HRD Leadership Interventions for Internationally-relocated Leaders: Understanding Cultures and Leadership Theories in Korea and America

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Purpose...................................................................................................................................................... 3
Theoretical Framework............................................................................................................................. 5
Culture. ................................................................................................................................................. 6
Leadership and different leadership styles........................................................................................... 7
Findings........................................................................................................................................................ 8
Challenges for Global Leaders to Adjust in Different Cultures and Leadership Roles ...................... 8
  Cultural adjustment and leadership styles: the case of Korean and American. ............................ 9
  Language barriers............................................................................................................................... 11
Diverse Leadership Interventions for Leaders’ Success in International Subsidiaries ..................... 12
  Senior-executive mentoring ............................................................................................................... 12
  Team building.................................................................................................................................... 13
  Cross-cultural training....................................................................................................................... 13
Assessment & Recommendations for Leadership Interventions .......................................................... 14
  Senior-executive Mentoring: Implications for Korean Leaders....................................................... 15
  Team Building: Issues of Virtual Interventions for Korean Leaders.................................................. 16
  Cross-cultural Training: Importance of Content............................................................................. 16
Implication for Practice............................................................................................................................ 18
  Implication for Individuals.................................................................................................................. 18
    HRD professionals........................................................................................................................... 18
  Implication for Organizations............................................................................................................ 18
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................. 19
References................................................................................................................................................... 20
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Globalization is causing organizational leaders to work outside of their home countries and cultures in increasing numbers. While working at subsidiaries of multinational or international organizations, many leaders have difficulties adjusting to the new culture and language as well as different leadership styles (e.g., Bass, 1998; Hofstede, 1980, 2001; House, 2001).

Purpose

This paper aims to review literature regarding leadership theories and their cultural impact on effective global leadership programs. The review of diverse global leadership programs will enhance the organizational leaders’ performance in new work and cultural environments. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (a) identifying the issues and challenges that leaders experience while working in international subsidiaries and (b) recommending effective global leadership programs to assist leaders’ successful job performance and adaptation in the international working environment. In addition, to assess the diverse leadership programs, I provide examples of South Korean leaders who are relocated to the U.S. workplace. By discussing three different global interventions for Korean leaders working in the U.S. culture, Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals will be able to apply these findings and discussions to other cultures.
Previous research suggests that managers who are relocated to international subsidiaries tend to return home prematurely because they are unable to adapt to foreign surroundings (e.g., Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1995). Moreover, the failure of leaders to adjust to a new culture can affect their career negatively as well as lead to significant economic costs for their organizations (Ronen, 1986). If HRD professionals can better understand leadership theories and cultural differences, they will be able to train and develop global leaders systematically. Better educated leaders will produce enhanced international relationships, improved work performance, and increased overall organizational profits in global workplaces. By investigating frameworks and case studies of effective leadership and different leadership styles in a global context, HRD professionals can assist leaders in learning how to succeed in working across countries and cultures. The following four questions are formulated.

1. How do the cultural values and practices in a wide variety of countries affect organizational leadership attributes?

2. What are some challenges faced by global leaders to perform successfully in different cultures?

3. What are the benefits and disadvantages of diverse HRD interventions for leadership development?

4. How can HRD professionals assist leaders to work effectively in dissimilar cultural settings?
Theoretical Resource different cultures, need to use leadership programs. Moreover, leadership styles, and House, Writing, it is necessary to explore these factors—those important and management, 1997). In order to evaluate leaders' performance in diverse situations, there are certain contingencies. Hb. However, both cultures interact to affect leaders' performances. Among countries (leadership styles, and House and Wray, 1993), the role of culture, leadership style, and the design of training programs. Leadership will reign
This section will explain the definition of culture, leadership, and leadership styles and describe how they are interconnected with each other. To clarify my model, I have used Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) four dimensions of cultural values to understand cultural differences. I chose Hofstede’s (2001) large-scale empirical studies of differences in cultural values because it represents one of the most significant theoretical frameworks for examining cross-cultural issues in organization studies. Moreover, I have used the framework of GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) to better understand the leadership styles based on different cultures. GLOBE is a research program which studied culture and leadership in 61 nations. In a survey of thousands of leaders in different industries in 61 countries, GLOBE compared their cultures and attributes of effective leadership (House, 2002).

