

# Global Careers and Global Leadership: Influencing Culture, Cause and Effect

by

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**Introduction:** I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak with you today, pleased for two reasons. First, I appreciate this opportunity to meet again with Hilary, and to meet with Kim for the first non-virtual time. As an outsider, and with an outsider's perspective, I trust you appreciate Cranfield as a powerful resource supporting global competitiveness in Europe.

Second, I am pleased to meet with you when the focus of our conversations is on the compelling, yet elusive topic of leadership – and leadership in global firms at that. I promise no pat answers, no magic formulae – only a perspective, and an incomplete and tentative perspective at that. I have been fascinated with this topic – what some would call a mass hallucination or at least mass attribution - all of my life. I prepared the topic for my doctoral comprehensive examinations many years ago and personally feel I was passed on the strength of my willingness to even take on the topic.

**Overview:** My formal presentation has five major parts: First, I will outline an emphasis on leadership as a context-specific process of clarifying and infusing a corporate culture that transcends national cultures. Key leadership processes and outcomes are presented. Second, follows a model of global leaders in a more traditional role of corporate “architect”. The third section provides a contrasting model of global leader in the role of corporate “bard”. The fourth section will present a discussion of the relationship between global careers as they “cause” leader capabilities associated with the bard leader. Finally, a discussion of the relationship between bard leaders as they “effect” the careers of other employees of global firms will conclude my presentation.

Please feel free to interject at any time with questions, comments, examples, rebuttals and general commentary as the spirit moves you. I assure you I welcome the dialog and debate of our conversations.

**On Leadership:** When trying to define leadership I am reminded of the U.S. Supreme Court Justice's reported comment on pornography: “I can't define what it is beforehand, but I know it when I see it.”

There are many approaches to this compelling yet maddening topic. I assume we have all covered the literal Anglo-Saxon translation of leadership as “people on a journey.” It is just those journey-specific aspects of leadership I want to emphasize.

Organizational leadership must ultimately be context-specific if it is to be strategically directed behavior. What Nancy Adler refers to as leadership in an already

“shared domain [corporation], influencing a specific audience [followers/employees] which is already sophisticated in the stories, the images and **the other embodiments** [my emphasis] of the domain.” (2001:78).

Any effort to create a context-free model will necessarily lose that shared-interactive meaning which gives leadership both its **power** (the power of revitalizing and building on long shared meanings and imagery) and its **purpose** (the communication and acceptance of a widely shared and yet still personally-relevant vision).

Our discussions must be firm specific to have this power and purpose – this is where you come in. As an academician I can dissect the topic, but then it dies. As a team of practitioners we can work up a case on the patient – and perhaps it will even thrive and grow.

The overarching goal of global leadership is nothing less than the creation, reinterpretation and continually refreshed enhancement of a globally shared corporate culture. This globally shared culture must balance a consistency with and acceptance within a wide variety of local national and regional cultures while simultaneously identifying itself with higher, unique corporate values and purposes. It must be firmly rooted in these local cultures and at once float and flow beyond them. In a moment I will present two roles by which this goal has been pursued.

To review, leadership is the manipulation of organizational culture – the conscious creation of meaning. According to Ed Schein, leadership is providing members with assumptions about the nature of the firm as it relates to its environment, assumptions about the nature and role of work in the lives of its members, assumptions about the nature of human relationships, assumptions about the nature of human nature, and finally assumptions about the nature of reality, time and space (1985). These answers to the big questions of life result in a widely held, example-driven set of corporate values. These values, literally that which is more valuable in any given decision situation, are communicated largely through symbolic actions and not explicit communiqués.

Leadership is both the **process** of influence via rich communication as well as the **outcome** of an improvement; improvement in the form of the vision of a better existence for the firm’s members and all the societies that host the firm. The outcome cannot be separated from the process. Tell me the future visionary state (the outcome) you want and then we can talk about appropriate processes of leadership and what leaders need to look like.

If outcome without process is philosophical musing, then process without articulated outcome is demagoguery. Both of these incomplete situations are dangerous for firms, their employees, their shareholders, as well as host societies.

