FOSTERING GLOBAL MINDSET AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: THE CONCEPT OF MINDFULNESS

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In the contemporary globalized world, firms span across geographic, socio-cultural and economic boundaries and deal with the resultant diversity and complexity. Such firms look for a new breed of leaders: global leaders, who have a global mindset. The literature on global mindset and global leadership is still in the emerging phase. In this paper we attempt to explore global leadership and global mindset from the perspective of ‘mindfulness’ The global mindset shares lot of ground with the concept of mindfulness. Taking a task analytic approach of global leadership, we attempt to elaborate on how different facets of mindfulness enhance the global mindset, and why and how it is important for performance of global leaders.

Key words

Mindfulness, global leadership, global mindset

GLOBAL LEADERS AND GLOBAL MINDSET

The construct of ‘Global leadership’ was born out of organization’s need to perform in the contemporary global business environment (Mendenhall, 2008). Bird and Osland (2004) posit that moving from domestic to global leadership involves a “quantum leap” (pp: 4) in perspective, and to deal with complexity arising due to greater need of (1) cultural understanding, (2) knowledge and boundary spanning functions across national boundaries, (3) dealing with multiple stakeholders and (4) dealing with greater ambiguity, stress and ethical dilemmas. Global leadership involves developing a global mindset, to move beyond ‘geographical reach’ and encompass ‘cultural reach’ and ‘intellectual reach’ (Osland et al, 2006, pp: 197).

Four processes are important for global leaders: collaborating, discovering, architecting and systems thinking (Lane et al, 2004). At a more specific level, we can analyze global leadership using the job analytic approach (Sandberg, 2000), which considers certain sets of KSAOs (knowledge, skills, attitudes
and other personality characteristics) to be important for tasks involved in a particular job. Caligiuri (2006) described following specific KSAOs as essential for performance as a global leader: (a) knowledge - culture-general knowledge, culture-specific knowledge and international business knowledge; (b) skills and abilities - intercultural interaction skills, foreign language skills and cognitive complexity, and (c) personality - extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness.

To deal with the ambiguity, diversity, multiplicity and complexity, and in order to effectively manage their globalized operations, global leaders require developing a broad and inclusive perspective, known as “global mindset” (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2003). Global mindset is characterized by (1) tolerating, accepting, and understanding diversity with an inclusive mindset; (2) a broad and universal perspective of business and (3) thinking openly, free from the cognitive cobwebs (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002). According to them global mindset involves a combination of high differentiation and high integration, that is, the individual should have broad base of knowledge (differentiation) and should be able to integrate the diverse perspective (integration). While the literature has recognized the importance of global mindset in the contemporary business environment (Levy et al., 2007), there have been few attempts to analyze the attributes that foster global mindset.

Cultivating a global mindset resonates with the concept of mindfulness. The concept of mindfulness primarily originated from oriental philosophy, notably Buddhism (Ting-Toomey, 1999) and refers to a state of mind characterized by heightened awareness of self and the surrounding environment, and to be non-evaluative and non-judgmental in experiencing the present (Brown et al, 2007 a). In this paper we examine the hitherto unexplored linkage between mindfulness, global mindset and global leadership. WE propose that the attribute of mindfulness facilitates the development of global mindset, which in turn, is required for effective leadership in contemporary organization. The paper is structured as follows. We first describe the development of the construct of mindfulness in the psychology literature and then examine how it connects to the contemporary organizations. Then taking a processual perspective, taking
a task analytic approach, we elaborate on how mindfulness enhances the global mindset, and why and how it is important for performance of global leaders.

**MINDFULNESS**

To be mindful is to experience the moment in its pure form as a liberated individual, free from the feelings, emotions, impulses, habits and perceptions (Leary and Tate, 2007; Rosch, 2007). Mindfulness, thus, entails freedom from rigid mindsets and mental schemas, from illusionary restrictions and from false sense of ‘ego’; these aspects can be directly related to the conceptualization of the global mindset (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Thomas, 2006).

Langer (1997) defined mindfulness as consisting of components of (1) openness to novelty, (2) alertness to distinction, (3) sensitivity to different contexts, (4) awareness about multiple perspectives and (5) orientation in the present; thus conceptualizing it as a multidimensional construct. Baer et al (2006) conducted an exploratory factor analysis of a combination of item from all available mindfulness questionnaires and found that the mindfulness consists of five dimensions: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience. In this paper we conceptualize mindfulness as a multidimensional concept with five components as described by Baer et al (2006).