**Culture.** A culture is a set of “shared norms, values, and assumptions” (Schein, 1996, p.229) that groups of people in populations such as regions, countries, and continents develop, and that influences behaviors. According to Hofstede (2001), a culture expresses values which are the collective programing of the mind. Additionally, the GLOBE research program theoretically defines culture as “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experience of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations” (House, 2002, p.5). This definition addresses the common experience that people have, which supports that each culture has a preferred style of doing things such as a leadership style. Hofstede (1980, 2001) develops four dimensions of cultural values: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity. To exemplify particular contexts, I focus on how Korean and American workers have different perspectives in the work place. I have adopted two of Hofstede’s four cultural dimensions, that is, power distance and individualism/collectivism. The reason is to
show significant differences between the U.S. and Korean cultures in terms of work environment. It also connects well with my findings on various global interventions in organizations.

**Leadership and different leadership styles.** Since the definition of leadership is so broad, I will review some of the main definitions of leadership. Rost (1991) defines leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p.102). In his leadership studies, he argues that interactions between leaders and followers have been overlooked. While this definition focuses on the influence of relationship, GLOBE researchers (1994) suggest a universal definition of organizational leadership that stresses the diverse viewpoints: “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (p.5). Speaking of leadership in general, Simonton (1994) defines a leader as a “group member whose influence on group attitudes, performance, or decision making greatly exceeds that of the average member of the group” (p.411). The definition by the GLOBE projects put the importance in organizational leadership, not leadership in general.

There are several different leadership styles across the world. Understanding the various leadership styles and the culture can be a key to planning the appropriate leadership programs. I will introduce several leadership styles to understand how these styles are different in various cultures. Hanges et al. (2000) addressed that different leadership styles are influenced by cultural backgrounds. House (2002) found that the most notable works in cross-cultural leadership noted that culture does influence leadership styles and perception of people. Bass (1998) mentioned that the expectation of the leader styles vary across cultures because people from the same culture possess a common set of beliefs about the attributes of a typical leader in that culture. According to Yeo (2006), there are seven leadership styles across the countries. Yeo (2006)
mentioned that HRD professionals should be aware of different leadership styles across the cultures to identify possible leadership deficiencies so that they can develop leadership programs. There are several leadership styles like following. Autocratic leaders tend to oppress their followers. Bureaucratic leaders are often concerned about hierarchy and impose rules and systems. Charismatic leaders like to inspire, motivate and counsel. This type of leaders believes that strong persuasive skills are needed to winning people. Servant leaders are focused on meaningful relationships and connections with people.

Findings

In this section, I explored the challenges of internationally-relocated leaders to identify what kind of leadership interventions should be developed to help their success. I discussed the applied scenario of Korean leaders sent to America to find more specific issues. Next, I introduced three leadership interventions.

Challenges for Global Leaders to Adjust in Different Cultures and Leadership Roles

Due to the increase in employment opportunities abroad, recruiting and retaining talented leaders remains an important goal of human resource departments (Chaudhary, Tikhomirova, & Yang, 2008). However, many researchers have addressed several challenges for global leaders to adjust in job markets outside of the country. According to previous research by Wagner and Hollenback (1995), 16% to 40% international leaders tend to return home prematurely because they are unable to adapt to foreign surroundings. According to Ronen (1986), the workers from outside of the nation tend to develop symptoms of social dislocation, transfer anxiety, adaptation problems, and disappointment. Parker and McEvoy (1993) noted that dissimilarity between host-country and home-country organizations can cause uncertainty and stress. The global leaders
who cannot overcome these difficulties tend to suffer from “the loss of self-esteem, self-confidence, and prestige among peers” (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1995, p.343).

