DEFINING THE 'GLOBAL' IN GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

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Version January 2012

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ABSTRACT

While scholars have begun to develop the conceptual foundations of global leadership, few attempts have been made to unify the plethora of existing definitions. We argue that the lack of a precise, rigorous and commonly accepted definition of global leadership limits the field's conceptual and empirical progress. Building on recommended practice for construct definitions, we first review and critique existing definitions of global leadership. Second, we specifically focus on explicating the *global* construct encompassed by the global leadership phenomenon and propose three dimensions along which this sub-construct can be analyzed: complexity, flow, and presence. Finally, we offer a revised construct definition and conclude with implications for research and practice.

Keywords: global leadership, global context, complexity, boundary spanning, geographical co-location, construct definition

DEFINING THE "GLOBAL" IN GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

1. Introduction

As organizations conduct a growing share of operations outside their home countries, their ability to attract and develop people that not only effectively perform global tasks and activities but also actively influence and motivate people at a global level provides a key source of competitive advantage (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009; Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen, 2001; Mendenhall et al., 2008). Over the past two decades scholars have therefore begun examining the necessary capabilities, skills and characteristics of people who take on global leadership responsibilities. Specifically, research has sought to identify the scope of global leadership tasks (Caligiuri, 2006), define a set of global leadership competencies and skills (Beechler & Javidan, 2007; Bird, Mendenhall, Stevens, & Oddou, 2010; Jokinen, 2005; Osland, 2008), develop assessment instruments (Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997) and training programs for global leaders (Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011; Suutari, 2002), separate the concept of global leadership from global management (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992; Jokinen, 2005) and distinguish between global leadership and domestic leadership (Osland, Bird, & Oddou, forthcoming). The publication of two related recent special issues of *Advances in International Management* (2007) and *Journal of Managerial Psychology* (2010) as well as the *Advances in Global Leadership* series, which is already in its 7th year, further highlight the scholarly interest in the domain of global leadership.

Despite the contributions noted above, global leadership remains a nascent field, and there is much that still remains to be understood about global leadership processes. Importantly, the field continues to lack a specific, rigorous and widely accepted definition of the construct (Pless et al., 2011). Recent reviews of the global leadership literature (e.g., Osland, Bird, Osland &

Mendenhall, forthcoming; Mendenhall et al., 2008) have identified a plethora of definitions. So widely varied are the definitions that it is difficult to unify them. With a view towards advancing our understanding of the global leadership construct we believe that it is vital to review its evolution and map the construct domain in greater detail. As scholars have argued elsewhere (e.g., Wacker, 2004), formal conceptual definitions are a necessary condition to enable robust theory-building and empirical research. Without clear and commonly accepted definitions, there is a risk that research domains become increasingly fragmented and lose their ability to develop a common body of knowledge and make sense of potentially conclusive empirical results. Indeed, examples from related disciplines such as expatriation, which has seen an increase in the different forms of international assignees being studied (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007), and cross-cultural research, in which different values and measures of culture have proliferated in recent years (Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007), show that a lack of common construct definitions makes it more difficult to interpret research findings and discern how they relate to and expand upon each other.

Our intent in this paper is to fill this gap in the field's understanding of the global leadership construct. Specifically, we review and critique existing definitions of global leadership. At the outset, we acknowledge that the construct of leadership itself is ambiguous and lacks unifying theory (Barker, 2001; Yukl, 1989). In this paper our primary focus will be on explicating the construct of *global* in the global leadership construct. By developing a conceptual model of *global,* we help to focus future research efforts in the field in such a way as to prevent conceptual pitfalls that have slowed the progression of other, similar sub-fields of international management.

2. A review of definitions of the global leadership construct

The field of global leadership has emerged over the past two decades as a response to the need of internationally operating firms to develop global strategies, expand into international markets and compete in the global marketplace (Black, Morrison, & Gregersen, 1999; Mendenhall et al., 2008). The increased intensity and growth in 'global work', defined as situations in which workers collaborate across national boundaries, is unprecedented (Hinds, Liu & Lyon, 2011). As a result, scholars have begun to conceptualize and develop models that can help global firms to develop global management and leadership talent. While existing efforts have contributed to a better understanding of some of the capabilities and competencies that global leaders ought to have, and how these can be effectively developed (e.g., Bird et al., 2010; Bücker & Poutsma, 2010; Suutari, 2002), the conceptual definitions underlying this stream of research are often idiosyncratic in nature, not explicitly spelled out, or insufficiently specific. In the next section, we review and evaluate existing definitions of global leadership.

2.1. Existing definitions of global leadership

Table 1 provides a representative sample of definitions of global leadership that have been applied by scholars in the field. They include one or more of these component categories: vision; purpose (e.g., goal achievement); behaviors (e.g., influencing, motivating, change agentry, building community and trust, boundary spanning, intercultural competence); MNC job responsibilities (e.g., global integration, strategy, architecting); target audiences (e.g., individuals, groups, organizations, global community); global component (e.g., global work, international job); performance measures (e.g., effectiveness, competitive advantage, world class performance, improved quality of life, positive change); and descriptions of the global context (e.g., cultural, political, institutional, geographical differences, multiple authorities, complexity, ambiguity).

Although they differ in their scope, as a group, they bring together a set of elements that help to better delineate global leadership. For example, scholars appear to agree that global leadership is significantly different from domestic leadership due to the salience of the context – characteristics of the global context appear to exert greater influence than is the case for domestic contexts.

-Insert Table 1 about here-

Specifically, global leadership scholars describe the global context as characterized by a greater range of diversity (e.g., Gregersen, Morrison, & Black, 1998), more frequent and far-reaching boundary crossing activities (e.g., Beechler & Javidan, 2007; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002), a greater number of stakeholders that need to be considered when making decisions (e.g., Beechler & Javidan, 2007; Mendenhall et al. 2008; Osland, Bird, & Oddou, 2007; Osland, 2010), greater competitive pressures (e.g., Brake, 1997; Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009), greater volatility and hence pressures for continuous change efforts (e.g., Brake, 1997; Osland, 2008), greater levels of ambiguities that influence decision-making (e.g., Caligiuri, 2006; Osland et al., 2007), greater complexity (IBM, 2010) which leads to demands for increased cognitive complexity (Levy, Beechler, Taylor, & Boyacigiller, 2007), social acuity and behavioral flexibility (Osland, Bird, & Oddou forthcoming), and greater needs for integration (e.g., Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009; Osland et al., 2007; Suutari, 2002).

