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Research, Process, and Recommendations**

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### **Abstract**

Over the past decades, Japanese companies have proven very astute at globalizing their business operations, but research shows their success at globalizing human capital has not progressed at the same pace. As a result, Japanese multinational enterprises are missing a significant opportunity to leverage their management talent for global success. In this article we review findings from the research and identify proven strategies for developing the global competencies of Japanese business managers. Specifically, companies should focus on aligning their HR practices of: explicitly considering the global competencies of applicants when making hiring decisions; implementing transformative training and development programs; fostering a supportive company culture that will enhance and reward global competency acquisition and transfer; and working to retain highly developed and globally competent managers. Japanese companies that succeed at this challenge will find a competitive advantage other firms will have great difficulty matching.

### **Key words:**

*Global leadership, managerial competencies, executive development, Japanese managers.*

There is no paucity of evidence on the part of business analysts that there is a distinct need in Japanese corporations to develop managers with global business competencies. A fitting summary of these voices is found in a white paper published by Mercer Japan:

Everybody knows Japanese companies' businesses have been already globalized extensively. There is no doubt about it. However, when it comes to the globalization in the "people" area, we in fact do not find that many advanced cases. In a word, the businesses went global rapidly,

but the alignment of human capital . . . has been left behind to date . . . (2009, p. 1).

Japanese companies are not alone in this quandary of how to develop global managers. One of the primary concerns of companies from North America and Europe is how best to develop global leaders who can lead their globalization efforts from headquarters, and from regions and subsidiaries around the world (Mendenhall, Jensen, Gregersen, & Black, 2003; Mendenhall, 2006), and leverage its human resources as a basis for its competitive edge (Pfeffer, 1998).

The purpose of this paper is to: 1) summarize the research literature to determine what competencies are necessary for effective global leadership; 2) describe findings from recent empirical studies regarding how these competencies influence the development of global leadership skills in Japanese managers during overseas assignments; 3) review leading scholars' views on the processes that contribute to global lead-

ership development; and 4) discuss the implications of these findings for global leadership development in Japanese corporations.

## OVERVIEW OF THE DOMAIN OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

Global leadership is a nascent sub-field in the wider domain of international management research. It evolved in response to the needs of corporations to understand and develop global managers in the wake of the rapid onset of globalization in the 1990s (Jokinen, 2005; Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, & Maznevski, 2008; Suutari, 2002). Corporations in the 1990s struggled to create effective global leadership development programs, mainly because the necessary competencies for global leadership were not clearly identified. Firms essentially speculated about the likely competencies, which generated a wide range of

Cross-Cultural Relationship Skills	Traits and Values	Cognitive Orientation	Global Business Expertise	Global Organizing Expertise	Visioning
Building Relationships	Inquisitiveness and Curiosity	Environmental Scanning	Global Business Savvy	Team Building	Articulating a tangible vision and strategy
Cross-Cultural Communication Skills	Continual Learner	Global Mindset	Global Organizational Savvy	Continuity Building	Envisioning
Ability to emotionally connect	Accountability	Thinking Agility	Business Acumen	Organizational Networking	Entrepreneurial Spirit
Inspire, Motivate Others	Integrity	Improvisation	Stakeholder Orientation	Creating Learning Systems	Catalyst for Cultural Change
Conflict Management	Courage	Pattern Recognition	External Orientation	Architecting and Designing	Catalyst for Strategic Change
Negotiation Expertise	Commitment	Cognitive Complexity	Results-Oriented	Global Networking	
Empowering Others	Hardiness	Cosmopolitanism		Strong Customer Orientation	
Managing Cross-Cultural Ethical Issues	Maturity	Managing Uncertainty		Business Literacy	
Social Literacy	Results-Oriented	Local vs. Global Paradoxes		Change Agency	
Cultural Literacy	Personal Literacy	Behavioral Flexibility			
	Tenacity				
	Emotional Intelligence				

Source: Mendenhall, M., & Osland, J. "Mapping the Terrain of the Global Leadership Construct." Paper presented at the Academy of International Business, San Juan, Puerto Rico, June 29th, 2002.