**FACETS OF MINDFULNESS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

Studies have shown that the benefits of mindfulness training or induction have considerable benefits, in the personal, social and work spheres of life which in turn can foster global mindset and global leadership (Leary and Tate, 2007). In this section we dwell on how mindfulness helps in various aspects of performance in contemporary organizations.
An emotionally charged response to any stressful stimulus can blunt rational thinking (Brown et al, 2007a), activate stereotypes and judgmental evaluation based on prior schemas (Weick et al, 1999), thus inhibiting the cognitive processing of the information. Mindfulness has been shown to decrease aggressive behavior to negative feedbacks (Heppner and Kernis, 2007) and reduce the automatic stereotype-activated behavior (Djikic, Langer and Stapleton, 2008). The less aggressive reactions of high mindful persons has been attributed to better self control (Brown et al, 2007a) and a decreased tendency to perceive other’s ambiguous behavior as malevolent (Heppner and Kernis, 2007). Therefore, mindfulness can reduce cross cultural misunderstandings and enhance interpersonal communication (Burgoon, Berger and Waldron, 2000), social behavior (Leary and Tate, 2007), and capability to manage interpersonal conflicts (Burgoon et al, 2000). This aspect of mindfulness nurtures global mindset by promoting team work and collaboration (Lane et al, 2004); sensitivity to other’s viewpoint enabling understanding of diverse perspectives and developing an integrated view (Bird and Osland, 2004; Lane et al, 2004). The above facet of mindfulness also enhance self control and emotional stability in facing ambiguity, stress and ethical dilemmas, an important aspect of global leadership (Bird and Osland, 2004).

Mindfulness improves creativity (Ritchhart and Perkins, 2000); enhances attention (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000), and improves the retention of the information (Lieberman and Langer, 1997). Mindfulness entails active thinking, enhancing participation rather than just the passive reception of the information (Ritchhart and Perkins, 2000) thus preventing a person from resorting to absentminded ‘automatic pilot’ behavior (Baer et al, 2006). This clears the cobwebs of rigid mindsets that restrict thought processes and inhibit openness; enhancing the differentiating and integrating abilities in the leaders, thus fostering global mindset and leadership.
Mindfulness tends to broaden the scope of cognitive attention to the whole, with the interaction of parts within the context, including the context itself (Brown et al, 2007 a; Heppner and Kernis, 2007). Langer (2002) put this forth in a metaphorical language by stating that walls, ceilings and floors of one’s life become transparent like glass, enabling a larger and clearer picture. Mindfulness thus foster the global mindset, which requires an inclusive consideration of multiple stakeholders (Bird and Osland, 2004), systems thinking (Lane et al, 2004) and high differentiation and high integration of knowledge base (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002).

Table 1 shows the implication of the five facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of experience and non-reactivity to various aspects of enhanced performance in contemporary organizations.

In the next sub section we attempt to explore the importance of mindfulness in the context of global leadership and global mindset based on task analysis of a global leader (Caligiuri, 2006).

**FACETS OF MINDFULNESS AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP**

A global leader’s task requires working with colleagues and subordinates from different countries, from contrasting value and belief systems (Caligiuri, 2006). In dealing with such diverse cultures, leaders need to actively seek to ‘observe’, learn about and understand their perspectives (Jokinen, 2005). Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) posit that differentiation in knowledge structures, representing the breadth of knowledge is an important characteristic of a global leader. To develop and imbibe the context of the culture, a leader must be a keen observer of the surrounding environment and realize the gap between foreign culture and one’s own, and also be aware of the biases which create the gap. Thus observing can be regarded as the first step of learning. ‘Discovering’ has been regarded as a key process for developing and nurturing a global mindset (Lane et al, 2004). Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) recognize the importance of curiosity about the world, and Osland et al (2006) consider pattern recognition as important
aspects to foster a global mindset. Similarly, Rhinesmith’s (1993) conceptualization, global leadership entails the ‘ability to scan the world...always looking for unexpected trends and opportunities...’ ‘Observing’ component of mindfulness, which represents tendency to notice internal and external experiences and stimuli (Baer et al, 2006) enhance this aspect of tasks of a global leader and help in creating a global mindset.