One dimension along which existing definitions vary concerns the differentiation between leadership as a state (Quinn, 2005) or a process (Yukl, 2006). Some definitions conceptualize global leadership as a state that is characterized by specific tasks, activities, job scope, roles and responsibilities that global leaders take on. Specifying these characteristics is beneficial as it

enables the identification and development of competencies and skill sets that are necessary to fulfill these roles and tasks and limits sample selection. For example, some definitions and studies assume that anyone who holds the title of global manager is a global leader; others specify that global leaders must be change agents, in keeping with Kotter's (1999) distinction between domestic managers and leaders. This contrast between role and function leads to another category of definitions that focuses on the process element of global leadership. In these definitions global leadership does not simply entail extending a domestic leader's attributes and activities to a wider context. Instead, global leadership is conceptualized to be a process that reflects *how* an individual engages in and fulfills global roles and responsibilities, and includes sense-making, the nature and quality of relationships that the leader holds with the people around them in a global context, and the mechanisms through which a leader exerts influence. This definitional approach has also received considerable attention in the literatures on leader-member exchange (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997) and relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Finally, some definitions combine the understanding of global leadership as a state and as a process, an integration that has several advantages. First, the two categories of state and process are not mutually exclusive. Implicit to the former view is the question of *how* individuals ought to fulfill the different tasks, roles and responsibilities that constitute a global leadership context. For example, performing global integration responsibilities does not occur in a vacuum but requires the involvement and support of other people, which necessarily entails a procedural element. Similarly, the process of global leadership cannot be assessed without taking into account the specific role requirements and task characteristics of the person spearheading that process. Adler (1997, p. 174) seems to acknowledge this when arguing that "global leaders are those people who most strongly influence the process of global leadership." Second, the distinction between state and process is largely a matter of unit of analysis: The process of global

leadership reaches beyond the individual occupying global roles and attending to global responsibilities and acknowledges how it is embedded in the wider collectivity within which global leaders operate to achieve their objectives. From that perspective, integrating the categories of state and process also provides a link between the two overlapping constructs of *global leader* and *global leadership*.

2.2. Limitations of existing definitions of global leadership

Despite their merit, the existing definitions of global leadership listed in Table 1 also entail a range of problems. While these problems are certainly not unusual for a young field, we argue that they impede the field from progressing. A major concern involves the lack of rigor, precision and similarity in scope in most global leadership definitions. Wacker (2004, p. 630) argues that "imprecise formal conceptual definitions … lead to ambiguous or vague measures and subsequently lead to 'bad' theory that cannot be confirmed nor refuted." This lack of specificity is reflected in the use of ambiguous terms to define the focal construct, for example by drawing on the attribute *global* as a defining term despite its inclusion as part of the construct that is to be defined. Many other studies do not explicitly state a construct definition of global leadership at all, even though they are intended as conceptual contributions to the literature (e.g., Connor, 2000; Morrison, 2000). A precondition for developing a rigorous and precise definition is to specify the content domain of the construct under study, an approach that has thus far found very little attention in the global leadership field (for an exception see Bird et al., 2010). Common in psychological research, domain specification operates from the premise that vagueness in theoretical conceptualization precludes clarity in methodological design and accuracy in measurement.

Related to incomplete domain specification, another shortcoming in the literature is the insufficient distinction of the focal concept from related concepts, which is a necessary condition to develop unique theory (Wacker, 2004). For example, whereas some scholars appear to equate global leaders with expatriates (e.g., Kohonen, 2005; Spreitzer et al., 1997), others merely highlight expatriation as a useful instrument to develop global leadership competencies (Black et al., 1999; Jokinen, 2005). This is even more crucial as the expatriate literature itself is characterized by conceptual pluralism due to an increasing variety of forms of international assignees, including inpatriates (Reiche, 2006), short-term assignees (Tahvanainen, Worm, & Welch, 2005), international business travelers (Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007) and self-initiated assignees (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). As a result, an insufficient distinction from related concepts risks introducing additional ambiguities that further dilute the focal concept. In a related vein, some of the definitions are idiosyncratic to a specific sub-set of global leadership (e.g., global *strategic* leadership as studied by Petrick, Scherer, Brodzinski, Quinn, & Ainina, 1999) rather than adequately defining the overarching construct of global leadership.

There are other differentiating dimensions of global leadership that are often found missing from extant definitions. One dimension along which conceptualizations of global leadership may vary, but which is usually not explicitly stated in existing definitions, refers to the scope of difference between domestic and global leadership. Specifically, some scholars have argued that global leadership primarily constitutes a difference in *degree* of required competencies, for example, elevated levels of self-awareness (Jokinen, 2005), to effectively lead in a global context. This view is consistent with the notion of an increased valence, intensity and complexity of the global compared to the local context in which global leaders operate (Pless et al., 2011). In contrast, others emphasize a difference in *kind* in the sense that additional competencies and skill sets such as cross-cultural communication are needed (Brake, 1997). In a

similar vein, Morrison (2000) differentiates between those global leadership characteristics that are generalizable and universally applicable versus others that are idiosyncratic and vary according to local conditions. While both views deserve consideration, the lack of an explicit discussion and conceptualization of these attributes leaves the boundary between domestic and global leadership fuzzy. An interesting contrast to the difference in *degree* vs. *kind* debate can be found in Osland et al.'s (forthcoming) thesis that differences in degree accumulate to a point at which they become differences in kind, similar to the way in which increases in the temperature of water (difference in degree) reach a point at which it shifts from liquid to gas (difference in kind).

Yet another criticism emphasizes the fact that existing definitions do not adequately address the conceptual scope of the attribute *global*. This is surprising as it is this very element that has prompted the field of global leadership to emancipate itself from the wider leadership literature and develop a body of research of its own. For example, Adler (1997, p. 174) adopts the traditional dictionary definition of the term *global*, that is, "being of the planet," and her conceptualization highlights the notion of leadership in the "world community." Other scholars are, however, less concise in their definitions, for example by conceptualizing global leaders as executives that are in jobs "with some international scope" (Caligiuri, 2006, p. 219; Spreitzer et al., 1997, p. 7), despite McCall and Hollenbeck's (2002) finding of wide variance in global leader jobs in terms of their roles, responsibilities, tasks, and boundary spanning. Yet other scholars appear to associate the term *global* with the concept of globalization and instead concentrate on the nature of this phenomenon in their conceptualizations, which they tend to view as a context that is nonlinear, constantly changing, complex and ambiguous in nature. The vagueness of these conceptualizations is problematic for several reasons. First, the concept *global* is so broad that, unless carefully delineated and specified, people may understand very different things. Second,

there are widely varying levels of global exposure that individuals, as well as organizations, experience. For example, research by Ghemawat (2007) suggests that a large share of multinational companies operate in relatively few foreign markets, which is why he suggests speaking of semi-globalization instead. More generally, the distinction between the domestic and global context needs to be further unpacked and clarified.