### ***The Traditional Role for Global Leader: Leader as Architect***

Traditionally, leadership in larger firms had taken on the role of corporate architect – the “master builder” that as entrepreneur starts out with the vision for a new or better way of doing business – new **products**, or new models of an existing business, new **markets**, or new uses in existing markets, or new **functions** added for customer satisfaction or regulatory requirement. In the early stages this personal, one-on-one or one on small group leadership dynamic (what I will call “*level one leadership*”) is

responsible for the creation or re-energizing of firm culture. This stage is characterized by the successful articulation and widespread acceptance of the **vision** (goal) and the **discipline** (those physical and psychological paths to walk) required to achieve the vision.

As the firm becomes larger “level one leadership” transitions to leadership by organizational design; Max Weber’s “routinization of charisma.” During this transition the selection of key disciples, the creation of tasks, jobs, hierarchies and a structure of formal relationships, all must be structured to create “spaces of influence.” Personal influence is largely supplanted specialization (to hold on to a piece of the vision) and requisite integration mechanisms in what I shall call “*level two leadership*.” Setting up and maintaining a structure of command and control is deemed the most effective way to focus attention in increasingly specialized, truncated and myopic pieces of the vision (goal) and the path (values).

“*Level two leaders*” spend much of their time tinkering with structures and gaming the chess-like placement of “key” players embedded within these structures. Influence here is the influence of creating the architectural setting.

I recently attended the annual national conference of “World at Work” the big U.S. based professional association for compensation, held last month in San Diego, California – I know, it was a dirty job, but someone had to go. I got into town early and was wandering around the marina and the adjacent convention center, which was to house our conference. The national conference of the “American Institute of Architects” was just concluding and I saw their conference motto and logo:

“Design Matters: *poetry* + **Proof**”

“*Level two leadership*” is heavy on the proof and light on the poetry.

“*Level one leadership*” interacts with “*level two leadership*” through two primary mechanisms. First, as the firm becomes larger and more diverse – diverse as to products, technologies, functions, activities, and particularly geographically and culturally diverse – leaders engage in occasional “walkabouts,” showing the flag, cutting the literal or symbolic ribbon, instilling confidence and/or shock and awe as the case requires.

Second, architectural leaders may occasionally personally intervene to tear down an aging edifice; subtly, with the replacement of a single key executive, more aggressively with the sledgehammer of a “night of the long knives” style wholesale sacking and reassignments, or even with the wrecking ball of product line reductions, restructuring and downsizing. Within this second mechanism, mergers and acquisitions may be seen as the masterstroke of the architectural leader. This interaction between “*level one*” and “*level two*” leadership is what I will call “*short wave*” leadership interactions.

The role of leader as architect is increasingly inadequate for today’s global firms. Environmental complexity, dynamism, diversity and uncertainty are so much a part of our work worlds that architect leaders spend all their time moving people around positions and rearranging structures, always two or three moves behind changing environmental conditions. You cannot be everywhere in person all the time. The owners (shareholders and other constituents) do not like the way the house is “looking,” so they sack the architect and hire a new one, etc., etc.

## *An Alternative Role for Global Leaders: Leader as Bard*

Recent developments in telecommunications and information systems provide a unique opportunity for these globally “stretched” leaders. Global leaders can do much more than merely apply these new technologies to reinforce the structural basis of command and control inherent in the leader-as-architect role. These technologies allow the leader to depart from this old role and take on an even older role: The leader as bard. The bard leader initially follows “level one leadership” with one on one, person-to-person communication (stage i). At this stage assumptions, values, imagery, stories, symbols and ceremonies are introduced and reinforced via personal exchanges. Things depart from the earlier role in stage ii with the explicit “mapping” and translation of organizational culture – its values, symbols and iconography – onto the virtual space of a global information system. It is this web-based decision support environment that creates a new incarnation of what Allan Bird would call a “sharing field” – a place and time for dialog where critical tacit and implicit knowledge can be transferred (2001). Sharing this tacit knowledge - across cultural, functional and product divides - is critical if global firms are to blend global standardization, local customization and the diffusion of innovation in an effort to realize the firm’s now-global vision. To quote Bird “The difficulty in organizations is in fixing a location for the sharing field and in assembling participants with the right set of shared experiences” (2001: 32).