Furthermore, the failure rate of new global leaders is high because there are few formal interventions, such as a leadership program, to support them learn and adapt to new leadership styles and cultures. According to Manderscheid (2008), many large organizations have established leadership development programs to ensure their leaders to grow and enhance the communication skills between leaders and followers for the purpose of accelerating learning and relationship building. However, it is discovered that many large organizations often neglect to develop their global leaders’ capacity to quickly adapt to new leadership roles and cultures (Manderscheid, 2008). Watkins (2003) also supported this assertion by criticizing organizations which spend little effort to help leaders to adjust to new leadership roles even though they are essential for leadership development and success of organizations.

To understand this issue deeply, I will compare differences in Korean and American cultural values and leadership. The focus will be twofold: 1) understand the cultural adjustment and leadership styles of Korean leaders entering into American industries and 2) review how language can be an important factor for global leaders’ successful adjustment in the international subsidiaries.

**Cultural adjustment and leadership styles: the case of Korean and American**. In this era of globalization, an important question is how leaders’ behavior varies depending on cultures. Many researchers have argued that there are significant and direct impacts of culture on leadership styles based on the specific cultural traditions, ideologies, norms and values (Lammers & Hickson, 1979). Korean leaders visiting an American organization may find several cultural differences, and one of the reasons for their failure has been cited as the inability to
adapt to the host-country's culture (Tung, 1988). One answer by Hofstede (2001) from organizational psychology is that leaders’ values vary across cultures. This means that organizations need to be aware of cultural differences and train both American and Korean leaders to understand each other’s culture.

GLOBE tested the nine cultural dimensions, and one of them is Power Distance which shows the degree of an organization’s idea that power should be unequally shared. Hofstede (1980, 2001) stated that Korean culture has a large power distance. From his survey of IBM, Hofstede (2001) found that Korea (60) scored higher than America (40) in terms of power distance. Koreans tend to value high on power and obey to superiors’ direction (Hofstede, 2001). House (2002) also stated that the leaders in high power distance culture, like Korea, tend to expect followers to obey their leaders. That is, the charismatic leadership is dominant in Korean culture. On the other hand, Hofstede (1980, 2001) classified the American culture as small power distance that subordinates tend not to depend on the structure and direction of superiors. Since American people are likely to be independent in their tasks, the status is not much focused (Hofstede, 2001).

Furthermore, according to Hofstede (2001), the contrast between the values of individualism and collectivism show significant differences between Korean and American cultures. Korean culture puts high value in collectivism which desire for solidarity, group-based performance metrics and nepotistic hiring (Hofstede, 2001). For instance, Waxin (2004) found that collectivists have stressed the importance of co-workers’ support while working. On the other hand, American culture desires for autonomy, individual based performance metrics and merit-based hiring (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, it is certain that these differences between American and Korean cultures can influence the preferred type of leadership styles.
Language barriers. Language can be defined as both a cultural component and as a communication tool. In a survey conducted by Bikson, Trecerton, and Moini (2008), respondents strongly agreed that foreign language learning is a significant contributor to the cross-cultural competency required for successful leadership of global missions. For instance, in a study by Bikson et. al. (2008), one of the international leaders mentioned that “You cannot work internationally without learning languages. It is critical for cultural understanding.” However, Bikson et. al. (2008) criticized that most university programs tend to emphasize literacy such as reading and writing, rather than applied uses in terms of cultural, social interaction of foreign language. This indicates that while gaining fluency of foreign language, people hardly acquire cross-cultural competence. For instance, there are some Koreans who can speak English fluently because they learned English at schools in Korea, but do not understand American culture. On the other hand, there might be some cases when Koreans understand American culture but are not able to communicate due to the lack of language skills. Either way, language can be a challenging part for Korean leaders when they attempt to work with American people.