Again, the expatriation literature provides a case in point. With the recent growth in different forms of international assignments, expatriation can be viewed as reflecting a continuum of various staffing options that span very short international business travel (Welch et al., 2007), traditional postings of three to five years in duration up to more permanent relocations to the corporate headquarters (Harvey & Buckley, 1997). However, the global leadership requirements will vary significantly for each type of assignee. Someone who regularly travels to a host of different countries grapples with different leadership demands than someone who always travels to the same country. These demands will also vary for a long-term inpatriate who continues to coordinate with headquarters versus a self-initiated expatriate who, after finding an international job on her own, may be more immersed in local responsibilities and untethered to headquarters. A clear understanding of what scholars mean by using the term *global* is therefore necessary if the field of global leadership is to advance further. In the following section, we will propose a conceptual model that aims to delineate in more detail the dimensionality of this term.

3. A conceptual framework of the global leadership construct

The previous section highlighted existing definitional shortcomings in global leadership research, namely deficiencies in rigor, precision, and scope. As a result, there is confusion about the boundaries of the global leader designation, which fails to specify who does and does not fit into this category. This is due in no small part to a lack of clear consensus concerning what

global means. In an attempt to develop a succinct and parsimonious definition of the term *global* (an important requirement of formal conceptual definitions according to Wacker, 2004), we focus on three critical dimensions that address the contextual, relational, and spatial-temporal elements of the construct.

3.1. Three dimensions of global

3.1.1. Complexity – the contextual dimension

In a recent IBM study, 1,500 CEOs representing 33 industries across 60 countries reported that complexity challenges them more than any other business variable (IBM, 2010). Scholars seem to agree with these executives that global business activity is characterized by increased complexity. For example, Ghoshal and Westney (1993) noted early on that multinationals differ from simpler organizations in their multidimensionality. This multidimensionality arises from operating in multiple geographical markets, engaging in multifunctional activities and often multiple product lines, and in dealing with heterogeneity in terms of diverging optimal solutions for different businesses, countries and tasks. These commingle to raise the level of complexity. Rosen, Digh, Singer, & Philips (2000) contend that global leaders must handle environments that are very different from those that domestic leaders face; global leaders, they argue, confront ongoing change with stakeholders across cross-cultural, geographical, and socio-political contexts. Similarly, Levy et al. (2007) maintain that a domestic leader's familiar and experienced mindset may not readily accommodate global business challenges. Instead, global leaders would need to acquire new knowledge about the different contexts in which they work, and the way they use knowledge and information to analyze a situation and act upon it entails a broader set of choices at a higher level of complexity (Levy et al., 2007).

Complexity, then, is the contextual dimension of the *global* construct – it is the environment in which global leaders find they must operate and live. Lane, Maznevski and Mendenhall (2004) argued in their framework of global complexity that four dimensions or conditions continuously mutually interact in a nonlinear process that produces ongoing multiplier effects which in turn produces, preserves, and continually transforms complexity across the globe. These four conditions are: *multiplicity*, *interdependence*, *ambiguity*, and *flux*.

The first condition, *multiplicity*, refers to the reality that global leaders necessarily confront in their work roles various and numerous models and manifestations of organizing, competing, and governing along with their attendant actors. Thus, complexity is not just reflective of the number and frequency of different people and entities global leaders must deal with compared to their domestic counterparts – "it is not just about 'more'; it's about more and different. This is the multiplicity aspect of complexity" (Lane, Maznevski, & Mendenhall, 2006, p. 10). Multiplicity of competitors, customers, governments, and stakeholders, along with multiplicities across the value chain, when operating globally is a core condition of complexity.

Interdependence, the second condition of complexity, reflects the rapid, world-wide movement and interconnectedness of capital, information, and people. No individual, no team, no company, in short – no one – is isolated any longer, and technology allows for rapid and easy linkages within and across companies, industries, and nations. In order to remain competitive "companies are finding that they must enter into interdependent arrangements through outsourcing, alliances, and network arrangements related to their value chains in order to stay price-competitive or continue to create value. Interdependence is not only a feature of the external environment; it also is something companies create themselves to cope with the challenges of the external environment" (Lane et al., 2006, p. 15).

The third condition of the framework of complexity is *ambiguity*. Complexity and its inherent technologies produce massive amounts of information and data. Uncertainty drives the need to obtain more information and apply probabilities to the outcomes. However, ambiguity "involves not being able to understand and interpret the data in a way that effectively guides action. Ambiguity goes beyond uncertainty" (Lane et al., 2006, p. 18). Lane and associates argue that three variables associated with ambiguity contribute to complexity: 1) lack of information clarity; 2) nonlinear relationships; and 3) equivocality (Lane et al., 2006). These variables are explained in the following paragraphs.

Information clarity refers to the inherent vagueness of meaning, accuracy, and reliability of data. For example, trust in accounting analyses has broken down with the public humiliation of firms such as Enron, WorldCom, Tyco and Vivendi, to name just a few. Similarly, the misuse of data on the part of many interconnected and interdependent actors involved in the sub-prime mortgage shenanigans that contributed significantly to the current debt crisis reflect the issue that information in and of itself does not provide answers; information is instead material that can be manipulated by actors to achieve their own purposes (Lane et al., 2006).

Linear cause-and-effect relationships exist in reality; however, so do *nonlinear relationships*, the second variable associated with ambiguity. Non-linearity occurs when events and the outcomes associated with them are inherently non-proportional in nature; basic examples include the truths that experiencing 140ºF is not twice as pleasant as experiencing 70ºF at the beach and the realization that taking eight aspirin for a headache is not eight times as effective as taking one aspirin (Goerner, 1994; Lichtenstein & Mendenhall, 2002). In the simplest sense, Meiss (1995, p. 1) notes that nonlinear can be characterized as "the negation of linear." In essence, nonlinearity occurs in a system when a given input or set of inputs into the system has effects on the system that are out of proportion to the degree of the original input(s). "The result

may be more than linear, as when a diode begins to pass current; or less than linear, as when finite resources limit Malthusian population growth" (Meiss, 1995, p. 1). Independent forces do not result in dependent outcomes in nonlinear dynamical systems, because the components and behaviors cannot be separated as they can in linear mechanical systems (Lichtenstein & Mendenhall, 2002). Rather, all elements are 'mutually constituting', which means they function and change as an interconnected network (Capra, 1996). Since an antecedent may have more than one outcome and the interdependence among variables can result in 'mutual causality', the customary cause-and-effect relationship is broken (Lichtenstein & Mendenhall, 2002). Complexity is characterized by variables that mutually influence each other over time in a nonlinear fashion, thereby producing unforeseen, distal effects that may or may not be beneficial to individuals, firms, communities, or nations. Thus, nonlinearity in systems within the global context strips information of any form of long-term predictability for global leaders; discrete groupings of data cannot be relied upon to guide them to logical decision paths that will enhance productivity over the long term.

