such as widespread pandemics, internet security breaches and organisational ethical mismanagement (as displayed during the Enron scandal, Barings Bank collapse and BP’s Deep Horizon oil spill) further demonstrate the globalised interdependencies of social, cultural, political, environmental and economic factors (Li and Tallman, 2006). Globalisation has intensified organisational leadership complexity due to: shifts in the conventional balance of global power (Li *et al.*, 2011); the acceleration in growth of emerging and transitional economies (Beets, 2005); the creation of vast networks of interconnectedness – technologically, socially, and economically (Li *et al.*, 2011); and the juxtaposition of territorial, religious, political and cultural differences (Maria and Arenas, 2009).



Consequently, numerous tensions arise from this rapidly changing, globalised, social, political and economic environment (Wang *et al.*, 2011). Organisational leaders are dealing with substantial ethical challenges; particularly in regard to corruption, bribery and corporate social responsibility (Beets, 2005; Maria and Arenas, 2009). Ideally, such challenges require compassionate, moral, authentic and ethical cross-boundary leadership abilities with competencies in cross-cultural leadership and diversity management (Li *et al.*, 2011; Pirola-Merlo, 2009; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2005). Numerous issues concerning personal data confidentiality, infrastructure suitability, climate change, business and environmental sustainability, and the management of virtual teams (Jenster and Steiler, 2011) result from the sheer speed and interconnectedness of global technology and global business ventures. These necessitate leaders with strategic, innovative, global mindsets, based on transformative and creative leadership (Karp and Helgo, 2009). Furthermore, global risks (such as terrorism, pandemics and natural disasters) threaten domestic and international health, peace and security (Piotrowski, 2010) demanding decisive decision makers who are proactive and vigilant in maintaining social, political and organisational viability and sustainability (Bledow *et al.*, 2011; Useem *et al.*, 2005).

2. Design methodology and approach

It would be beyond the scope of a conceptual article to comprehensively cover all the pertinent social, political, and economic factors associated with organisational leadership in most conditions, and particularly during times of massive geopolitical and environmental flux. Therefore this review is delimited to the identification of core issues that organisational leaders are facing internationally and that are underpinned and interconnected by the reality of a rapidly changing international economic environment.

The initial questions framing this review were:

- In what manner do international economic complexities challenge organisational leadership, now and in the future?
- Are domestic organisational leaders also markedly affected by globalisation pressures?
- What leadership attributes, competencies, styles and models are and will be, most effective in dealing with these globalisation complexities?

Articles identifying current international issues impacting on organisational leadership from the rapidly changing international economic landscape were targeted in a preliminary literature search. The qualitative data gathering and evidence collection technique known as conventional content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) was then applied to the relevant leadership, management, organisational development and human resource management literature. As the textual information was analysed, interpretive decisions were made as to specific themes or insights arising from parallels in literature research findings.

It became evident that the interrelated three core themes of – global ethics, global tempo and global risk – were highly indicative of the complexities organisations and their leaders are facing in the twenty-first century (Beets, 2005; Piotrowski, 2010; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2008) during a decade book-ended by large-scale economic and political crises such as the Asian Crisis, the GFC and the Arab Spring. Further content

analysis of the literature revealed a number of sub-dimensions underscoring these three core issues.

The following section explores these three core themes associated with twenty-first century leadership:

- (1) global ethics;
- (2) global tempo; and
- (3) global risk.

Appropriate leadership skills, competencies and models that increase leadership effectiveness in dealing with these issues and their sub-dimensions, are also considered.

3. Consequences of a rapidly changing global economic landscape

3.1 Global ethics

Cross-border mergers and acquisitions, global information technologies, free-market capitalism (Ralston *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2011) and the soft convergence of management and economic ideologies have led to rapid growth in transitional and emerging economies (Beets, 2005; Ralston *et al.*, 2008; Warner, 2002). Unfortunately, economic cross-fertilisation has also led to increasing corruption and bribery, especially where corruption is a rampant national norm (Gugler and Shi, 2009) and where nations lack the legal resources to compel commercially ethical behaviour or human rights compliance (Beets, 2005). However, Useem *et al.* (2005) posit that corruption emanates as much from the institutional characteristics and emerging economic conditions of the national culture of a developing nation as from the actions of international businesses operating in the emerging economic market, where often contravening standard operating procedures is valued as highly as a tactic as is compliance with them. In their severest forms, unethical practices and corruption limit international expansion, social improvement and legitimate business growth (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2005). Political leaders exploiting their authority for personal gain, and leaders of non-government organisations are not exempt from corruption. In fact, corruption is often linked in developing countries with poor governance and compliance practices (Maria and Arenas, 2009). In such countries, abject poverty leads to forms of behaviour predicted by attribution theory: in other words, behaviour underscored by survival instincts rather than ethically-based consequences (Beets, 2005). Corrupt practices may concomitantly aggravate this poverty, depriving vulnerable emerging populations of their lawful resources, generating political instability and worsening environmental damage (Beets, 2005). This is especially the case where organisations operate in multiple global locations and issues of complex cultural fit are juxtaposed (Ralston *et al.*, 2008). For some organisations, condoning corrupt practices has resulted in irreparable organisational and leadership reputational damage (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011).