Language is an important factor to consider since it is a part of culture. Some scholars defined culture as “the customs, worldviews, language, kinship systems, social organization, and other taken-for granted day-to-day practices of a people which set that group apart as a distinctive group” (Scollon & Scollon, 2001, p.139). This indicates that a language is one aspect of culture, meaning language and culture can be difficult to separate. Hofstede (2001) connected language to intercultural interactions. Hofstede (2001) mentioned that “having to express oneself in another language means having to adopt someone else’s frame of reference.” Hofstede (2001) concerned that if expatriates do not know the language of their country of residence, they will be missing a lot of the subtleties of the culture. It is also stated that “Language, by its very nature, is
a distillate of human culture” (Wells, 1999). This shows that there is a strong relationship between culture and language that can be challenges for global leaders.

**Diverse Leadership Interventions for Leaders’ Success in International Subsidiaries**

McLean (2006) noted that interaction with people from a target culture can be useful in preparing to live and work in that culture. In other words, it is necessary for HRD practitioners to design and implement global interventions in organizations so that leaders can adapt to a new cultural environment as well as perform effectively on their job assignments. Black (1988) defined intercultural adjustment as “the degree of an individual’s psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country.” There are several global leadership interventions aimed for leaders’ intercultural adjustment that have been implemented in various organizations. In this paper, I focus on organizational global interventions which involve different levels: (a) individual: senior-executive mentoring; (b) group: team building, and (c) organizational support: cross-cultural training.

**Senior-executive mentoring.** This approach can be identified as an individual leadership intervention. In terms of a general objective of mentoring, McLean (2006) explained that mentoring is to help individuals take advantage of opportunities for career and personal enhancement. The mentoring system can be applied to one of the leadership development program. Tyler (2006) pointed out that one of the roles for HRD professionals is to facilitate mentor relationships between senior executives and leaders from other countries. A case study by Green (2002) also showed that senior level involvement in delivery has a crucial role in providing clear communication, adding credibility to the mentoring, and ensuring that organizational expectations were clearly delivered to the leaders from other countries. Senior executives can also mentor the new leaders by providing insights into the unwritten rules of
organization, and direction and encouragement for them. Tyler (2006) added the importance of
the senior-executive mentoring intervention by noting that the main difference between leaders
who succeed in adjustment or failed in the company is through their network, specifically getting
a direct help from the senior-executive mentors. Through the interview with Freeman, Tyler
(2006) recommended that assigning both home-country and an overseas mentor to leaders is
effective in terms of their successful job performance because the host-country mentor can be a
cultural interpreter.

**Team building.** This is one of the group interventions commonly used in work places in
order to practice a leadership skill. McLean (2006) noted that concept of team building has been
utilized in the context of real activities. Burke (2011) noted that team building requires
cooperative interdependent behavior on the part of all members. McLean (2006) introduced
Beckhard (1969)’s suggestions on objectives of team building as following: The team building
should establish clear goals, roles, policies and procedures. This is to improve interpersonal
relationships. These activities can be used broadly in multiple cases with different level of
workers in the organization.

Since there is increasing interaction with organizations around the world, many leaders
attempt to build their relations and working assignments through online media. This is why the
formation of a virtual team building leads as one of global interventions.

**Cross-cultural training.** This global intervention can be categorized as an organizational
support. Since the early 1960s, considerable efforts have been spent to develop cross-cultural
training programs (Hofstede, 1980). Bikson et al. (2008) evaluated 20 components of successful
leaders in international organizations and cross-cultural competence ranked fifth out of all of
them, which shows the importance of this competence. Black and Gregersen (1991) suggested
that cross-cultural training can support the global leaders with appropriate information in the new work context. A lot of researchers supported the needs and benefits of the leaders’ cross-cultural training in order for them to succeed in their international assignments (e.g., Teagarden, 2007; Shin, 2009). The purpose of this program is to increase cross-cultural communication skills by increasing awareness of the extent to which people are “programmed” by their own cultures (Hofstede, 1980, p.398). Black and Gregersen (1991) and Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992) addressed that cross-cultural training can assist the leaders’ adjustment in different cultures.

Tung (1981) identified five different training programs in cross-cultural training: “didactic training, culture assimilator, language training, sensitivity training and field experience” (p.70). Brewster and Pickard (1994) also suggested that cross-cultural training program should include the content of proper knowledge about the targeted cultures and skills that can help with adjustment in different cultures.