The global virtual “sharing field” creates what I will call “*level three leadership*.” Conventional wisdom states that the influence of leaders breaks down with physical distance – you cannot phone influence in. However, if we orchestrate and coordinate the personal messages and iconography of “*level one leadership*” with the iconography and interactive virtual symbolism of a global decision support network, then cannot this “*level three leadership*” act as a sounding board or amplifier of the original message?

The purpose of these networks is not to independently create the tune of the cultural message, but rather reverberate - resounding and evoking the values of culture. In this manner the pattern of personal messages and values of leadership are expanded upon.

This interaction between “*level one leadership*” and “*level three leadership*” is what I call “*long wave*” leadership. Structure and architecture still exist, but they are of secondary importance and not strategically relevant to top-level leaders. The critical role for bard leaders is to orchestrate and harmonize the song of influence across the personal and virtual levels. These bards are not the court lapdogs of late medieval or renaissance courts. Rather they are the earlier warrior-poets evoking national/tribal heritage and values in the face of the tumult and confusion of battle.

These shared, acultural decision support networks allow both the leaders and followers to listen to each other (Engle and Mendenhall, 2001). Leaders can **send** messages customized to followers and groups to reinforce and clarify cultural visions, values and norms as well as **receive** information on the state of individual employees and groups (stages iii and iv). This system would allow the leader to keep in touch with the actions and **career progress** (more on that later) of a wide number of individual followers.

*Level three* interactions, when reinforced by personal “*level one*” “sharing fields” in the form of retreats, action learning assignments, seminars, etc., can create a “steady

state” or “flux” between the two levels of leadership (stage v). In a sense this “flux” is merely a centralized extension of the reportedly increased use of virtual intercultural task forces and project teams, a use expanded to more fundamental cultural issues (Oddou, et al., 2001: 115). Coordinating and “spinning the top” of this global “flux” relationship is the role of the bard. Leader in this new role as bard will be the focus of the balance of my presentation.

*Global Careers and Leadership: Careers as the “Cause” of Leadership*

What kinds of career experiences will cause (influence) individuals to have those capabilities and perspectives required to be successful global bards? When I was notified of the topic for the forum I thought, “Someone is going to get their money’s worth – leadership and careers.” Something so huge and fundamental as to be mystifying (leadership) coupled with something so much in a state of metamorphosis as to appear unknowable (careers). As an act of discretion I direct you to work by Hilary and Chris at Cranfield, as well as Henrick Larsen and Camilla Ellehave (2000) for up to date empirical information on the transformation from vertical career ladders to what Mark Mendenhall and I are calling “widening career weirs” – open, horizontal activities and assignments intended to build knowledge and competencies across cultures, functions, products and institutions/customers (Engle and Mendenhall, June, 2003). Careers are about developing and maintaining these competencies – open, ongoing linkages to developing product technologies, sources of the latest functional knowledge, cultural contacts as well as links to key clients and institutional players.

Careers may be seen to be composed of two elements:

$$\text{Career} = \text{Personal Capabilities} * \text{Situational Experiences}$$

Personal capabilities (cognitive capabilities, the ability to perceive stimuli and apply what is experienced in a purposeful manner) and situational experiences (those assignments, places and events; those environments we place ourselves in) combine and interact. Experience alone is no guarantee of future capabilities. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century many young gentlemen from England took the “grand tour” of the continent and returned effectively unchanged. One must have the quality of mind to respond to what one has experienced.