Equivocality, the last variable explaining ambiguity, is the condition "in which multiple interpretations of the same facts are possible" (Lane et al., 2006, p. 21). Equivocality flows from the interaction of the first two dimensions. In turn, leaders' uncertain responses to equivocality may further contribute to increases in ambiguity. Lane and his associates (2006) argue that global leaders live in a world of heightened, nonstop ambiguity to a greater degree than domestic leaders. This does not mean that domestic leaders never have to deal with ambiguity; however, their context contains more information clarity, more clarity in cause-and-effect relationships and less nonlinearity, and less equivocality than the global context that shapes global leaders.

The final condition of global complexity proposed by Lane et al. (2006) is that of *flux*. Flux is both a result of, and a nonlinear catalyst of complexity. "The whole system [of the global

context] is always in motion, always changing. And it seems to be changing at a faster rate all the time" (Lane et al., 2006, p. 24). The conditions of complexity combine to produce a multiplier effect, which has been characterized as: *multiplicity* x *interdependence* x *ambiguity* x *flux* = dynamic complexity (Lane et al., 2006). We propose that this equation conceptually reflects the inherent context of global leadership, that of complexity.

Complexity is a factor that conceptually differentiates global from domestic leaders for scholars who conduct research in the field. Specifically, just because a leader in a given research sample holds positional or hierarchical power within an organization does not necessarily qualify that person as a global leader, even if the job responsibilities reach beyond the domestic context. Instead, we affirm that it is the level of complexity inherent in the leader's international responsibilities that determines the degree to which the term *global* should be applied to that leader. Scholars should first assess, and then report the degree to which leaders in their samples are embedded in conditions of multiplicity, interdependence, ambiguity, and flux. At present the literature identifies members of samples solely as *global leaders* or *global managers* while conceptual equivalence of the context in which the subjects operate is simply assumed by the researchers. Such delineation would, in and of itself, be a step forward for the field; however, we propose that delineation of context is only the first step toward a more rigorous conceptualization. In addition to context, conceptual imperatives associated with relational and spatial-temporal aspects of the construct of *global* must be taken into account as well. We next discuss the relational dimension, *flow*, and follow that by discussing the spatial-temporal dimension of *presence*.

3.1.2. Flow – the relational dimension

A look at the definitions provided in Table 1 shows that global leaders are thought to cross a variety of boundaries, both within and outside of the organization (e.g., Beechler &

Javidan, 2007). Boundary spanning, while a common variable of perceived criticality to global leadership, interestingly does not appear much – if at all – as an important variable in the general leadership literature (Osland et al., forthcoming). This aspect of the *global* construct also can conceptually differentiate global from domestic leadership.

Beechler, Søndergaard, Miller & Bird (2004, p. 122) define boundary spanning as "the creation of linkages that integrate and coordinate across organizational boundaries . . . the boundary spanner cuts across functional, geographic, and external boundaries in order to move ideas, information, decisions, talent, and resources where they are most needed." The multiplicity of boundaries that are crossed is also captured by the concept of *psychic distance* (Dow & Karunaratna, 2006), which concerns differences in and, hence, boundaries among cultural, linguistic, religious, educational, political and legal systems. Spanning the boundaries of psychic or cultural distance seems to be treated in the global leadership literature from a satellite perspective; that is, the various types of boundaries listed above tend to be simply acknowledged and then only roughly conceptually mapped out by scholars. Beechler et al. (2004) note that boundary spanning is usually studied at the organizational level in the strategy literature and only rarely studied at the individual level in the management literature. One exception was Williams' (2002) study that identified the individual-level competencies required for effective boundary spanning: high levels of personal relationships, communication and listening, conflict resolution, brokering, and personal attributes (respect, honesty, openness, tolerance, approachability, reliability, and sensitivity).

Beechler et al. (2004, p. 124) note that effective individual global leaders are able to utilize their competencies described above to:

> *. . . ensure that boundaries do not hamper the flow of essential knowledge*
>
> *and information. Interpersonal networks are vital in this effort because*

they serve as the glue that holds these vast geographically dispersed and

internally differentiated organizations together. Interpersonal links act as

integrative mechanisms because they are conduits for information

exchange that enable the various interconnected parts of the multinational

enterprise to coordinate their activities with one another. The actual

process of boundary spanning is implemented through the communication

acts of individual members of the organization.

Flow is the label we apply to the relational or boundary spanning dimension of the *global* construct because the essential content of the relations between actors across boundaries is information exchange through multiple and various types of channels. A qualitative study of expert global leaders identified a broader range of boundary spanning activities related to perspective taking, trust building, and mediating (Osland et al., forthcoming). Information exchange, however, is the basic component that enables and results from such activities. Information flow between the global leader and other actors throughout the global context constitutes a core dimension of the conceptualization of what it means to be a global leader. In their research, scholars who study global leaders and global leadership must assess the degree to which members of their sample confront high versus low degrees of flow in their work assignments. The higher degree of flow requirements reflect global leadership activities; lower degrees of flow imperatives in work roles would indicate activities that would not be characterized as relating to global leadership. To aid in such assessments we propose two dimensions of flow that can be assessed: *richness* and *quantity*.

Richness encapsulates the nature of the information flow oscillations that occur between the global leader and the representatives or actors across alternate organizational, geographic, cultural, national and/or economic boundaries. Richness can be thought of in terms of three

qualities: frequency of information flow, i.e., oscillations (reciprocal information flows), the volume of information flow, and the scope of information flow that are necessary in order to effectively perform one's role. Quantity refers to the magnitude or number of channels the global leader must use to proactively boundary span in his/her role. These dimensions of flow are derived from the conceptually similar notions of volume, diversity and richness attributes of information that flows through social relationships between actors described by Koka and Prescott (2002). Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between richness and quantity.