FIGURE 1 Dimensions of Global Leadership

competency sets across firms with concomitant management development outcomes. However, this was just guesswork, and in the wake of this problem, some international management scholars began to conduct research to delineate the primary competencies necessary for effective global leadership (Von Glinow, 2001).

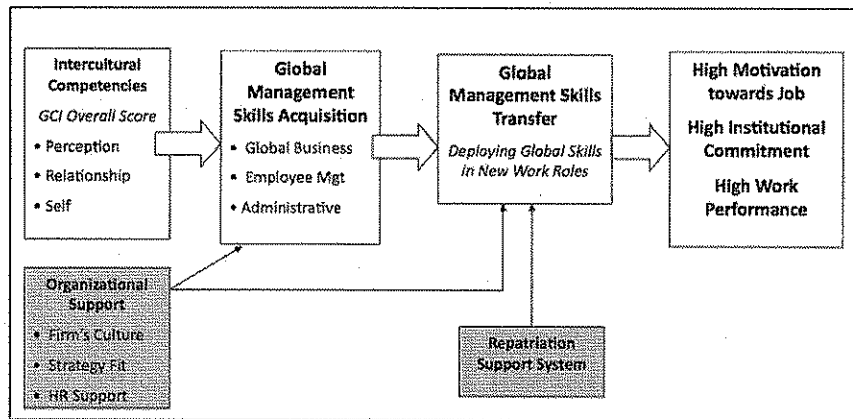
Unfortunately, these research studies generated a plethora of variables (over fifty in all) that seemed to influence global leadership effectiveness; thus, although the findings were perhaps based on more solid evidence, academe added to the confusion surrounding the phenomenon (Mendenhall, 2001). In an attempt to bring order to the conceptual chaos, a review of this literature was conducted by Mendenhall and Osland (2002), and subsequently updated (Mendenhall et al., 2008). This ultimately allowed for a more focused conceptualization of global leadership competency dimensions that provided useful clarification to the field. Mendenhall and Osland (2002) grouped the various competencies that surfaced from studies associated with global leadership into six dimensions: *Cross-cultural relationship skills, traits and values, cognitive orientation, global business expertise, global organizing expertise, and visioning*.

Mendenhall et al. (2008) argue further that "the six dimensions can be conceptually divided between those that involve competencies directly related to intercultural interaction at the person and small group level . . . and those that involve the mastery of more macro, global business knowledge and skills." (pp. 2-3). Bird and Osland (2004) contend that competencies associated with the person/small group level serve as prerequisite building blocks to higher-order global business competencies. Within this more fundamental domain of global competencies, the question still remained unanswered in the field: "Which global competencies are most important for global leadership effectiveness?"

Some progress has been achieved in narrowing the list of global competencies that are fundamental to the development of higher order competencies (Osland, 2008). Mendenhall, Stevens, Bird and Oddou (2008) noted that "when the dimensions of global leadership and their attendant competencies were compared to the literature of expatriate effectiveness, it was found that there was a significant overlap between three of

the competency domains of global leadership and the competencies that are important to living and working in a foreign country as an expatriate" (p. 2). Thus the primary competencies that have emerged from this literature can be applied to the domain of global leadership. Mendenhall et al. (2008) examined previous reviews of both the expatriation and global leadership empirical literatures. They argue that seventeen of the myriad competencies that exist in studies in both literatures were most strongly related to outcomes of living and working effectively with people from other cultures. They labeled these competencies as: *Non-judgmentalness, Inquisitiveness, Tolerance of Ambiguity, Cosmopolitanism, Category Inclusiveness, Relationship Interest, Interpersonal Engagement, Emotional Sensitivity, Self-Awareness, Social Flexibility, Optimism, Self-Efficacy, Self-Identity, Emotional Resilience, Non-Stress Tendency, Stress Management, and Interest Flexibility*. A full delineation of these competencies, along with the reviews upon which they were chosen, is beyond the scope of this paper (for a comprehensive review see Mendenhall et al., 2008).