Assessment & Recommendations for Leadership Interventions

Throughout the literature review, we acknowledge the importance of cultural awareness and different leadership styles. In this section, I focused on three main concerns that are related to the model programs that I found through the literature, which are senior-executive mentoring, team building, and cross-cultural training. I discussed what strategies and practices of the three well-known programs align well with the specific needs of Korean leaders who are relocated to the American subsidiaries, in terms of culture, and which do not. Next, I proposed suggestions to HRD to modify and develop the contents of various leadership development programs.
Senior-executive Mentoring: Implications for Korean Leaders

Many researchers have addressed the benefits of senior-executive mentoring program for global leaders. Crosbie (2005) supported the senior-executive mentor program because the senior-executives can provide new comers with contextual awareness and a broader understanding of systems, process and functions. It is also beneficial because Groves (2007) examined that opportunities for global leaders to question the senior executive mentors about their jobs, challenges and solutions were considered as one of the best practices. According to Simmonds and Tsui (2010), the purpose of senior-executive mentoring is “to stimulate discussion and cement understanding of the business direction and goals and the need for leadership” (p.526). Therefore, enhancement of mentoring system supported by senior-executive in the organization can assist new leaders to adjust to new organization in foreign country.

Based on the general benefits of senior-executive mentoring intervention, there is an implication for Korean leaders. Considering Korean culture as a high power distance, senior-executive mentoring can be effective because Korean people tend to listen carefully to elders. Hofstede (2001) noted that in countries with a high power distance, like Korea, it is found that subordinates are more likely to be influenced by authority. McLean (2006) also mentioned that to avoid conflict, mentoring is often offered by someone who is at least two levels higher than the mentee. With these reasons and characteristics of Korean culture, HRD professionals can facilitate senior-executive mentorships and establish systems to create mentors. Senior-executive mentoring programs will help Korean leaders to learn more about American culture and its language, which are two major challenges.
Team Building: Issues of Virtual Interventions for Korean Leaders

Team building can be effective to Korean leaders because they tend to put a high value on collectivism (Hofstede, 2001). Since Korean leaders attach more importance to structure and are more emotionally involved with a group in organizations, the activities within a group might enhance their learning abilities and skills for their adjustment in American workplaces. However, it is important to keep Beckhard (1969)’s objectives of team building mentioned earlier, because the failure of following those goals will result problems like misunderstanding, turnover and wasting time and energy within group members (Burke, 2011).

However, team building programs have some issues, especially regarding virtual team building programs that are widely accepted in multinational corporations. First, it is difficult to learn others’ culture by being online. Culture can be taught and learned naturally while you are talking to people face-to-face, but people tend to focus only on the job assignment during the virtual team meeting. Secondly, virtual team building program can lead to miscommunications. McLean (2006) noted that a virtual team building can occur more possibilities of miscommunications across cultures than face-to-face meeting. This is because it is difficult to see other’s body language and emotions while they talk online. Virtual team building can be less costly than face-to-face meeting, but HRD professionals need to develop new ways that can be used effectively in virtual team building programs.

Cross-cultural Training: Importance of Content

There has been a cross-cultural training for international employees in America. Eschbach, Parker, and Stoebel (2001) mentioned that cross-cultural intervention was effective for re-located leaders because they were able to adjust better and acquire higher skills. For Korean culture, Waxin and Panaccio (2005) found that result of cross-cultural training can differ
according to leaders’ culture of origin. In their research, Koreans are the only ones for whom cross-cultural training has a positive effect based by their culture: high power distance (60) and low individualism (18). It is discovered that the longer the cultural distance between the country of origin and the host country, the more obvious are the effect of cross-cultural training (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). These were interesting results, which support the effectiveness of cross-cultural training for Korean leaders re-located in American subsidiaries. Additionally, Simmonds and Tsui (2010) recommended that in order to understand the culture and values, the training should be designed as a discussion about our culture and values, what they are, and include stories that exemplify them.