-Insert Figure 1 about here-

As shown in Figure 1, individuals who work in roles of elevated richness and quantity are faced with high levels of the relational dimension of the *global* construct. Medium levels of both dimensions reflect a challenging, but less extreme degree of *global* while lower levels of both dimensions indicate a less challenging global orientation. Higher levels of richness associated with fewer number of channels and actors to work with reflect a situation where the leader necessarily focuses on fewer, yet highly active channels of information exchange; conversely, higher levels of quantity that are associated with lower levels of richness reflect a situation where the leader must deal with numerous channels and actors, but at more leisurely oscillation rates.

To avoid a "one-size-fits-all" conceptualization of global leadership, scholars need to differentiate the leaders in their sample according to the complexity they confront and the degree of flow in boundary spanning their work roles require. We propose there is another dimension that must be assessed when determining the requisite degree of global leadership in individual jobs: *presence*.

3.1.3. Presence – The spatial-temporal dimension

A third defining dimension of the *global* construct refers to the degree of geographical co-location or what we term, *presence*. It reflects the spatial-temporal dimension that is inherent in the *global* construct. It is the degree to which an individual is required to physically move across geographical, cultural, and national boundaries, and not just communicate across them via virtual technologies.

Presence reflects the amount of actual physical relocation that a person needs to engage in to interact with key stakeholders who are situated in various locations around the world. Expatriates are an example of individuals who require presence in order to be effective in their work assignments. The literature on expatriation has long characterized international assignees as boundary spanning individuals (e.g., Kostova & Roth, 2003; Reiche, 2011). At the same time, scholars have acknowledged that international assignees are not necessarily global leaders just because they are physically located overseas (Adler, 2001; Jokinen, 2005).

For example, self-initiated expatriates tend to work for organizations with a lower focus on international business activities (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), which reduces international travel requirements and hence leads to a low degree of geographical co-location or presence. A similar argument can be made for short-term expatriate assignments, especially if they do not involve repeated transfer cycles. A medium level of presence exists for traditional long-term expatriation and (semi-) permanent inpatriation assignments to the corporate headquarters as these assignments usually involve regular trips to the individual's home or host unit (Harvey & Buckley, 1997). International assignments with a high degree of presence involve extreme international business travel, especially if it includes travel to a variety of locations, or commuter and rotational assignments on the part of an expatriate who is also based outside of his/her home culture (Collings et al., 2007).

Virtual assignments (Welch, Worm, & Fenwick, 2003) and global virtual teams (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999) constitute a low level of presence because most of the interactions with stakeholders occur without physical relocation. Virtual assignees may travel internationally once in a while, for example to meet members of a globally dispersed team, but the majority of activities are coordinated from the home organization. Presence increases the valence of degree of *global* in comparison to working in a virtual team that does not require physical relocation. It kindles a larger range of emotions, adds to the probability of confronting interpersonal challenges of a cross-cultural nature, places one outside of one's home culture's social predictability, and in general exposes the individual to a myriad of unpredictable and cross-culturally ambiguous encounters.

3.2. Degrees of global leadership in different profiles of international staff

Based on the three dimensions of the *global* construct, we can evaluate different profiles of international personnel in terms of their global leadership contexts. We focus on three divergent examples here.

-Insert Figure 2 about here-

First, consider an international assignee who is posted to manage a regional headquarters (as shown by the shaded cube in Figure 2, case A). This assignee's responsibilities involve managing an entire region that may differ in terms of its type of subsidiaries and entry mode strategies (Harzing, 2002) or markets. We would expect complexity to be fairly high. Similarly, the assignee will need to regularly travel within the region, which requires a high degree of presence. At the same time, the degree of flow is likely to be medium as the scope and degree of

information oscillation will be limited to a specific region of the world, though it may involve a range of issues, from the strategic to the operational.

The second example involves the head of a global IT function (as illustrated by the shaded cube Figure 2, case B). This individual holds mainly functional responsibilities, which probably means that she would be faced with a medium level of complexity. Similarly, she would experience less frequent international travel leading to an expectation that presence would be low to medium. However, being the head of global IT, she would still need to interact with subordinates, (internal) customers and other stakeholders across a wide range of cultures, which reflects a medium to high degree of flow.

Finally, consider a person leading a global virtual team (as shown by the shaded cube in Figure 2, case C). This person manages people that are geographically dispersed, with the result that many traditional leadership approaches will be less applicable to this context (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999), hence indicating a medium to high level of complexity. At the same time, he would engage in less frequent international travel (medium presence), yet require daily interaction with people from different cultures (high flow). The example of leading a global virtual team thus highlights the importance of explicitly differentiating between flow and presence.

In summary, Figure 2 provides several illustrations showing how specification of the *global* construct dimensions enables a clearer distinction regarding what constitutes global leadership and affords a clear path to measuring the extent of global leadership a given manager is engaged in. Specifically, the greater the volume of the shaded cube, the higher the person's degree of global leadership activities and responsibilities.

4. Towards a conceptual definition of both "global leadership" and "global leader"

The field of global leadership currently confronts both a threat and an opportunity to its potential to evolve and progress. At present, as scholars conduct research they are either working off implicit assumptions about what constitutes global leadership or developing definitions of the construct that loosely fit their assumptions without providing the necessary theoretical undergirding to support their definitions. This has led to a state of affairs where researchers inadvertently work at theoretical cross-purposes, thus rendering comparison or integration of their empirical findings problematic or impossible. For example, how can we compare findings from samples and designs that fail to take into consideration the different roles and job demands described in this paper? On a more positive note, this theoretical balkanization of the field is still in its early stages and can be reversed if general agreement among scholars can be achieved around the core dimensions that constitute the construct of global leadership. Consensus would allow the field to progress more rapidly, yield a higher quality of research outcomes and, in turn, produce greater confidence in applying findings to the workplace.

In the spirit of aiding the process of theoretical de-balkanization, we propose a working definition of global leadership for consideration. As previously mentioned, it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the construct of *leadership*. We have focused instead on exploring how to define the construct of *global*. It may, however, be helpful to keep in mind the challenge of defining leadership as well, by asking the question: "When we say *global leadership,* what do we mean by *global* and what do we mean by *leadership*?" We conclude now by briefly reviewing core dimensions of the construct of leadership and linking them to the newly defined sub-construct of global proposed above.