The critical question then, becomes the following: "How can intercultural global competencies, the building blocks to higher-order competencies, be developed in managers?" Scholars in the field have often claimed that long term overseas assignments are crucial to the development of global leadership skills and to their application upon return to the home country, usually in a corporate headquarters context (Black, Morrison, & Gregersen, 1999; McCall & Hollenback, 2002; Osland, 2001). This would suggest that such competencies can be developed, given the right set of circumstances. Some, however, argue that the competencies delineated by Mendenhall et al. (2008) are immutable and not susceptible to appreciable change over time, even during an overseas assignment. Further, some scholars have argued that other variables intervene in the development of global competencies while overseas; for example, that higher levels of organizational support lead to an increase in global management competency learning (Furuya, Stevens, Oddou, Bird & Mendenhall, 2007). To more fully flesh out an understanding of these processes among Japanese managers, Furuya and his associates studied 305 Japanese managers who had recently returned to



**FIGURE 2 Global Skill Acquisition and Transfer in International Assignments**

the home office after having been sent abroad on 1-2 year work assignments (Furuya, Stevens, Bird, Oddou, & Mendenhall, 2009). This sample represented repatriated managers from five Japanese multinational firms. In each case, the manager had not had previous overseas work experience before being sent abroad. A summary of their findings is illustrated in **FIGURE 2**.

As noted in **FIGURE 2**, they found that two main sets of variables influenced the acquisition of global business, employee management, and administrative skills during their expatriate experience: 1) the degree to which the expatriates possessed intercultural competency skills *before* leaving on their overseas assignment, and 2) the degree to which the firm's culture, strategy, and human resource processes was supportive of overseas assignments (Furuya et al., 2009)

Expatriates who acquired competencies in the three areas previously mentioned were subsequently more likely to transfer these learned competencies upon return to the home office. Thus, "competency acquisition was positively related to subsequent competency transfer upon repatriation" (Furuya et al., 2009, p. 210). It was also found that a supportive repatriation human resource system assisted in competency transfer upon repatriation.

Finally, as indicated in **FIGURE 2**, those expatriates who were able to transfer their competencies upon repatriation in their home offices also exhibited higher levels of: 1) motivation and satisfaction in their jobs in the home office, and 2) work performance in their jobs in the home office. While more research needs

to be done in this area, this preliminary study offers some important implications for Japanese companies in developing a new generation of managers with global mindsets and global managerial skills (Furuya et al., 2009).

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES IN JAPANESE FIRMS

Scholars have long argued that the primary way to develop global managerial or global leadership competencies is via transformation processes, often called "crucible experiences" (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; Mendenhall et al., 2008; Osland, 1995; Osland, 2001). That is, given the immutable aspect of many of the competencies associated with global expertise, the most likely way for those to be developed is to place managers in situations where they are challenged beyond their current emotional, psychological, and work comfort zones, where they will have to confront experiences that will force them to stretch, learn new skills, or learn how to either compensate for their weaknesses or deploy their strengths more effectively.

Though there are anecdotal cases of individuals transforming from configurations of mostly weak global leadership skills to the possession of higher-order skill sets, Furuya and his associates found rather that individuals who are more likely to increase their global managerial abilities are those who already possess above average levels of core intercultural competencies before they embark on expatriate experiences

(Furuya et al., 2009). That is, the “crucible experience” of an expatriate assignment is more beneficial for people who already are either “hard-wired” with higher levels of intercultural competencies or have learned them from their previous life’s experiences.

However, the Furuya et al. (2009) study did not control for other variables, such as the degree to which expatriates were buffered from having to deal with the local culture while they lived overseas. Anecdotal reports drawn from their sample of 305 Japanese managers led the researchers to conclude that most of the expatriates lived in close contact only with other Japanese expatriates and in fact socialized and worked mostly with other Japanese managers while they were overseas. In fact, for many of these managers, the living and working arrangements while overseas were so buffered from the local culture and host country employees that it was almost as if they had never left Japan!