However, many researchers found out that the issues and failure of leaders were still high after some sort of trainings. One of the main reasons for their failure is the “inadequate” selection criteria of training used by many multinational corporations (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). Additionally, few researchers have studied the effectiveness of cross-cultural training. This indicates the importance of future research that will explore what kinds of contents should be designed and developed in order to ensure leaders’ success in organizations. The content of training programs should be modified differently depending on the characteristics of diverse groups from various countries. Therefore, the research should be done to have knowledge about diverse cultures and leadership styles from different countries. The weak point is that it can be time consuming and costly if there is no expert on that particular culture and leadership roles. For instance, if the HRD person has a substantial knowledge in Asia but not Europe, he or she might need time to research European culture and leadership styles.
Implication for Practice

This applied example of Korean leaders re-located to the U.S. has implications at both individual and organization levels. Increasing investment in leadership development programs has helped not only the improvement of leadership capacity and competitive advantage but also development of organization (Wellins & Weaver, 2003). Learning about challenges of Korean leaders and global model interventions will help individuals and organizations to apply in their real world practices.

Implication for Individuals

HRD professionals. HRD professionals should be conscious of the relocated leaders’ challenges in diverse organizations. This study can help practitioners to design effective diversity programs for global leaders. HRD professionals can take a number of steps to ensure that leaders enjoy a smooth return home. This foundation of research will aid to generate other tools and ideas that can assist leaders. For example, designing the opportunities to socialize naturally with senior executives from target culture will benefit leaders because it is less costly and stressful than the team building activities. By providing successful integrated programs for global leaders, HRD professionals can develop well-qualified leaders and send them to different countries for even greater success. Trained and talented leaders can train and influence positively to other workers in subsidiaries in different countries.

Implication for Organizations

Corporations often neglect to provide any kinds of leadership programs to global leaders. “Several studies (Brewster, 1995; Selmer, 2000) found that the cross-cultural training provided by most multinationals is insufficient, incomplete or simply non-existent” (Waxin & Panaccio,
They tend to think that those interventions are useless to pay extra expenses, even though there is much research that supports the needs.

However, multinational companies need to pay more attention to the training and development for global leaders (Lam, 2000). Designing the effective global interventions in organization can lead to leaders’ success, which indicates that the organizations can have the return of their human resource investment. For instance, sending the capable leaders to American subsidiaries from home company can be a risky investment, because the home country may lose not only capable leaders, but also spend excessive money on relocation, cost-of-living differentials, travel expenses and new housing. Not only that, serious damages in international agreements or contracts, and even company reputation can take place if leaders fail on adjustment in the subsidiaries. The cost of failed international negotiations and assignments is high (Latham, 1988). Thus, this study implies that implementation of successful interventions will help organizations to be more productive and promising.

These practices can change organizational culture in positive ways. Both home companies and subsidiaries in the host country can change organizational values to respect cultural differences. McLean (2006) also stressed that all these interventions are designed to bring about an improvement in the organization’s culture. Moreover, this paper can be a helpful tool to assist the U.S. multinational corporations, just like Korean corporations, who are sending American leaders to different countries, because people should be aware of the cultural differences in order to succeed on their job assignment in foreign countries.

**Conclusion**

Based on the leadership styles and cultural differences, I was able to explore the global leadership development interventions for internationally-relocated leaders in the applied scenario
of Korean leaders sent to America. This study explored the challenges and recommendations for those Korean leaders. I have discussed the benefits and disadvantages of different leadership development interventions, such as senior-executive mentoring, cross-cultural, and virtual team building. Additionally, several suggestions were made to both the individual and organizational levels. This research has important implications for HRD practitioners to give them a foundation to assist leaders’ success and make a profit for their companies.

Moreover, this paper discusses significant implications for HRD researchers to work for future research. HRD researchers should particularly focus on the fields of designing leadership development interventions in the area of content which includes the awareness of cultural differences. Further research is necessary for detailed plans on how the leadership development programs can be developed with reasonable costs. Developing effective leadership interventions can broaden its theme to develop useful programs for immigrants or expatriates all over the world. This will help to solve the issues of immigrants since the world is becoming a multicultural society.

References