Leadership scholars have argued for decades about how leadership should be operationalized as a construct (Nahavandi, 2012; Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). The term itself was abducted from its general usage in language and used by scholars for their research purposes. As a result, it was not redefined to fit the needs of social science, and hence "it carries extraneous connotations that create ambiguity of meaning" (Yukl, 2006, p. 2). Thus, little agreement regarding its definition exists, and the result has been the creation of scores of definitions within the field (Nahavandi, 2012; Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). In his review of the field, Stogdill noted that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who attempted to define the concept" (1974, p. 2). Indeed, Yukl (2006) argues that scholars usually define leadership in line with their individual views and the elements of the phenomenon that most interest them. Consequently, the field of leadership has evolved into a myriad of sub-areas, where scholars look at leadership from a variety of theoretical and methodological lenses (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011). This state of affairs is not necessarily altogether counterproductive as it allows for nuanced understandings around various dimensions of the phenomenon; however, it does tend to render a holistic and integrative understanding of the phenomenon to be almost impossible.

Like the blind men of the Indian parable who were asked to touch different parts of an elephant and then describe what an elephant is, scholars from one perspective touch the leg of leadership and state that leadership is like a tree trunk while others touch the ear of leadership and contend that it is like a sail of a ship. Both perspectives are truly valid, but multiple definitions that vary significantly from each other produce very different kinds of data. The greater the degree of definitional unity of a field's construct, the greater the degree that empirical results from various studies can inform each other, and more robust conclusions about the phenomenon can be drawn.

While leadership scholars differ in their perspectives, it is possible to derive dimensions of leadership that many scholars deem as important elements of the phenomenon (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011; Yukl, 2006). Yukl (2006, p. 3) notes that:

> *Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization. The numerous definitions of leadership appear to have little else in common.*

Thus, most leadership scholars would likely agree with the following assumptions that leadership: 1) is a process of influence; and 2) involves influencing, facilitating, and organizing a group with the aim of accomplishing a vision, a purpose, or significant goal (Pierce & Newstrom, 2011; Yukl, 2006). Over the past two decades an increasing focus has been placed on the development of subordinates by leaders (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997; Van Dierendonck, 2011). This is the general notion that part of the leadership process, and the role of leaders, is to develop people's managerial, social, and work skills, along with assisting them to reach their potential not only as workers but also as human beings. (Greenleaf, 1991; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Also, a group of scholars have recently investigated the dimension of corporate and social responsibility as being a critical dimension in global leadership. This emphasis focuses on the ability to balance stakeholders' needs in such a way that integrative solutions can be crafted by the global leader, and that all stakeholders' perspectives are given equal emphasis and respect in global leaders' decision making processes. (Pless et al., 2011)

We do not argue that the definition we will propose is the *sine qua non* of the global leadership field's progression; however, we believe that it may serve as a useful reference point for a more conscious, nuanced, and collective analysis and usage of the construct by global

leadership scholars. It is in this spirit that we propose the following definition for consideration, which is based on the conclusions of leadership scholars (Yukl, 2006), additional elements from Table 1 definitions, and our own thinking:

> *The process of influencing others to adopt a shared vision through*
>
> *structures and methods that facilitate positive change while fostering*
>
> *individual and collective growth in a context characterized by significant*
>
> *levels of complexity, flow and presence.*

Our proposed definition of a *global leader* flows from the above definition of global leadership, and is as follows:

> *An individual who inspires a group of people to willingly pursue a positive*
>
> *vision in an effectively organized fashion while fostering individual and*
>
> *collective growth in a context characterized by significant levels of*
>
> *complexity, flow and presence.*

How do our definitions differ from the extant definitions of global leadership listed in Table 1? First, it is our view that the definitions that were heavily grounded on *state* vs. *process* to be of less heuristic value to the field. Definitions that essentially state that "global leaders are executives that work globally" are conceptually circular in nature and do not allow for discrimination within the state or role presented in the definition. Like Yukl (2006, p. 6), we treat leadership in our definition as "both a specialized role and a social influence process."

Second, we have created two definitions – one for global leadership and one for the global leader, which very few of the existing definitions addressed. At times leadership scholars sometimes conflate leadership with individual leaders in their research; thus we believe it is therefore important to conceptually separate the two and advise scholars to clearly do the same in their research on global leadership.

Third, only two of the articles cited in Table 1 address the element of vision as part of their definitions. Especially in the transformational leadership (Bass, 1996) and charismatic leadership (Conger, 1989) research streams, vision is seen as critical to leadership. Some even argue that having a vision differentiates leaders from managers or "would-be" leaders (Clawson, 2006). While some of the existing global leadership definitions use terms such as goals, competitive advantage, and positive change, the term *vision* captures the level of superordinate goal that leadership processes and leaders naturally try to achieve (Jokinen, 2005; Osland, 2008).

Fourth, we have included within our proposed definition the dimension of follower development. We contend that leadership is not a value-neutral process; rather it is a process that kindles both rational and emotional processes in both leaders and followers (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2010) and, as such, has the potential to damage or edify all who are involved in the endeavor. We contend that the degree to which global leadership leaves people less developed, farther from having met their potential, less likely to engage in innovative activities or positive citizenship behavior in the organization, the lower the manifestation has been of effective global leadership (Van Dierendonck, 2011). This aspect of our definition focuses scholars on expanding their conception of performance outcomes from "meeting one's numbers" to also "developing one's people." Some multinationals have adopted the development of talent as a critical aspect of leadership on which they assess their leaders in addition to standard performance outcomes. Thus, we feel it is important to consciously incorporate this aspect of leadership into our definition. Additionally, our definition also encompasses the notion of "collective growth" which addresses leadership dimensions and processes that relate to corporate social responsibility in the global context. (Pless, et. al., 2011)

It is important to note in the Table 1 definitions focusing on *state* rather than *process*, that global leaders are usually portrayed as individuals who occupy positions of high authority in

organizations. This raises two concerns. First, globalization has resulted in an increasing number of people who are engaged in global work farther down the organizational hierarchy. Although they are also functioning as global leaders, such definitions would exclude them. Second, in any global leadership process, which is usually a team effort, it is more likely the case that multiple leaders emerge, contribute to the process, and then drop out of the limelight into more traditional follower roles. Recent research in the area of shared/distributed leadership indicate that multiple team members often enact leadership roles, and that individuals who are traditionally described as leaders of the team because of their position authority are not always leading their teams when these role enactments occur (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Yukl, 2006). Our definitions above are not limited to the top echelons in organizations and they also allow for the enactment of multiple or shared global leadership to be assessed and studied by scholars who wish to do so.

5. Discussion and conclusion

A rigorous, precise and commonly accepted definition is a necessary condition for an academic domain, especially for a nascent field such as global leadership, to advance conceptually and empirically (Wacker, 2004). In this paper, we therefore aimed to bring greater clarity to the construct of global leadership by analytically unpacking the *global* construct. To do so, we reviewed and critiqued existing definitions of global leadership, proposed a three-dimensional framework to conceptually map the *global* construct, and provided revised construct definitions of both *global leadership* and *global leader*.