Successful leadership competencies in addressing these concerns have been displayed by advanced market economy business leaders (and politicians) who consider corporate social responsibility (CSR) factors, apply ethical principles during business transactions and take a longer term strategic view (Gugler and Shi, 2009). Leaders from developing and transition economies are also realising advantages to the environmental, ethical and business case for CSR, in some cases becoming trendsetters

as they internationalise into advance market economies in order to increase their competitive advantage (Gugler and Shi, 2009). Another trend is businesses, both globally and domestically, employing the accounting philosophy of the triple bottom line – financial, environmental and social (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011). These strategies serve to not only decrease corrupt practices and the prospects of branding reputational damage, but increase global competitiveness, sustainability and long-term organisational viability (House *et al.*, 2002) in a proactive and ethical manner.

3.2 *Global tempo*

The pace or tempo of change as a result of globalisation is unprecedented, creating a number of emerging tensions, including declining environmental sustainability, personal confidentiality and national security concerns, and managerial risks associated with the coordination and control of virtual teams (Li *et al.*, 2011).

Countries and societies (particularly in emerging and transitional economies) experiencing an uncompromising impetus for economic profit are facing chronic change-imposed environmental sustainability dangers (Karp and Helgo, 2009). These hazards include infrastructure deficiencies in food, water, energy, health, transport, and sustainable urban development (Tatoglu and Demirbag, 2008), hazards that can be doubly injurious in times of global crises (for example, natural disasters and terrorism). Additionally, a disquieting increase in environmental degradation has exacerbated the demands on the efficacy of industries such as agriculture and fisheries, particularly in those countries whose economic well-being is mainly dependent on primary commerce (Li *et al.*, 2011).

Organisations experiencing rapid international growth and competitiveness also need to balance the tensions of global control and coordination, with local responsiveness and knowledge sharing (Dowling *et al.*, 2008). Coordination and control are often achieved through knowledge management technologies that are evolving more rapidly than appropriate intellectual property and legal protections, raising questions over confidentiality of personal details, intellectual property ownership, and organisational and national security (Griffith *et al.*, 2008).

At the same time, organisations are realising that long-term business sustainability is heavily dependent on the strategic recruitment and retention of globally innovative, “out-of-the-box” thinkers, particularly in an environment of global skills shortages (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011) and new forms of interdependent, collaborative and collective leadership (Doz and Kosonen, 2007). However, this can be undermined by another tension resulting from the unprecedented tempo of global change: the need for virtual interaction and collaboration – due to the spread of temporal and geographically dispersed business units – between team members using computer-aided communication technology (Jenster and Steiler, 2011). The presence of these virtual communication technologies such as email, Skype, video-conferencing and instant messaging (Brake, 2006; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2008) presents leadership challenges including 24-hour operational availability (Jenster and Steiler, 2011) and the respectful management of cultural and language diversity (Li *et al.*, 2011). Effective leadership skills during rapid change include the ability to maintain careful individualised management (often through sufficient face-to-face contact) of virtual staff. This prevents both an isolating sense of lack of community (Jenster and Steiler, 2011; Li *et al.*, 2011) and communication confusion, as seen in ambiguities in e-mail and

other written messages, without the added benefit of auditory and visual clues (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2008). This is especially important where virtual team membership is either growing, constantly changing or is highly culturally diverse (Brake, 2006).

3.3 Global risk

Global risks are diverse and may be: financially orientated, as in the global financial crisis (Li *et al.*, 2011); security related, such as terrorism and cyber security (Kondrasuk *et al.*, 2005); natural disasters, for example, tornados, tsunamis, fires and earthquakes (Piotrowski, 2010; Waugh and Streib, 2006); and health related, such as the SARS and H1N1 pandemics.

