Meeting the Competency Needs of Global Leaders: A Partnership Approach

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Abstract

This article concludes that common competencies, the fundamental knowledge and skills developed in traditional educational environments, are necessary but insufficient in the preparation of global leaders. Rather, human resource professionals, in partnership with management educators, are best positioned to identify and facilitate global leadership excellence by focusing on the identification and development of key personal characteristics or distinctive competencies. In particular, global leaders must be men and women of sound character. We further propose that "distinctive competencies" are best assessed through experience in the field. Recommendations are offered as to how competency-based leadership development can be designed to address both common and distinctive competencies, with special attention to the individual's character.

Meeting the Competency Needs of Global Leaders: A Partnership Approach

Competency-based approaches have been applied to a wide range of human resources practices, including recruitment and selection, training, and performance management (Dubois & Rothwell, 2004; Kochanski & Ruse, 1996; McEvoy, Hayton, Warnick, & Mumford, 2005; Rivenbark, 2004; Rodriguez, Patel, Bright, Gregory, & Gowing, 2002). In particular, competency-based leadership development has received increasing attention for its potential to create firm-specific expertise and to foster high-performing organizations (T. Bingham, 2005; Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Preparing the next generation of leaders is a key goal of both human professionals and graduate business educators, and competence-based approaches have been recognized as one method of achieving this outcome (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2003; Hernez- Broome & Hughes, 2004; Mirza, 2004; Morrison, 2000).

Competency-based performance systems have proven effective in both industry and educational settings. However, developing high-performing leaders who are able to navigate with sensitivity and compassion in a global environment, and who engender trust as they confront complex challenges, requires more than mastering a common set of readily assessed performance standards. This article concludes that a portfolio of fundamental, readily observable competencies that can be mastered by the majority of learners in structured classroom settings— what we refer to as *common competencies*—is insufficient in the preparation of tomorrow's global leaders.

Rather, leadership development requires more complex competencies dependent upon individual characteristics. These *distinctive competencies* direct appropriate action and can best be revealed and assessed through experiences in the field. Creating community among international members, adapting appropriately to constantly changing business contexts, and inspiring multiple stakeholders to pursue a shared vision are the kinds of competencies that, we argue, cannot be acquired or expressed in meaningful ways in simulated settings. Neither, however, can practitioners or educators afford to neglect these less tangible competencies simply because they are often difficult to articulate precisely and even more challenging to assess.

In particular, it is essential for global leaders to be men and women of integrity and character. As Brockbank, Ulrich, and Beatty (1999) suggest, competencies represent who an individual is as well as what the individual knows and does. Incidents during the past decade have made clear the importance of focusing on more than performance outcomes. Character influences the leader's vision, goals, strategies, perceptions, and other key dimensions (Badaracco, 1998; Hartman, 2006; Kolp & Rea, 2006; Sankar, 2003). We suggest that the personal qualities required to create and maintain trust and to engender goodwill distinguish the truly effective global leader. Our attention is therefore drawn to the importance of character as an essential distinctive competency.

Competency-based approaches in traditional classroom settings and in training environments are effective in teaching the foundation knowledge and skills of leadership. However, these approaches are insufficient in addressing the personal characteristics that define excellence and that are expressed in the application of common competencies to real-world problems and dilemmas. This article suggests that in partnership with management educators, human resource professionals are best positioned to identify and facilitate leadership excellence in a global business environment by identifying and developing these distinctive competencies. Recommendations are offered as to how human resource professionals can begin to address this challenge.

This article unfolds in the following manner. An overview of competency-based approaches is provided and the benefits and challenges of this method are briefly summarized. To illustrate key issues in the development of common competencies, the competency-based portion of a leadership development program is then described as it was implemented and maintained for nearly ten years in a graduate management curriculum. The results of a recent assessment of leadership requirements are then presented. Three guiding questions provide a framework for the sections that follow:

1. What are the key benefits and challenges of a competency-based approach to leadership development as implemented in educational settings?
2. What key requirements of tomorrow's global leaders may be neglected within formal training environments?