Global leader must interact continually with the colleagues, subordinates, vendors, internal and external customers, from diverse cultures, seeking to engage in a meaningful, positive dialogue (Wibbeke, 2009). Perceptions should be communicated explicitly and swiftly amongst the colleagues and subordinates from different cultures, so that it fosters an open environment (Jokinen, 2005). Explicating one’s viewpoints is the first step to make others aware about oneself, and to seek feedback about one’s assumptions and perceptions which, in turn, will facilitate understanding of other’s world view. Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) posit that explicit and self conscious articulation of current mindset is an important part of the process of developing a global mindset. Further, as global leader has to interact with diverse colleagues, clients and subordinates, good intercultural interaction skills and foreign language skills form an important repertoire of KSAOs (Caligiuri, 2006). The ‘describing’ facet of mindfulness which represents the ability to articulate one’s thoughts and feelings is essential for these aspects of global leadership.

Global leaders deal with complex interactions between multiple stakeholders and must view business as a social system (Wibbeke, 2009). Researchers have identified ‘systems thinking’ (Lane et al, 2004), seeing the big picture (Jokinen, 2005), and cognitive complexity (Caligiuri, 2006) as key attributes of global leaders and to foster global mindset, both at individual and collectivity level. Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) further that global leaders should proactively attempt to develop an integrated perspective, and that knowledge of the global leader should be high on differentiation and high on integration, that is who can synthesize diverse perspectives. Sensitivity to the needs of all stakeholders, including the pursuit of socio-economic development of the community and local environment captures this aspect of importance of
developing a comprehensive picture (Reade et al, 2008). According to Jokinen (2005), self awareness is an important aspect of global leadership, creating insight about ego and self concept, and enabling the leader to develop listening skills and to understand the viewpoints of others. These aspects are facilitated by, and require, the ‘acting with awareness’ component of mindfulness, which prevents tunnel vision and dissociation, and helps in create a universal perspective (Baer, 2007).

Global leadership involves acceptance of complexities and contradictions (Jokinen, 2005). Beechler and Javidan (2007) posit that global social capital is important for global leadership and it requires building trustworthy relationships with people from diverse cultures and to develop a common understanding (Beechler and Javidan, 2007). Further, global leaders operate in complex and interdependent systems, interacting with multiple stakeholders (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1999) and therefore, the social system of business can be considered as a ‘complex adaptive system’ (Holland, 2006). Hence global leaders may face unexpected and novel surprises anytime, in the process, requiring innovative and creative ways to solve the problem. Appropriate action in these situations may require, openness to interpretations (Caligiuri, 2006) and suggestions of team members irrespective of their hierarchy; attempting to develop a common understanding (Beechler and Javidan, 2007); and a creative and innovative thought process (Jokinen, 2005). Two components of mindfulness, ‘non-judgment and non reactivity to inner experience’, enable non-evaluatory experience of thought processes allowing the feelings to come and go, and enhance emotional intelligence and self regulation (Baer et al, 2006; Masicampo and Baumiester, 2007). This in turn improves social skills (Leary and Tate, 2007; Burgoon et al, 2000) and enhances team participation and tolerance (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The above two aspects of mindfulness facilitate understanding of, and adaptation to, diverse cultures, the key aspect of leading globally (Thomas, 2006). Non-Judgment and non-reactivity to inner experience, by enhancing the social skills Further, this aspect of mindfulness also enhances the ability to develop performance criteria without being bound by the assumptions of one’s culture or context (Jokinen, 2005) and to implement plans appropriately in diverse cultures (Manzevski and Lane, 2004). Moreover, global leaders ought to work efficiently under
ambiguity, stress and anxiety, and ethical dilemmas (Bird and Osland, 2004). These situations can be perceived as threatening and can cloud the thinking process (Brown et al, 2007, a). Disentangling of thought process from judgmental and reactive behavior enables proper cognitive processes even in potentially threatening environment (Brown et al, 2007 a).