Personal capabilities, often called competencies, emphasize those qualities of mind that act to react to circumstances – literally that which surrounds us. Traditional global leadership competencies, as presented by Mark Mendenhall, Marion Festing and Torsten Kuhlmann, (in Mendenhall, Kuhlmann and Stahl, 2001) and include inquisitiveness, personal character, flexibility of thought, business savvy, empathy, open mindedness, behavioral flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, curiosity, cognitive complexity, reflectiveness and learning capabilities. To this list, and specific to bards, I would add:

- 1) “Ortsinn” defined as “a sense of locality” and “the power of quickly forming a correct geometrical idea of any portion of country, and consequently of being able to find one’s place in it exactly at anytime.” (Carl von Clausewitz – “On War,” Chapter III, “The Genius of War” as translated by Col. J.J Graham.) Confederate

General “Stonewall” Jackson had the ability to ride over a range of countryside and be able to use the terrain to tactical and strategic military advantage months or years later and in the heat of battle. What is the global competitive equivalent – “the global mind set” put to competitive use (Aycan, 2001; Pucik and Saba, 1998)?

- 2) Communication capabilities drive these role incumbents; communication on a personal and human level, and across cultures. The ability to listen, personally and from a cultural, physical and functional distance, is critical for the bard. To tell a leader’s story you must have an ear for the listener’s frames of reference.
- 3) Finally, and often overlooked – “the constitution of a goat.” Global leadership requires the ability to travel well (an adjustable biological clock) and the ability to think global and yet eat local (recall George Bush’s unfortunate dining experience in China in the early 1990’s). As an aside, can anyone tell me what “peelie-wallie” means?

In terms of experiences and careers, five observations come to mind. First, an early exposure to the core values and capabilities associated with a firm’s major success or even a significant failure can be useful. It is the “whistling of bullets” that clarifies the mind and sets the stage for a serious adventurousness.

Second, early, in-depth experiences in a variety of core functional areas, critical product lines and with key customer-client relationships are invaluable in gaining a balanced overview. Third, Assignments that stretch communication capabilities are useful, particularly communicating in difficult, complex, cross-cultural situations. Fourth, a real understanding of the capabilities of global decision support systems, leading to the ability to send and receive complex cultural messages across cultures, functions and products is of course absolutely fundamental for the bard leader. This experience may be very difficult for many traditional executives that relegate these activities to specialist “nerds.” Finally, mentoring experiences, first as a protégé and then as a cross cultural, functional and product mentor is a requirement.

*An Aside on Careers:* I have never really understood why global careers have to be such a stretch. Can’t we so design domestic or regional careers that a variety of product lines, functional areas and regional subcultures are covered? In this way, the leap to a global career would not be so daunting. Domestic careers should, to the degree possible, capture those significant aspects - albeit on a narrower frame - of global careers. Does it make sense to play rugby in lower leagues and then be called up to the Premiere league to play football? And yet, too many global firms create domestic career patterns with very limited activities across functions, products or cultures.

If we want an executive to be successful in experiencing the “Grand Tour” of global assignments, perhaps his or her domestic career should emulate the “Repertoire Tour” of repertory theatre that forces young British actors to learn their craft in a variety of plays and settings.

*Global Leadership and the Global Careers: Leadership’s “Effect” on Other’s Careers*

As presented in the discussion of global leader as bard, the global leader, by personally and virtually monitoring and tracking the careers and assignments of any number of far-flung employees, can intervene to provide an orchestrated pattern of tasks, assignments, projects, retreats and seminars to allow those “shared experiences” that provide and reinforce the cultural glue of the global firm. The employee competency database (comprised of capability assessments and experience logs) within the global decision support system has the capability to track employee activities and experiences (Engle and Mendenhall, 2001). The leader can, almost at a glance, determine the most appropriate, efficient and timely forms of cultural influence – be it live and personal or indirect and remote; individual or group; or interactive or unidirectional influence.

A constant stream of sustained shared meaning can be the location for “the sharing field. . . assembling participants with the right set of shared experience” (Bird, 2001: 32). According to Bird “if managers don’t share a sense of community, they cannot effectively share the tactic knowledge they have acquired: (2001: 34). Bard leaders are responsible for directing and orchestrating the global careers of a wide range of followers.

### *Conclusion*

I trust this presentation may help clarify my position on a very complicated and rapidly changing domain of work. I thank you for your kind time and attention. Are there any questions or comments?

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