3. How can these essential leadership requirements best be addressed within a competency-based framework?

A model is then presented of a holistic approach to leadership development that specifies the relationship between common competencies and distinctive competencies, and further distinguishes the central role of character in leadership effectiveness (Figure 1). Suggestions are made as to how educators and human resource professionals might work together to more fully address these interrelated components that form the profile of a high-performing global leader.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Competency-Based Leadership Development

Competency-based leadership development is predicated on the belief that some traits and behaviors are exhibited more consistently by excellent leaders and that these competencies can be identified, taught, and assessed (Flood & Flood, 2000; Hayes, Rose-Quirie, & Allinson, 2000; Stuart & Lindsay, 1997). Researchers (Agut & Grau, 2002; Hofrichter & Spencer, 1999; Perdue, Nine- meier, & Woods, 2002) have proposed profiles of the specific competencies required for leadership in a wide range of contexts.

Frank Russell, president and CEO of GeoLearning, Inc., noted that the field of competency management is growing and that competency-based performance management systems are an effective means not only of identifying the behaviors employees need to be successful in their current roles, but also of preparing them for future responsibilities. When skills gaps are identified, well-defined competencies provide direction in determining the behaviors and performance levels employees need to acquire (Martone, 2003; Yeung, Woolcock, & Sullivan, 1996).

In a recent interview, training and development experts identified reliable assessment as one of the top training concerns (Bingham, 2005). Because competency-based programs are systematic,

performance can be more readily assessed and shaped by reward systems (Hofrichter & McGovern, 2001). The clarity provided by competency language not only facilitates evaluation, but also creates a structure that enables individual competencies to better support the organization's strategic goals (Bingham, 2005; Conger & Ready, 2004).

While adopting slightly different approaches and perspectives, most authors agree that competencies are the things learners have to know and do to achieve targeted outcomes (Hoffman, 1999; Wynne & Stringer, 1997). The definition we propose in this article is based on a traditional understanding of competencies as specific descriptions of the behaviors and personal characteristics that are required to be effective on the job (Antonacopoulou & Fitzgerald, 1996; C. B. Bingham, Felin, & Black, 2000; Mansfield, 1996). While common competencies provide the broad foundation of knowledge and skill global leaders draw upon to achieve high performance across contexts, the relative importance of distinctive competencies—personal traits such as resourcefulness or flexibility—is influenced by situational variables such as an organization's culture, goals, and environmental constraints. The exception is with regard to character, a distinctive competence that, we argue, is essential to all global leadership contexts.

The unique features of common and distinctive competencies influence the means by which each is best developed, and therefore have implications for educators and human resource professionals. We suggest that the personal characteristics (distinctive competencies) that drive high performance must be addressed through strategies that are largely unavailable to those who focus on the acquisition of more concrete and fundamental knowledge and skills (common competencies). While educators can design learning experiences within the context of an academic curriculum to develop common competencies, distinctive competencies are cultivated over time, and their authentic application is best assessed when demonstrated and observed in the field. In addition, the potential to achieve high levels of a particular distinctive competence varies dramatically from one individual to the next.

To clarify the key attributes of common and distinctive competencies, we first discuss common competencies as they have been identified and developed in a special component of a graduate business

program. Following that, we turn to the more complex question of how the less readily accessible personal characteristics, including character, can be elicited, developed, and assessed in the field.

Common Competencies

If individuals are to engage in leadership development, it is important to articulate clearly all relevant knowledge and skills and to define carefully the standards used to assess mastery. Competency-based models emphasize learner outcomes and suggest that, regardless of how well an instructional intervention is developed and delivered, success must be measured by the changes that take place in the learner's behavior (Conger & Ready, 2004).

Here, we examine one component of a graduate management program to illustrate how a set of common competencies, identified by various stakeholders as fundamental to leadership effectiveness, was addressed. The competency-based component is first described, after which an explanation is provided regarding how educators experienced and addressed five instructional challenges that are likely to be encountered in both academic and corporate settings.

Competency-Based Leadership in Graduate Business Education

Competency-based learning emerged as an important influence in graduate business education as management programs increasingly focused not only on the acquisition, but also the application, of business knowledge (Bogert & Butt, 1992; Boyatzis, Cowen, & Kolb, 1992; Neelankavil, 1994; O'Reilly, 1994). Guidelines from the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (1994, 2003) were continuously revised to reflect this emphasis. It soon became clear that one approach to preparing students to meet the challenges of the business world was to specify and teach the competencies required for leadership effectiveness (Brownell & Chung, 2001).