Thus, construct of mindfulness, as described in the psychology literature, which includes the five dimensions of observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience (Baer et al, 2006) is of high relevance to tasks of global leaders and development of global mindset both at an individual and at a collective level (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Leadership in contemporary organizations involves understanding of, and dealing with, multiple stakeholders from diverse cultures and perspectives. Effective leadership entails developing a global mindset, a cognitive structure characterized by openness to diversity and an integrative perspective on cultural and strategic dimensions (Levy et al, 2007). The attribute of ‘mindfulness’, as described in the psychology literature, enhances the capability to actively engage with the diverse and conflicting viewpoints, and visualizing and creating a ‘bigger’ picture. In this paper we have emphasized the importance of concept of mindfulness in contemporary organizations, in fostering global mindset and global leadership. We explored the relationship between various components of mindfulness, as conceptualized by Baer et al (2006) to the various aspects of global leadership, taking a task analysis approach.

The synthesis of the literature on mindfulness from the psychological and organizational perspectives, at the individual and collective levels respectively, highlighted few areas which need further attention and exploration. Can the training in mindfulness enhance performance in the organizational settings,
especially for the tasks which require global leadership skills and global mindset? If so, to what extent does it help? Should the training in mindfulness involve the metaphysical attention and spirituality, from which it derives its origin? How to deconstruct the construct of mindfulness, and will does it vary from situation to situation like from clinical, organizational and spiritual settings? Mindfulness is always preferred over mindlessness, as is presented by scholars like Langer (Sternberg, 2002). However in the contemporary business world, which is highly complex and ambiguous (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1998), it may be better to filter out some environmental stimuli, or act according to the protocols to complete that part of the task which requires repetitive inputs and have more time dedicated to the ‘variable’ part of the work (Sternberg, 2002). It seems this flexibility to switch from mindless to mindful state, and to be selectively mindful, may be more important than the average level of mindfulness. Future research may explore the optimal balance between the two, and how to achieve that balance.

Both the concepts, of global leadership and global mindset, and of mindfulness are in the emerging phase in the organization literature. The paper is one step forward in the direction of understanding the processual part of global leadership, an area hitherto unexplored. Empirical studies to link mindfulness and global leadership could provide more clarity on the relation between the two. The managerial implications of the study of mindfulness in global leadership skills are significant. Especially, it can help in designing more effective training and development programs to foster global mindset.
REFERENCES


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<th>Factor</th>
<th>Psychological/organizational implications for global mindset and global leadership</th>
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<tr>
<td>Factor 1: Observing/ noticing/ attending to thoughts. Perceptions and feelings (tendency to notice internal and external experiences)</td>
<td>Strongly related to openness to experience (Baer, 2007). Important for creativity and innovative thinking (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000)</td>
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<td>Factor 2: Describing, articulating (labeling with words) (to recognize and articulate feelings and emotions)</td>
<td>Ability to recognize and label emotional states is important for ‘emotional intelligence’ and self-control (Brown et al, 2007 b), which in-turn facilitates faculties like decision making in crises and (Langer, 1997) ability to communicate with others (Burgoon et al, 2000).</td>
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<td>Factor 3: Acting with awareness (to avoid distractions and be conscious of the activities)</td>
<td>Acting with awareness decreases dissociation and absent mindedness during tasks (Baer, 2007). The person is thus more vigilant towards minor deviations from the ‘routines’. This aspect also improves the individual’s capability to adapt to various situations (Leary and Tate, 2007)</td>
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<td>Factor 4: Non-Judging of experience (taking a non-evaluative stand towards one’s feelings and thoughts)</td>
<td>Strongly correlated to emotional regulation (enhances tolerance, teamwork) and open thought processes (Baer, 2007; Leary and Tate, 2007). Enhances experiential avoidance and self-compassion, which facilitates novel thinking to solve problems and refrain from resorting to stereotypes (Baer, 2007). Moreover this facet improves social behavior of a person (Leary and Tate, 2007), facilitating team participation and discouraging hubris, (Weick, et al, 2000)</td>
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<td>Factor 5: Non reactivity to inner experience (allowing feelings and thoughts to come and go without reacting to them)</td>
<td>Enhances experiential avoidance and self-compassion (Baer, 2007), and augments self-regulatory processes (Masicampo and Baumeister, 2007)</td>
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Figure 1: Mindfulness as implicated in development of global mindset and performance of global leaders (Based on Baer et al, 2006; Levy et al, 2007; Caligiuri, 2006)