Nevertheless, there were a few managers who were exceptions to the buffering described above. Due to their greater innate curiosity and interest in developing effective networks among the locals, as well as their ability to manage challenges, those expatriates who possessed higher levels of intercultural competencies *before* expatriation were more likely to venture out from their “expatriate communities” and en-

gage the local populace, both at work and outside of work. Applying their intercultural competencies to the “crucible” experiences would likely have further developed their abilities to acquire additional competencies.

To develop a cadre of global managers in the long run, the strategic question becomes: Do we try to develop them internally within the company, or do we focus on recruiting and hiring individuals who already possess effective intercultural competencies? Essentially this becomes a “Make or buy” decision. If the decision is to buy, how is this best accomplished? If the decision is to make, how is this best accomplished? The issues associated with these two options are illustrated in **TABLE 1**.

### The “Buy” Decision

Though counter to traditional Japanese management values and practices, one option is to rigorously screen and hire only experienced, proven global managers at the middle and top layers of management. However, the research previously reported (Furuya et al., 2009) shows that time spent abroad does not mean that expatriate managers have actually learned to be skilled global leaders; Japanese expatriates in particular can be very methodical at physically and psychologically buffering themselves from the contrast and

**TABLE 1 A Comparison of “Buying” or “Making” Globally Competent Managers**

“Buy”	“Make”
Agree on the essential core global competencies.	Agree on the essential core global competencies.
Screen all job applicants for the degree to which they already possess the desired core global competencies.	Conduct needs assessment of all trainees to determine where global competency training and development is needed.
Make job offers based on the degree to which candidates possess the desired core global competencies.	Begin training and development activities by targeting those areas of greatest growth and development need.
Develop supportive organizational and HR policies and programs that enhance and reward global competency development.	Designing transformative training programs and developmental experiences that tie into strategic goals and do not take managers away from their jobs for long lengths of time.
Develop repatriation reassignment policies that enhance transfer of skills upon return and reassignment.	Design career paths and organizational culture wherein learned global competencies can be practiced and internalized.
Work to retain highly developed and globally competent managers who will otherwise be sought after by rival companies.	Work to retain highly developed and globally competent managers who will otherwise be sought after by rival companies.

conflict that would come from actively engaging the host country culture and its people. Therefore, it is essential to be able to assess whether the individual has acquired the competencies a firm has identified as those most desirable. Thus, the “buy” decision really becomes the “identify” decision. It means a firm must have an accurate measurement and assessment system to determine *whom* to “buy” among those with global business experience. Such an evaluation can be done through carefully developed assessment centers, which can include a number of different psychological-based assessments as well as behavioral-based training and testing. Or for a less costly but also less thorough assessment, a single on-line or paper assessment can be used. Reliance on a single instrument, however, means due diligence must be done to ensure it is based on sound research and has been constructed to reflect the various necessary measurement qualities of high reliability and validity (see for example, <http://www.kozaigroup.com/gci.html>).

Second, as indicated in TABLE 1, hiring experienced global managers will be a waste of time and talent if they enter an organizational culture that does not actively reward and champion global competencies and/or provide opportunities for those global management skills to be deployed in meaningful ways. Similarly, firms do not always benefit from the knowledge and skills acquired by their repatriates (Oddou, Osland & Blakeney, 2009) if they do not manage the knowledge transfer process and implement supportive repatriation policies. In both examples, global managers may opt to suppress their competencies and act like all the other peer managers in their cohort group. This leads, of course, to the final issue: If for any reason experienced global managers are dissatisfied with the circumstances in which they find themselves, they are more susceptible to recruitment by other companies, which constitutes a wasted investment by the firm that actually sent them abroad.

### The “Make” Decision

Most companies are comfortable with the idea of developing their own global managerial talent from their existing managerial cadres. This invariably means leveraging a strong and well-positioned training function within the organization. In the “Make”

decision, a firm has three major issues to resolve: 1) it must first decide on which global competencies it will develop in its managers; 2) it must have an HR strategy that maximizes the probability that its personnel have those competencies before joining the firm, and then it must have HR practices that train and develop; and 3) it must design effective training programs and career paths that will allow for the actual development of these competencies. Each of these three elements is discussed in more detail below.