Recognizing the value of this approach, a competency-based leadership component was integrated into a highly diverse graduate program in a large, private northeastern university. Often, nearly 60% of the 50- member class was international. Target leadership competencies were identified through a

stakeholder survey and Q-sort (Stephenson, 1953) that involved industry executives, faculty, alumni, and current graduate students in the process of prioritizing items. An extensive review of the current literature on leadership success factors was also conducted (Barth, 1993; Enz, Renaghan, & Geller, 1994; Penley, Alexander, Jernigan, & Henwood, 1991).

Stakeholders' views were consistent with research findings; among the most critical competencies for leadership effectiveness were those related to communication, human relations, and team dynamics. Competency-based objectives for each of the three areas were then specified and performance standards developed. Since these common competencies were viewed as an essential foundation for leadership effectiveness, every student who entered the graduate program was required to achieve established standards in the targeted areas.

An overview of the competency-based portion of this graduate curriculum follows. The section concludes by asking the question, “What requirements of global leaders might be neglected within an academic competency-based instructional environment?" The issues that arose during this competency-based instruction are identified, and the actions taken to address each challenge are described.

The Leadership Development Component of a Graduate Management Program

An innovative graduate curriculum was implemented in 1995, integrating a number of nontraditional components with traditional credit courses. Among these special features was an assessment center where incoming students' target competencies were observed and evaluated against performance standards. In this two-day experience, senior executives joined faculty in observing and providing feedback on behaviors in the required competency clusters that students were asked to demonstrate—communica- tion, human relations, and team dynamics. Students who met competency standards were identified and immediately given credit for this requirement. For others, assigned advisers assisted in creating a personal development plan for meeting competency requirements. Using this plan, students identified areas of strength and weakness relative to the target competencies and utilized resources that could help them achieve development goals. Those who had difficulty with English

language abilities or who needed to further develop conflict management skills, for instance, enrolled immediately in elective communication and team dynamics mini-courses that provided opportunities to acquire specific knowledge and skills (Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 Here

Subsequent benchmarking then took place within the context of the required curriculum. Competency evaluation was conducted so that it did not require students to complete additional assignments; rather, faculty members worked with those teaching the required core courses to identify exercises and assignments that would be assessed to determine if competency standards had been met. For instance, a case-study analysis prepared as an assignment in the quantitative methods course might be used to assess organizational skills. Presentational speaking skills were benchmarked as students presented the findings of their term project in the information technology course. Those not meeting competency standards during the first semester were presented with a variety of options for mastering objectives during the second term.

One aspect of the program involved student consulting teams. At the end of the semester, team project groups presented the results of a real development plan to managers and owners associated with the client company. Following these presentations, students received real-time feedback on the quality and delivery of their proposals, both from the industry guests as well as from the core program faculty. In sum, the design of this component of the graduate program provided students with opportunities to demonstrate and to improve the specific common competencies believed to be fundamental to effective leadership.

Issues and Challenges of a Competency-Based Approach

While the benefits of developing students' common leadership competencies are clear, a competency-based instructional approach within a business curriculum poses a number of challenges. The following section presents five issues typically faced by educators and trainers adopting a competency-based model. The actions that were taken by program faculty to address each concern are then described (Brownell & Chung, 2001).

Consistency in Assessing Competencies Against Performance Standards

The assessment of competencies can be problematic (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). First, perceptions of behavior vary—particularly between self and other. For instance, Yammarino and Atwater (1997) studied perceptions of competence in a business setting and reported substantial differences between managers' self-ratings of competence levels and the ratings assigned by their supervisors. Similar studies revealed that the leniency effect was evident in teams as well; team leaders rated themselves more highly on all performance dimensions than did their team members. Cultural differences further contribute to the likelihood that interrater reliability will be unsatisfactory even on the most basic and readily identified performance dimensions.