These global risks can have wide-reaching, even catastrophic consequences (Li and Tallman, 2006). Recent global pandemics and natural disasters have highlighted the “messiness” of collaborative responses to such crises, mainly due to ambiguous leadership hierarchies in control and decision-making (Piotrowski, 2010). Difficulties can also arise from shared leadership responsibilities, strategies and inter-agency coordination (O’Dempsey, 2009), and inappropriate emergency management plans and disaster preparedness (Waugh and Streib, 2006). Global terrorism plays to uncertainty, occurs in multiple locations, is difficult to predict and often relies on the educated guesses of leaders, as to where terrorist attacks may occur, whom the terrorists are and their goals, the cultural underpinnings of particular forms of terrorism, and appropriate response mechanisms in the face of a terrorist attack (Kondrasuk *et al.*, 2005).

Leaders need to demonstrate definitive decision-making in the face of global adversity and it is imperative that cross-border business and risk leadership approaches are innovative and proactive (Useem *et al.*, 2005; Wang *et al.*, 2011).

4. Implications for managers

In summary, the adverse effects of globalisation can threaten social, political, organisational and cultural health, well-being and security (Li and Tallman, 2006). Hence, it is crucial that managers recognise the detrimental, interconnected effects of globalisation issues, and identify effective methods of dealing with these issues.

4.1 Global ethics

Given these multiple interwoven issues, just what types of leadership skills and models can be gleaned from the extant literature, and that are appropriate for managers in fighting corruption and adhering to corporate social responsibility? First, compassionate consideration for the well-being of employees, society and the environment needs to underpin intelligent stewardship of organisational and national resources in complex, pressured and ambiguous settings (Li *et al.*, 2011; Useem *et al.*, 2005). Such stewardship should also encourage by-partisan solutions to socioeconomic issues (especially of vulnerable population groups) based on ethical collaborative partnerships (Maria and Arenas, 2009), and the building of trust to accomplish shared vision and goals (Chao and Tian, 2011). Managers should aspire to intelligent stewardship as a relevant, long-term objective, especially as, in general, short-term political decisions often underpin the way business is performed and managed.

Second, the moral conduct of leaders can be crucial and wide-reaching in reducing corruption (Pirola-Merlo, 2009), even more so than any organisational policies, national laws or ethical compliance procedures underpinning anti-corruption endeavours (Beets, 2005) can hope to achieve. Moral, ethical, authentic leaders are able to improve organisations, economies and thus livelihoods when they employ ethical business practices and engage with cultural diversity in creative and innovative ways (Li *et al.*, 2011). The practice and process of authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) instils “hope, trust and positive emotions” in followers and develops significant relationships with stakeholders (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011, p. 387). Moreover, the effects of political and organisational authentic leadership enables individuals to develop other-focused values, including social justice (Avolio and Gardner, 2005), builds individual change capacity, and increases well-being and productivity (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011).

Javidan *et al.* (2006) believe a third leadership key to preventing corruption is to understand what cultural dimensions are the most divergent in international relationships. Li *et al.* (2011, p. 3) also identify effective global leadership as consisting of attributes such as cultural intelligence, “open mindedness, patience and adaptability”. Developing cultural intelligence, therefore, results in understanding the institutional and cultural motivational philosophies and propensity for corruption (Beets, 2005), and the effectiveness and suitability of particular leadership styles (for example, participative leadership) crossing from one culture to another (Scandura and Dorfman, 2004). Such cross-cultural leadership competencies enable leaders to ethically respond to corrupt environmental demands (Bueno *et al.*, 2004); responses that Bledow *et al.* (2011) claim should be proactive, flexible, innovative and contextually appropriate.

Fourth, Useem *et al.* (2005) advocate well-constructed and principled leadership development programs based on action-based or in situ learning on a global scale as a means to develop socially responsible leadership competencies that are self-reflective and encourage community capacity building and long term human development. However, it should be noted that scholars such as Li *et al.* (2011, p. 8) caution that at present, there is insufficient research into “appropriate criteria for evaluating effectiveness” of global leadership programs.

Thus, in dealing with corruption and bribery, it appears that leaders who are immersed in a geocentric leadership viewpoint – and one which underpins organisational strategies and goals from a world-wide perspective (Dowling *et al.*, 2008) – are better able to secure organisational internal and external legitimacy, and are better placed to be globally (and corporately) socially responsible (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2005). In summary, political and organisational altruistic endeavours, combined with measurable value creation, articulated through a socially responsible business model, will improve bottom lines and gain trust from multiple stakeholders (Doz and Kosonen, 2007; Li *et al.*, 2011).