Our arguments entail various implications for research and practice. Implicit to our proposed framework of *global* is the need to find adequate operationalizations for each dimension to aid researchers in designing their research and adequately selecting their samples. Concerning the contextual dimension of complexity, there are several possible metrics of its different facets.

For example, multiplicity involves the number and diversity of stakeholders that global leaders interact with on a regular basis. In this vein, the diversity literature provides various hints as to how the diversity of stakeholders can be assessed (e.g., Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). Measures adapted from job complexity and global mindset research could also prove useful for various aspects of multiplicity (e.g., Murtha, Lenway, & Bagozzi, 1998; Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2007). The facet of interdependence is conceptually close to structural embeddedness that has been discussed in the social network literature (e.g., Granovetter, 1985). Embeddedness reflects the degree to which actors are enmeshed in a social structure and the effects that the inherent social relationships have on economic outcomes. Embedded ties are characterized by trust, cohesion, personal relationships and reciprocity (Uzzi, 1997). The degree of ambiguity faced by individual global leaders could be based on measures of information clarity and equivocality from the communication literature (e.g., Daft & Macintosh, 1981) and on measures of nonlinearity (e.g., Dooley & Van de Ven, 1999).

Regarding the relational dimension of flow, measurement issues revolve around operationalizing information flows. Here, the social network literature (Brass, 1995) again provides possible measures. For example, richness of information flows has been operationalized in terms of the existence of multiplex ties or repeated ties between actors (Koka & Prescott, 2002). A multiplex tie exists when two individuals interact with each other in different contexts; a global leader may sustain multiplex ties, for example, by dealing with the same actor in a competitive situation in one country, partnering in an R&D joint venture in a second country, and jointly lobbying a local administration in a third. Richness could also be measured by the range and nature of ties a global leader maintains with actors who are located in different geographic, cultural, national and economic milieus (Brass, 1995).

In terms of the spatial-temporal dimension of presence, we may differentiate between physical and technologically mediated co-location. It is easy to think about this difference as a continuum in which varying degrees of physical and technological presence exist, for example in the case of a leader of a virtual team who travels once in a while to personally meet her dispersed team members. Frequency of presence might reflect another way to think about measuring presence, for instance in terms of the duration of an international posting. Similarly, range of presence, defined as the number of different locations one must be present in, may constitute a third metric.

While we have outlined several possibilities for operationalizing our proposed framework we encourage scholars to refine our proposed metrics and test them in an empirical setting. Most of the metrics are continuous in nature, which may prevent a simple distinction between domestic and global leadership and result in the identification of various profiles of global leaders. We also acknowledge that our refined definition and the different dimensions and sub-dimensions of the *global* construct may pose additional challenges for scholars in terms of an increased number of measurement items necessary to capture all conceptual elements. To avoid having potential participants complete a comprehensive global leadership measurement instrument at the time of sample selection, it would be possible to focus on individuals' past experiences and results. For example, based on our definition suitable selection criteria would include (1) that study participants have completed a successful global change effort, (2) possess expertise in doing global work (e.g., measured as number of years of experience), and (3) are known for their intercultural competence.

Our paper also surfaces several managerial implications. Specifically, our framework can provide direction to organizations in their design of global leadership development programs. For example, it is important that such programs provide participants with exposure to complex

situations in which they have to deal with multiple, different stakeholders, are embedded in different work contexts (e.g., hierarchical position, joint product development team with customers, cross-country project team), increase their tolerance for ambiguity (e.g., through regular new intercultural encounters) and cope with rapidly changing conditions. Some multinational firms have begun to devise such programs, and their initial outcomes support the implications of our proposed framework (Pless, et. al., 2011; White & Rosamilia (2010).

Programs for global leadership development also need to promote boundary spanning activities. As Kostova and Roth (2003) argue, boundary spanners must not only possess the ability to facilitate information flows but also have the motivation to do so. This requires that companies design programs that enable individuals to not only establish but also maintain and update social relationships with actors in different contexts, for example, through repeated rotational assignments. Finally, while organizations acknowledge the role of expatriate assignments for providing global leadership development experiences, it is important to offer individuals a mix of different assignment forms through which they can develop global leadership skills and identify the degree of global leadership responsibilities they feel comfortable taking on in the future.

Another implication is that the scope of the dimensions of *global* may not necessarily be the same for all staff. For example, the complexity of the task environment may be greater for an inpatriate that is transferred from a small foreign subsidiary into a multinational's headquarters than for a parent-country national being sent to a small sales subsidiary abroad. This is because inpatriates lack the credibility and status of their headquarters counterparts while also being confronted with getting to know a much larger and often more hierarchical organizational unit (Harvey et al., 2005). As a result, different parts of an organization will need to collaborate more

closely in the design of global leadership development programs to ensure that their talent obtains similar developmental experiences.

To conclude, our objective in this article was to address the *global* construct more systematically and comprehensively than existing global leadership definitions have done thus far. We have sought to provide scholars with a framework for *global* that can be applied to their research designs without having to specify it within the definition of the construct itself. Only if the sub-constructs of an overarching construct, in this case *global* and *leadership*, receive conceptual attention themselves, can the overarching concept be meaningfully refined. Our hope is that the framework of what *global* entails, and the revised definitions that we have proposed, can act as heuristic catalysts to the field and as practical guides to scholars who conduct research in global leadership.