In the case of this graduate program, faculty expectations and assessments of students' performances needed to be aligned as closely as possible. On some occasions, for instance, students would receive an A for a written assignment because of its content and thoughtful analysis but would not meet required communication standards for organization, mechanics, or style. These discrepancies had the potential to confuse students and undermine the effectiveness of the competency development efforts.

To address this issue, faculty workshops were offered so that goals and expectations could be discussed and shared. Templates were also created so that all faculty relied on the same definitions of what a report, case, memo, or other written assignment required. Regular meetings were established to coordinate and update plans for each required offering. Not only did increased interaction significantly resolve the issues, but as faculty became accustomed to sharing information and identifying common concerns, this sort of collaborative process became accepted practice.

Perceptions of Remediation: Focus on What "Needs Fixing"

A competency-based approach also has been criticized for focusing on “what needs fixing." In competency language, learners are seldom considered “incompetent"; rather, they are “not yet competent." This semantic framing implies that competencies are established and standards set whereby anyone given the time and resources can be successful. Theorists and practitioners alike have questioned whether competency-based learning sets high enough performance standards to be meaningful (Conger & Ready, 2004; Corn- ford & Athanasou, 1995; Garavan & McGuire, 2001). As we will discuss, these common competencies are, in fact, only the foundation for building high-performing leaders.

The aim of this graduate program was to define what excellence looked like and to raise students' performance to the highest level possible within the constraints of the program's time frame. Deliberate and ongoing efforts were made to ensure that standards were maintained. Since meeting competency standards was a graduation requirement, there was occasional pressure brought to bear on those responsible for making competency judgments. Clearly defined performance criteria, however, made the task of assessing performance as objective and consistent as possible.

Assessment in a Culturally Diverse Student Population

Another assessment challenge arose from the high number of international students in the program (approximately 60%), many for whom English was a second language. Although the admissions committee often deferred students for up to two years based on lack of language proficiency, the duration of the program was such that those who began with extensive ESL interference often did not have sufficient time to address the gap created by their lower-than-average entry skill profiles. To address this need, a communication center was established to serve as a resource where students could seek additional one-on-one assistance.

A second issue that emerged as a result of the highly diverse student population was the dimension of culture and communication. Students from cultures whose preferred style, norms, and values differed from the United States' often had difficulty meeting the requirements of a program designed to assess effectiveness as judged by domestic U.S. standards. To respond to this dilemma,

workshops were offered to sensitize students to cultural differences and to the various issues that were likely to emerge.

The effects of culture on the project teams' functioning were particularly vivid. While efforts were taken to address these concerns, the issues raised in defining performance standards for an international population were never completely resolved.

Lack of Individualization

Competency-based programs are often designed with the assumption that there is one set of desired outcomes and one best way to achieve each goal. Traditional competency models are characterized by prescription and preset direction (Athey & Orth, 1999; Conger & Ready, 2004; Parry, 1998); those wishing to achieve standards often must reshape or reinvent themselves to match performance demands. It may therefore be misleading to think about competency-based learning as "individualized." In academic settings, in particular, each learner is treated in a consistent and systematic manner as he or she works to develop a predetermined knowledge base or skill set of common competencies (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004).

Most international students who planned to return to their home countries found value in the cognitive competencies they developed, but many questioned the usefulness of meeting high competency standards in what they considered American-based skills. While it was the intent of program designers to focus on those common competencies that provide the strongest foundation for leadership effectiveness, cultural differences brought these assumptions into question.

Creating Rigidities That Make Change Difficult

Those most uncomfortable with a competency approach (Antonacopoulou & Fitzgerald, 1996; Burgoyne, 1989; Cappelli & Crocker- Hefter, 1996; Hayes et al., 2000) see leadership behavior as unpredictable and uncertain and argue that a list of competencies is both irrelevant and impractical. They posit that skills must be viewed as holistic and integrated and cannot be separated into parts for competency classification (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Some argue (Leonard-Barton, 1992, 1995) that even the most fundamental common competencies, such as those identified in the graduate program

described here, create rigidities— sets of specific knowledge and behaviors that potentially inhibit change and innovation. Bacon (2001) agrees, warning that once an elaborate system is in place, administrative rigidities prevent it from responding to change.