4.2 Global tempo

It could be said that in a fast-moving marketplace, “managing people amid chaos, uncertainty, and complexity has become the main challenge for organisations of every kind” (Karp and Helgo, 2009, p. 81), creating the need for collaborative leadership attributes combining social qualities, technical competencies (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2008)

and the fostering of frank dialogue, trust and self-worth (Casimir *et al.*, 2006). Essential also, is a leader's own self-reflection as a role model for organisational values and behaviours, as well as an ability to manage personal uncertainty anxiety (Karp and Helgo, 2009; Li *et al.*, 2011). Doz and Kosonen (2007) state that leaders in uncertain and rapidly changing conditions must be experienced "all-rounders" who collaboratively encourage others to become collectively responsible for decision making and change leadership. Karp and Helgo (2009) further add that loosening control and micro-management of change will challenge organisational mental models and allow self-governing traits and more positive forms of communication to emerge.

However, a model which appears to be somewhat universal across cultures, and one that appears suitable in situations of complexity and change, is that of transformational, value-based leadership, though cultural undertones moderate how the leadership behaviour is both displayed and received (Bass, 1997; Scandura and Dorfman, 2004). In fact, humble, authentic, ethical, transformational, innovative, ambidextrous leadership, a geocentric globalised mind set and decisive decision-making appear to be universal phenomena across cultures that are effective at dealing with globalised complexity (Bledow *et al.*, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2011). On the other hand, recent studies have also shown both transactional and transformational leadership to be fundamental to the effectiveness and cohesion of global virtual teams (Jenster and Steiler, 2011), which are a combination of task-orientated (or transactional) and relationally-orientated (inspirationally building community through cultural intelligence and developing shared norms and mental models) leadership approaches (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2008). Task-oriented leadership behaviours develop team membership trust further (Casimir *et al.*, 2006), by encouraging collaborative discourse between team members to define tasks and problem-solve (Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011), providing structured goal setting and rewarding knowledge sharing (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2008), and clarifying the cultural assumptions underlying words (Brake, 2006). Relational-orientated leadership behaviours are interpersonal and inclusive and rely on leadership attributes such as "compassion" (individualised care, consideration and empathy) and "passion" (using inspirational behaviours to increase team member participation, relationship building and shared values) (Li *et al.*, 2011, p. 5). Leaders who develop these behaviours are more likely to assist their organisations as they adapt to global change imperatives.

4.3 Global risk

Without doubt, courageous meaning-making during global crises such as natural disasters, terrorism or pandemics, is a crucial role of leadership (Jepson, 2009), as is striving for effective decision making that examines the most plausible options and allocation of resources to deal with the crises in order to reduce risk (Piotrowski, 2010). The impact of leadership decisions can have profound consequences for individuals, the organisation and the wider community (Useem *et al.*, 2005). But in actuality, sound decision-making ability should be a leadership prerequisite long before crises and global risk occur (Useem *et al.*, 2005). This is a leadership skill that is partly learnt in response to the counsel and influence of empowered and informed others (Wang *et al.*, 2011) and in the empowering of frank and direct challenges to leadership mindsets (Doz and Kosonen, 2007) as well as in leadership development programs (Useem *et al.*, 2005) and through powerful mentoring and coaching (Li *et al.*, 2011). Thus, in building

the global risk management skills of leaders, leadership development programs must be based on action learning that is so vivid it invokes ethical, astute, informed and judicious decision making under conditions of extreme duress (Backus *et al.*, 2010).

Unpredictability also calls for innovative solutions and sensitive management of conflicting cultural norms (Bathurst and Monin, 2010). Leadership qualities that Bledow *et al.* (2011, p. 65) advocate for crisis leadership include “sensibility, adaptation, changeability, experimentation, cultural awareness... and the willingness to be surprised by complexity”. Useem *et al.* (2005, p. 474) list the qualities of “preparedness, ability to mobilise (people and resources), strategic thinker (acquiring and analysing information), ability to execute (planning), personal selflessness (for collective purpose) and unequivocal authority”. However, it is interesting to note that Stelter (2002) found descriptions of leadership traits or behaviours not predictive enough for actual leadership effectiveness, finding that leadership was moderated by contextual and situational factors that may impact on leadership decisions and individual leaders to differing degrees. Useem *et al.* (2005) also produce a leadership attribute list with caution, stating that mere possession of attributes can be misleading when referring to leadership decision-making ability in risk situations.