1) **Identification of competencies.** The most often cited research on the fundamental competencies necessary to adapt to and interact effectively across cultures is that presented by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), which has since been expanded and refined to encompass the 17 specific global competencies mentioned earlier in this article (see also research related to the development and validation of the *Global Competencies Inventory* by Mendenhall et al., 2008). This framework clusters the 17 competencies into three broad dimensions of: a) competencies related to one’s perceptions, which determine the accuracy and quality of one’s intercultural learning; b) competencies related to one’s ability to develop relationships, which increase one’s critical sources of learning and create human bridges between two cultures; and, finally, c) competencies related to the ability to manage one’s own psychological and emotional well being in very challenging situations, such as those typically faced when working across cultures.

2) **HR strategy.** A firm’s business and HR strategies must be integrated. Firms must create career paths, reward systems, and opportunities consistent with the need to develop global competencies. This, too, has its challenges as some HR department directors, themselves, do not possess a global mindset and consequently become yet another obstacle in designing appropriate methods to develop the firm’s personnel.

3) **Effective training programs.** It is clear from research that traditional, classroom-training formats are insufficient to develop global competencies. Training designs should incorporate experiential learning, on-going developmental assignments over time accompanied by coaching and other expert feedback, and short-term immersion experiences that challenge people to move outside their comfort zones (Black



& Mendenhall, 1990; Goleman, 1998). This is new ground for many companies to tread and in many cases requires a complete reworking of training and development methodologies and approaches.

If these conditions can be met and managers successfully undergo processes whereby they actually develop global competencies, the organizational culture must be receptive to such people and the application of their newfound skills. In the end, the same challenge exists for the "make" decision as for a successful "buy" process -- namely, once a company has developed a cadre of global managers, how can the firm fend off efforts by other businesses to hire away the global managers the company has spent so much time, effort, and money developing?

## A WAY FORWARD

Based upon our research over the years and our consulting experience, we recommend to companies that perhaps the best approach to take is neither the "make" nor the "buy" approach, but rather an integration of the two approaches.

### Step 1: Hire Globally Competent People Early in their Careers

This first step arises from the observation that when it comes to hiring new employees, strategically managed firms will recognize that people are not all created equal in terms of the knowledge, skills, abilities and essential job-related competencies that they possess. The first step therefore is to recognize that Japanese firms greatly increase their chances for future success in the global arena if they start at the beginning with the best raw human talent they can possibly get, in terms of the innate global competencies they hire into the company. If companies ignore this opportunity to deliberately and proactively manage the human resource talent equation at its very inception of hiring, then it means they are leaving to chance what can otherwise be a thoughtfully leveraged and tremendously strong competitive advantage. Though limited in number, there are a few well developed and validated assessments that specifically target and measure global competencies (for a review of available measures see Bird, 2008), and the strategically managed firm will be wise to utilize them to make

the best possible "buy" decisions when hiring college graduates. This becomes increasingly critical as more and more research shows that to a large degree many global competencies are immutable and developed early in life; it is therefore easier to develop a cadre of global managers from a base of employees who are already "above average" at the time they are hired, in terms of their global competencies. Inclusion of intercultural competencies and global mindset, in addition to technical expertise and other variables used in the hiring process of college graduates, is thus a crucial strategic step for globally oriented firms to take.

### Step 2: Once Hired, Provide Strategic Development Opportunities Over Time

Firms must also strive to create a series of developmental opportunities throughout the career of a global manager, from the time recruits are hired out of college until the time they are ready to be sent on an overseas assignment or work in overseas global operations from the home office. Each company is different due to its unique operational characteristics and the industry in which it competes; however, developmental opportunities can be provided incrementally over time, and rewarded. Reverting to traditional Japanese management practices in this regard could be advantageous. For example, in the past many Japanese firms offered their blue-collar employees special skill allowances whereby they were rewarded with increased pay if through training they qualified for licenses or special skill certifications, such as becoming a crane operator or a computer programmer. The concept of a special skill allowance could be applied to employees on management tracks to reward the acquisition of foreign languages, specific global competencies, and global business acumen valued by the company.