This concern would seem to have merit. Despite having a continuous improvement process in place, the competency-based design itself was so elaborate and highly integrated that changes to requirements were difficult to implement. The process of developing assessment tools and structuring opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills and preparing a group of faculty to assess each behavior against clear performance standards worked against even evolutionary program change (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996).

It appears that framing these three fundamental leadership requirements in terms of common competencies, even with the issues discussed earlier, added substantial value to the graduate management curriculum. Both reaction-based as well as learning-based data were collected on the program's effectiveness. The reaction-based data were compiled from student satisfaction surveys, while the learning-based data were derived from comparing assessment center baseline results with later performance in core courses and success in meeting common competency standards.

Unpublished studies tracking the progress of alumni (2001) further suggested that the competencies acquired provided a competitive advantage in the workplace. When presented with a list of 18 items and asked, “Which aspects of the graduate program best prepared you to advance in your career?" the competency component was among the five most frequently selected, with just over 82% of the 116 respondents (response rate of 57%) ranking it among the “most influential" program activities. The following responses from a question posed to more recent graduates capture perceptions of the value of competency learning:

- At first, it seemed like one more hoop to jump through toward getting our degree, but now I find that I am much better prepared for communication assignments than many of my peers, and I feel like I have a real advantage.

- The competencies were specific and gave me goals to work on. As an international student, I felt like I accomplished a lot and could see my progress.
- Having focused on specific competencies has given me a lot more confidence in my abilities, and I know that I would have been a lot more reluctant to take on new responsibilities.

While with sufficient time and motivation nearly all learners were able to develop a foundation of common competencies, it was apparent that there was another level of competence that would be required to distinguish truly effective global leaders from those who simply had mastered program requirements. A subsequent comprehensive review of leadership requirements revealed that additional needs, and additional questions, remained.

Tomorrow's Leadership Needs: Addressing Distinctive Competencies and Character

The following sections examine two remaining questions: (1) “What critical needs do tomorrow's global leaders have that may be neglected within formal academic and training environments?" and (2) “How can these essential leadership requirements best be addressed within a competency-based framework?" In examining recent literature on leadership development and interviewing a large sample of practicing professionals, it seems apparent that there are two related concerns.

First, there appears to be a set of personal characteristics that are required for high performance in the global business environment—what we have termed *distinctive competencies.* Such personal characteristics, as will be discussed, direct the application of the *common competencies*—the fundamental knowledge and skills that frequently constitute the focus of a business curriculum. Competencies such as sensitivity, initiative, decisiveness, or resilience are distinctive for several reasons. First, they are developed over time as individuals apply past learning to confront new challenges and reflect on their choices and behaviors. Second, unlike common competencies that can be mastered by most learners, the potential to demonstrate a particular distinctive competency varies from one individual to the next. In addition, a reliable assessment of the personal characteristics so critical to global leadership can be made only as these competencies are elicited in real, on-the-job settings. Finally, the relative importance of

distinctive competencies is determined by the leadership context. The distinctive competencies of highest priority would be different for global leaders facing a major financial crisis and those looking to establish inclusive organizational cultures (Figure 3).

Insert Figure 3 Here

Among those characteristics we are calling distinctive competencies is the particularly critical component of character. Recent events have focused our attention on character as a variable that influences global leadership because it serves as a lens through which individuals perceive events and determine their course of action. Bass and Stei- dlmeier (1999) are among those who suggest that leadership must be grounded in the leader's character, as defined by personal qualities such as fairness, humility, and concern for the greater good. Unlike other distinctive competencies, character is not situation-specific and remains a high-priority competency under all circumstances.

Following is a brief review of research related to distinctive competencies with special emphasis on the role of character in global leadership.

Distinctive Competencies

In the last decade, increased emphasis has been placed on managing human capital across the globe. The pressing need for developing leaders able to navigate in this increasingly complex and unpredictable business environment is clear (Black, Morrison, & Gregersen, 1999; Chapel, 1997; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Morley & Heraty, 2004). While researchers generally agree that that no single, definitive list of distinctive competencies applies to all contexts, a growing number of studies conclude that relevant personal characteristics are essential ingredients for success in today's international landscape (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2003; Cant, 2004; Joplin & Daus, 1997; Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999; Mintzberg, 2004).