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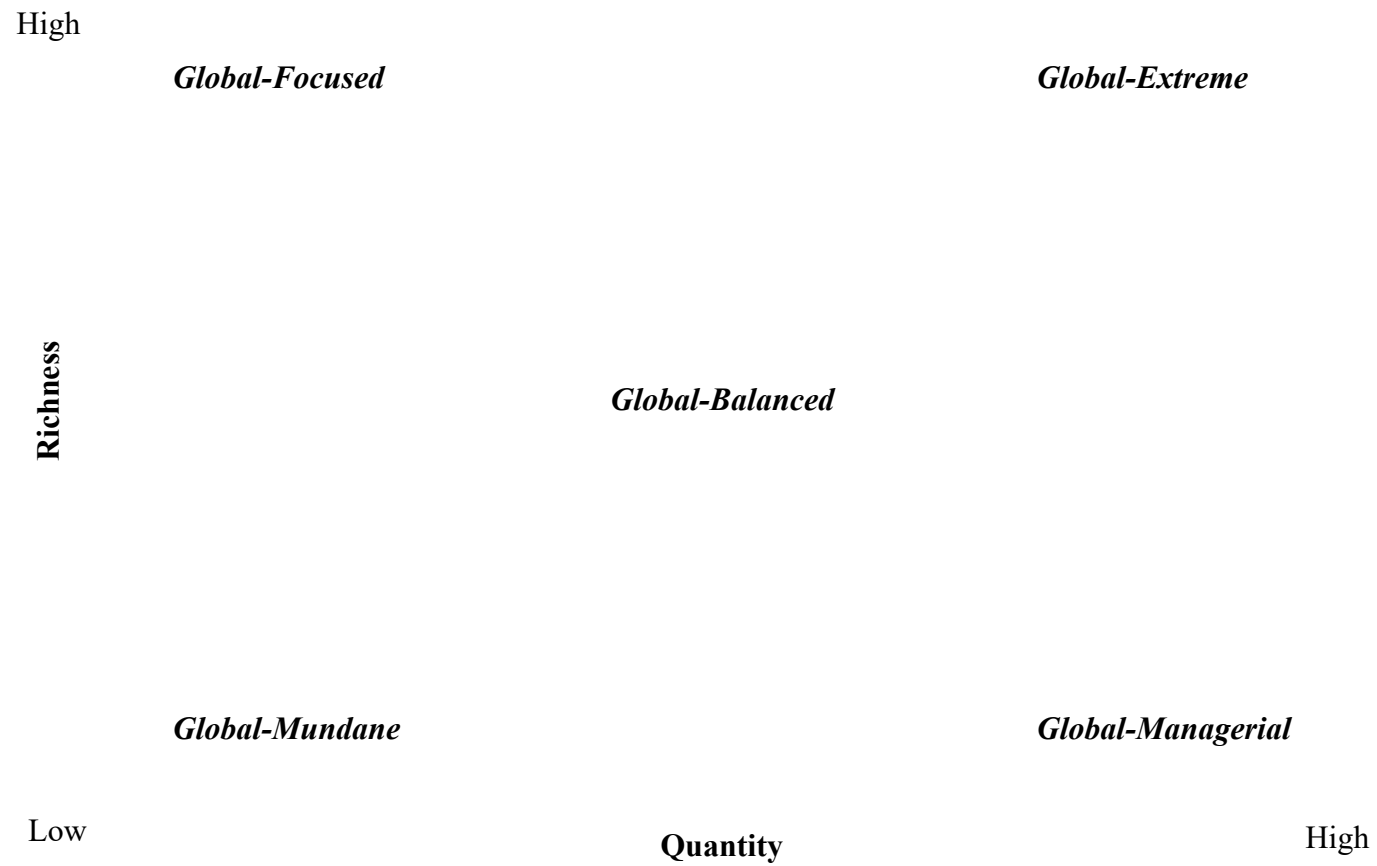
Table I. The Definitional Scope of Global Leadership in the Literature[1]

State vs. process	Author	Definition
State	Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney (1997: 7)	An executive who is in a job with some international scope, whether in an expatriate assignment or in a job dealing with international issues more generally.
	Gregersen, Morrison, & Black (1998: 23)	Leaders who can guide organizations that span diverse countries, cultures, and customers.
	McCall & Hollenbeck (2002: 32)	Simply put, global executives are those who do global work. With so many kinds of global work, again depending on the mix of business and cultural crossings involved, there is clearly no one type of global executive. Executives, as well as positions, are more or less global depending upon the roles they play, their responsibilities, what they must get done, and the extent to which they cross borders.
	Suutari (2002: 229)	Global leaders are managers with global integration responsibilities in global organizations.
	Harris, Moran, & Moran (2004: 25)	Global leaders are capable of operating effectively in a global environment while being respectful of cultural diversity.
	Osland (2008: 34)	Anyone who leads global change efforts in public, private, or non-profit sectors is a global leader.
Process	Adler (1997: 174)	Global leadership involves the ability to inspire and influence the thinking, attitudes, and behavior of people from around the world. . . [it] can be described as "a process by which members of the world community are empowered to work together synergistically toward a common vision and common goals resulting in an improvement in the quality of life on and for the planet." Global leaders are those people who most strongly influence the process of global leadership.
	Petrick, Scherer, Brodzinski, Quinn & Ainina (1999: 58)	Global strategic leadership [...] consists of the individual and collective competence in style and substance to envision, formulate, and implement strategies that enhance global reputation and produce competitive advantage.

[1] In some cases these definitions have been edited, for purposes of readability and clarity, and thus have left out citations within the actual definitions where the authors credit the ideas of others for parts of their definitions. Please see the definitions in the published articles for these citations.

	Osland & Bird (2005: 123)	Global leadership is the process of influencing the thinking, attitudes, and behaviors of a global community to work together synergistically toward a common vision and common goal.
	Beechler & Javidan (2007: 140)	Global leadership is the process of influencing individuals, groups, and organizations (inside and outside the boundaries of the global organization) representing diverse cultural/political/institutional systems to contribute towards the achievement of the global organization's goals.
Both	Brake (1997: 38)	Global leaders – at whatever level or location – will 1) will embrace the challenges of global competition, (2) generate personal and organizational energies to confront those challenges, and (3) transform the organizational energy into world-class performance.
	Caligiuri (2006: 219)	Global leaders, defined as executives who are in jobs with some international scope, must effectively manage through the complex, changing, and often ambiguous global environment.
	Caligiuri & Tarique (2009: 336)	Global leaders [are] high level professionals such as executives, vice presidents, directors, and managers who are in jobs with some global leadership activities such as global integration responsibilities. Global leaders play an important role in developing and sustaining a competitive advantage.
	Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou & Maznevski, (2008: 17)	Global leaders are individuals who effect significant positive change in organizations by building communities through the development of trust and the arrangement of organizational structures and processes in a context involving multiple cross-boundary stakeholders, multiple sources of external cross-boundary authority, and multiple cultures under conditions of temporal, geographical and cultural complexity.

Figure I. Richness and Quantity of Flow

High

Global-Focused   *Global-Extreme*

Richness

Global-Balanced

Global-Mundane   *Global-Managerial*

Low   **Quantity**   High

Figure II. The Dimensions of *Global*

A) International assignee at regional HQ   B) Head of global IT function   C) Leader of a global team

high   high

Presence

high

Complexity

low

Flow   high

high

Presence

high

Complexity

low

Flow   high

high

Presence

high

Complexity

low

Flow   high