Overall, it appears that leadership “as a system” is most effective in turbulent and adverse conditions (DeChurch *et al.*, 2011). Business leaders then, must be respectful and cognisant of the interaction of leadership processes occurring at all levels of an organisation, as well as across organisational boundaries (Bathurst and Monin, 2010; DeChurch *et al.*, 2010). Leaders must also network and boundary span outside their own system to create accurate pictures of threats, and to develop meaningful ties that can be easily coordinated if required (DeChurch *et al.*, 2011).

5. Conceptual model: application in theory and practice

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model for the study, which incorporates the core issues (global ethics, global tempo and global risk) and their associated sub-dimensions. The model illustrates the manner in which each of these three core issues are interrelated (denoted as separate entities at the triangle vertices but each are still part of the larger body of the triangle). The model also explains how each of the core issues magnifies each of the others, as the vertices can be metaphorically folded onto each other to form a new, more compact triangle.

The conceptual model also demonstrates how the globalised leadership capabilities, skills and competencies highlighted in this review are central to each of the core issues and can either be taken as a whole, or “turned” to each vertex in order to examine their usefulness for each individual issue.

6. Research implications

As shown in Figure 1, the conceptual model of the study represents current globalisation leadership concerns, issues and competencies, and may be a useful operational tool for managers and leaders to help them come to terms with current social, economic, environmental and political imperatives. However, a limitation lies in the model’s inability to predict future leadership trends and requirements in the areas of global ethics, global tempo, and global risk.

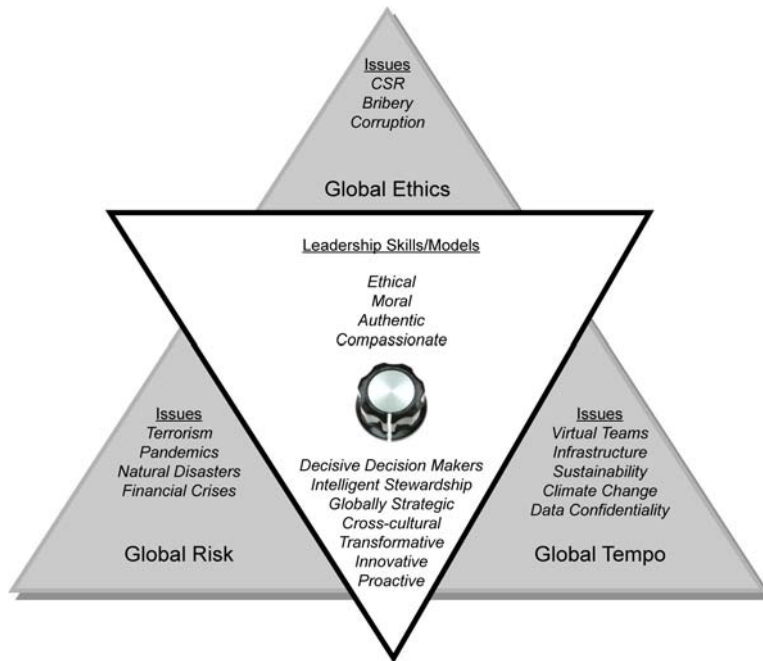


Figure 1.
Conceptual model of the
study: globalisation and
twenty-first century
leadership issues

6.1 Global ethics

The following research on leadership in the twenty-first century as an ethical and cross-cultural practice is warranted:

- Longitudinal studies of “Best Practice” corporations operating in both developing and transitional economies, with a specific focus on their overall effect on transitional economies; the degree to which these companies do business ethically as well as an examination of the efficacy and the value of any bi-partisan partnerships in which they may be involved.
- A multi-perspective exploration of ethical leadership in business practices (for example from philosophical, psychological and social perspectives), particularly given that senior leadership in large businesses tends to be short-lived and subject to high turnover rates. In addition, the effect of “long-term leadership” (i.e. one person or leadership team being involved for more than three years) on the ethical running of a global corporation versus short-term leadership merits investigative attention.
- Evidence that ethical/authentic leadership may reach a “glass-ceiling” in the extent to which it reaches the upper echelons of decision making.
- Examination of the extent to which compliance and regulatory laws really work.
- Examination of whether a transitional economy can be “made ready” for free market capitalism.

