

# The Global Leadership Development Dilemma Or How Best To Develop Your Global Leaders

Many global organisations are citing significant gaps in their leadership pipeline as a major concern. It seems the leadership challenge, or perhaps more specifically the global leadership challenge, remains as urgent as ever.

Spending on corporate training is on the up with studies<sup>1</sup> suggesting over \$130 billion worldwide and approximately 35% of that investment is on leadership and management. So why are companies not always getting a good enough return on this investment? Are they investing in the right training for the right people? Do leadership programmes provide the right inputs for the global leadership agenda? What should companies be doing differently? And what should they be doing instead of, or as well as, training? This article aims to address these questions, dispel some of the myths and suggest how organisations can best develop their global leaders of the future.

## Hire The Right Global Talent

“We just need to hire people with innate leadership potential and previous international experience, don’t we?” Yes, this has some truth as hiring ‘ready-made’ talent offers advantages. It can certainly speed up the development process but it won’t automatically provide the right global leadership capability for your context, your sector, your strategy or your markets. Nor will an innate aptitude for leadership necessarily see an executive through the complex challenges of a global career.

Candidates who have completed part of their education overseas or have already taken academic studies in global management may well bring a more open and flexible approach, greater cultural knowledge and perhaps a working knowledge of another language. However, they probably won’t have all the skills required to be a leader in your organisation and nor will they necessarily have the ability to apply pre-existing knowledge and skills to their new and future roles or to the organisational strategy.

Numerous tools, models and

methodologies now exist for assessing leadership capability and these can be useful at the recruitment stage. However, recruiters need to make sure that they choose the right one for their context and also select a framework that includes the appropriate global and cultural dimensions.

**Take away 1** - Valuing prior international experience and including global leadership competency assessment as part of the recruitment process can play an important first step in building a global leadership pipeline.

## Give People International Experience

“People learn by experience so if we give our future leaders plenty of international exposure they will become more globally competent, won’t they?” Yes, relevant, sustained experience of working internationally is undoubtedly a requirement for successful global leadership, but not necessarily enough on its own. Expatriate experience seems to be significantly more useful than other more sporadic types of international experience but even lengthy periods spent managing projects or operations in other parts of the world do not automatically deliver the required global leadership capability. Organisations need to consider how the international assignment is set up and managed as well as how the assignee is prepared and supported. Many global mobility teams are now working more strategically with HR and Talent Management teams to ensure that international assignments provide maximum value to both the company and the individual employee.

**Stretch** - First of all, the international assignment should offer the future leader the right developmental opportunities rather than simply plugging an operational gap. Consider whether the employee will get the right level of stretch to develop their leadership capability. Does the assignment have a broader regional rather than a purely national remit? Will the assignee have the chance to develop new knowledge and skills? Will they build relationships with a wide range of stakeholders including local

staff, government representatives, suppliers or clients?

**Support** – It goes without saying that the assignment needs to be a success for all concerned: operationally, strategically and developmentally – and companies can support their international assignees to ensure this happens. Providing expatriates with quality language and intercultural training before they leave and on arrival can help them to maximise the opportunities their new environment has to offer. Global communication skills and cultural understanding can help them to integrate more quickly and more fully, avoid making personal and reputation-damaging mistakes and build stronger and longer-lasting relationships. It is important that the international assignment allows the employee to reflect and to learn. Offering in-country mentoring and coaching programmes can help assignees to evaluate their experiences, work through challenging situations and initiate changes in mindset and behaviour. Ongoing support from the home country or head office can also be critical in ensuring the assignment is a success.

**Re-integration** – An international assignee may acquire new expertise, learn new skills and develop a more global perspective but if these are not put to good use on their return then the assignee may become disillusioned and, in the worst case, either leave the organisation completely or look for another overseas posting. Ensuring that the returning expatriate has a well-defined role that integrates and builds on their new skills and knowledge is essential in maintaining a strong talent pipeline of future global leaders.

**Take away 2** - International assignments are a key component in developing global leaders, but the assignment must be well-structured and the expatriate supported and given the right learning opportunities.

## Invest In Leadership Development Training

“We send our best people on leadership courses, is that not enough?” Yes, formal education plays an important

part in global leadership development and there is a vast array of leadership development offerings on the market from very expensive executive education programmes to off-the-shelf short courses to in-house development programmes, all promising to give your future leaders the skills they require to succeed. Companies that make a sustained investment in the right type of global leadership development do appear to perform better than those that don't.<sup>2</sup> What are some of the key elements of a successful global leadership development programme?

**Content** - There are numerous frameworks and lists of competencies all focusing on the complexity of managing local and global priorities and on the ability to engage with diverse stakeholders. Identifying which competencies are essential is more important than presenting a long list of non-specific skills and attributes. In addition to greater self-awareness and global competencies, leaders also require an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic factors impacting their organisation's global expansion. Perhaps the most important, but also the most challenging part of global leadership development is the ability to adjust mindset and shift firmly-held assumptions, feelings and beliefs. The Thunderbird School of Global Management describes global mindset as 'the ability to influence individuals, groups and organisations with a different cultural perspective in the host country to achieve the company's goal.' Development programmes that give leaders the opportunity to reflect, evaluate and 'try on' other perspectives are more likely to be successful in effecting behavioural change.

**Context** - Customisation is key to successful global leadership training. Clear priorities are required in terms of which competencies need to be developed, which markets are crucial and what the overall objectives and desired outcomes of the programme are. Where possible real-life projects can link classroom learning to on-the-job challenges, 360 feedback can highlight how participants show up within their organisation and individual coaching can dive deeper into the challenges of each specific context.

**Consistency** - Short infrequent training events for a select few will not deliver results. Leadership development needs to be sustained rather than sporadic and part of the organisational culture.

**Take away 3** - Formalised training needs to be customised and ongoing to be effective. Self-reflection, competency development, country knowledge and global mindset are all important components.

### Getting The Strategy Right

The development of effective global leaders should be firmly embedded within the organisational context and embraced from the very top. Maintaining a strong leadership pipeline should be a priority through recruitment, training and career planning initiatives and development should be available across all levels rather than something accessible only to a minority. Organisations and their employees need to have a clear understanding of their global strategy and then make an assessment of the specific knowledge, behaviours and competencies required by current and future leaders.

### No Easy Solution

There is no easy solution, no one-size-fits-all but several messages are clear:

- Global leadership development needs to start early and be inclusive – it is no longer a luxury item but an essential component for strategic growth
- Successful global leadership development is multi-faceted including training, coaching, mentoring, overseas rotations and on-the-job projects
- Context is everything – sector, organisational strategy and culture, key operating markets and individual capability will all help determine the focus of a successful global leadership development programme.

*1 Bersin at Deloitte, 2014*

*2 Deloitte University Press, 2015*



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