As noted previously, training that goes beyond the classroom is important to enhance and develop global management skills. The experiential, immersive, out-of-one's-comfort-zone training also has a basis in traditional Japanese management practices. Thomas P. Rohlen (1974) reported examples of practices used in a large Japanese bank in the late 1960s that were typical at that time. To develop its employees, the bank carefully involved them in immersive, experiential

processes such as endurance walks, rotating work assignments in farm villages, and self-examination via diary writing. Global competencies can be developed locally using similar strategies. For example, a management development program that was run by the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) in the late 1990s (Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000) desired to broaden and expand the perspectives of their managers. They determined that the best way to do this would be to assign their managers to work with not-for-profit agencies in a full-time role for one or two weeks. Some managers were assigned to work with terminally ill HIV patients. Other managers were assigned to work in homeless shelters. Still others found themselves volunteering to work with juvenile delinquents or immigrants. Oddou and Mendenhall (2008) conclude that:

Though often painful and challenging, this experience provided powerful contrasts to the managers and challenged them to expand their perspectives and worldviews. The results indicated that this intensive global simulation experience helped the USB managers to significantly "reduce subjective barriers and prejudices, learn more about themselves, broaden their horizons, and increase their interpersonal skills—all of which are competencies associated with global leadership" (Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000: 258). Interestingly, sixty percent of the managers who participated in the *SeitenWechsel* program continued to support the institution that they served in after the program finished (Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000).... Managers were placed in situations where they had to extend the reach of their existing competencies to handle, cope, and be productive in milieus that were alien to them. Thus, it is possible to develop global leadership competencies without sending people overseas per se. Also such in-depth simulations can be used to increase the number of managers who are trained to develop global competencies, as this type of global leadership competency training does not require managers to be sent overseas on either long or short term assignments, which of course can be quite expensive and budget-prohibitive (p. 173).

Modifying traditional Japanese management devel-

opment processes can become an innovation for 21<sup>st</sup> century companies that are willing to utilize transformative learning experiences to successfully globalize their managers. A similar approach can be found in the development of assessment centers, which have also been used successfully to develop global competencies in managers (Stahl, 2001).

Another key point is that developing an individual into a competent global manager cannot be accomplished over the course of a year or two of focused training. Thus, rolling out a developmental program that would take place over the course of a career would allow large numbers of managers to prepare themselves over time to be ready to take on increasingly important responsibilities when they reach higher managerial levels within the firm. Currently, many companies are trying to develop global managers almost overnight, but shortsighted, one-time approaches are ineffective.

### Step 3: Incrementally Change the Culture

For the first two phases of global management development to truly take root, the soil in which they are planted must be hospitable to the growth of these initiatives. This soil is the company's culture, and yet trying to globalize an entire corporate culture overnight is just as impossible as trying to globalize a manager overnight. As management employees engage in the training activities associated with Step 2, concurrent incremental changes in company culture need to be established that allow for the acceptance, nurturing and practice of what is learned.

The key for a global firm is to tie its values and reward structure, both formally and informally, to the acquisition of global management skills. As already mentioned, "hard" rewards such as special skill allowances can be instituted for the development of specific global competencies and skills. Informal rewards such as celebration/graduation rituals at various points of the global management skill development path can be instituted. Similarly, firms can increase opportunities for lower-level managers to participate in special "make-work" initiatives around non-strategic work issues that involve practicing global skills, such as global virtual teamwork. The entire culture does not need to change; however, certain aspects of its hard rewards and soft rewards need to be adjusted

to signal to management track employees that developing global skills and competencies is something that is valued and rewarded in the firm.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Though challenging, recent developments in research and practice hold great promise for guiding Japanese firms that wish to become strategic and proactive in the art of developing a cadre of internal managers who are genuinely globally competent -- as opposed to having managers among their ranks who have simply worked in their company's overseas operations as part of an expatriate assignment. We have summarized the key findings of this research and developed recommendations for practice that revolve around empirically-based approaches to maximize both the "buy" and "make" decisions that all firms must face as they manage their human resources. Firms that effectively manage both the acquisition and development of globally competent managers are positioning themselves for an enduring competitive advantage that other firms will find most difficult to match.

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