- Validation of the premise that cultural divergence is seen as a major issue in International business, although the dedication of budget to training and development in this area is miniscule.
- Longitudinal studies of geocentric employees and the creation of valid and measurable criteria in geocentric leadership development programs to investigate the impact of relocations on moral character and to address issues such as: identification of the long term effects (psychologically, socially, interpersonally) of relocating workers multiple times across countries in an attempt to expand geocentric understanding; the extent to which relocations cause geocentric employees to lack a solid foundation and therefore make workers more open to corrupt practices.

6.2 Global tempo

The following research on leadership in the twenty-first century as a globally strategic and transformative practice in dealing with rapidly changing business environments and practices is warranted:

- The extent to which cross-cultural leadership practices impact leadership development programs; i.e. are leadership development programs incorporating appropriate cross-cultural practices.
- Examination of the consequences of the juxtaposition of flexible and agile work practices on a global scale with maintaining local responsiveness and understanding local cultural requirements.
- Evidence to show that employees are empowered by management to solve challenges posed by virtual teams and global management issues generally.
- Exploration of the extent to which businesses apply strategic objectives to their leadership recruitment practices, with a specific emphasis on: whether leaders fully understand the strategic nature of their recruitment practices, especially in choosing managers with the ability to effectively lead team members in disparate geographical areas; test the notion that organisations devote a disproportionate amount of care to recruitment at senior management levels, when in fact a strategic focus should be applied and maintained for all workers across all organisational levels.

6.3 Global risk

The following research on leadership in the twenty-first century as a proactive and decisive activity as a suitable response to global risk is warranted:

- evaluation of the appropriateness of action-based leadership development programs designed for specific contexts and situations;
- examination of the extent to which psychometric or psychological testing can help determine the efficacy, morality, ethicalness and authenticity of particularly leaders in demanding situations;
- further evidence on the extent to which leadership development programs teach managers to: value and respect the abilities of employees; enable employees to become autonomous and independent thinking; examine the benefit of dialogue

when dealing with difficult issues; embrace complexity and deal with ambiguity; develop moral character; and

- identification of the behavioural changes required, both individually and organisationally, in developing “leadership as a system” as recommended by DeChurch *et al.* (2011).

7. Conclusion

The significant issues and concerns organisational leaders are facing during the early part of the twenty-first century such as global crises, rapidly changing economic landscapes, and the sheer speed of global change are creating ethical dilemmas, complexity and unpredictability for twenty-first century international leaders (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2005; Tatoglu and Demirbag, 2008; Walker, 2006). Whether domestically or internationally, organisations are grappling with capriciously shifting external hurdles (customer demands, unpredictable markets, expansion into new economies, constantly changing strategic alliances, sustainable growth and viability) and internal issues (skills shortages, talent retention, flexible work forcing, organisational structural adaptations) (Wang *et al.*, 2011). Thus, maintaining national, social and organisational resilience, security and viability in turbulent and uncertain international conditions should be top priorities for international leaders (Bledow *et al.*, 2011; Karp and Helgo, 2009; Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011; Rogers, 2011). Also relevant is the notion that political leaders must put partisan politics aside and collaborate with social, community and business leaders to encourage human development and capacity building for resilience in the face of corruption, environmental degradation, and global threats, especially as there is no single, globally enforcing, political or economic body holding leaders accountable for their actions (Walker, 2006).

However, endeavours to discover an appropriate leadership approach relevant for all international leaders have typically been blurred by a perplexing array of fragmentary and opposing viewpoints, cultural biases in interpretation, and an “eclectic variety of leadership perspectives [that] define the essence of leadership” (DeChurch *et al.*, 2010, p. 1071). Additionally, these approaches are often based on a predominantly Western, Anglo-Saxon social constructivist viewpoint, which is focussed on leadership as imparted by an individual rather than leadership models as “process” (Jepson, 2009).

The conceptual model presented in this article aims to simplify and consolidate much of this research by focussing on three key globalisation issues resulting from a rapidly changing global economic environment and detailing “best practice” leadership skills, competencies and models that are applicable to effectively dealing with all three core issues. Attention to these “best practice” skills should enable business leaders to apply what Wang *et al.* (2011) suggest are more sophisticated leadership capabilities. It is these capabilities that should proactively underpin corporate strategy with an influential socially responsible business model focusing on long-term outcomes, a wide-range of stakeholders (not just shareholders), and the obliteration of corruption and bribery (Li *et al.*, 2011; Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011; Useem *et al.*, 2005). It is to be hoped that such a course of action will go some way to prevent the reoccurrence of global disasters that seem to appear with increasing frequency and heightened levels of ongoing threat.

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