Effective leadership is difficult to develop within a global business context (Graf, 2004; Levy-Leboyer, 2005; Lobel, 1990; Schramm, 2004). Competency language often is used by those who propose a standard set of leadership requirements. However, we find that learning expectations associated with a particular competency have been expanded such that many of the goals identified are nearly impossible to achieve within the limited time frame of the business curriculum or to assess using traditional classroom methods and performance standards. Rather, global leaders must develop these personal characteristics over time and hone their skills through experiences that enable them to effectively apply common competencies (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004).

Examples of such distinctive competencies—those that focus on personal characteristics required to achieve desired results— have been proposed by a variety of authors. As Conger and Ready (2004) persuasively argue, however, it is unlikely that one set of competencies describes a universal “best in class" leader (p. 44). Rather, high-priority, position-specific or organization-specific distinctive competencies are identified as needs and goals evolve. Consequently, it is not surprising that researchers have generated a number of distinctive competency profiles and frameworks. Spencer and Spencer (1993) identified “hard" (primarily cognitive, such as analytical and conceptual thinking) and “soft" (primarily affective and behavioral, such as relationship building and self-control) competencies that they believed frequently accounted for high performance. Lawson and Limbrick (1996) proposed that leaders demonstrate distinctive competencies such as flexibility, opportunism, and intuitiveness. Ulrich and Smallwood (2004) suggest that leadership competencies include talent, accountability, and innovation. Conger and Ready (2004) discuss IBM's success in building on 11 core leadership competencies, several of which—such as “breakthrough thinking" and “passion for the business"—are particularly relevant to global leadership challenges.

Similarly, Townsend and Carns (2003) have identified several personal abilities necessary for effectiveness in the global workplace. These include a global perspective, synergistic learning, and cross-cultural sensitivity. McNally and Parry (2000) and Funakawa (1997) have suggested similar distinctive

competencies for transcultural leadership. An approach described by Cant (2004) proposes that global managers display “cultural consciousness" and the development of a “global mindset."

Still other researchers suggest that effective leaders balance frameworks of perception depending upon the cultural context, and therefore require the ability to identify and to solve unfamiliar problems in unfamiliar situations. These individuals must also possess the vision to create shared values (Banks, 1994; C. B. Bingham et al., 2000; Collin, 1989; Townsend & Carns, 2003).

In the global business environment, there is also a growing interest in framing leadership as a dynamic that emerges between the leader and his or her followers. Increasingly, effective leadership is defined by the potential created as the result of a relationship rather than by the efforts of one individual. Leadership effectiveness, in essence, is achieved through building community. What often is needed are leaders who can forge consensus in a divided world and build relationships among those with dissimilar backgrounds and perspectives (Day, 2001; Kolp & Rea, 2006; Wolfensohn, O'Reilly, Campbell, Shui-Bian, & Arbour, 2003).

Finally, many practitioners and researchers have argued that emotional intelligence competencies are among the most valuable in today's international business environment. Emotional intelligence was first proposed and defined by Salovey and Mayer as a “form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (1990). Popularized by Goleman (1995, 1998, 2004) and others (Becker, 2003; Boyatzis & Van Oosten, 2003; Dawda & Hart, 2000; Druskat & Wolff, 2001), emotional intelligence competencies have become of significant interest in leadership development.

Global leaders who possess a high level of emotional intelligence are perceived as authentic and credible (Collins, 2001; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Goleman, 2004; Ruder- man, Hannum, Leslie, & Steed, 2001). These distinctive competencies challenge educators and human resource professionals to re-examine their priorities with regard to leadership development goals and practices.

A question that repeatedly arises concerns the extent to which distinctive competencies can be taught. Richard Boyatzis has been among those educators at the forefront of competency-based

approaches to leadership development. In a published interview, Boyatzis talked about his work, emphasizing that a competency, in his view, is an “underlying characteristic of a person that leads to or causes . . . effective performance" (Yeung, 1996, p. 119). While focusing on what we have labeled distinctive competencies, Boyatzis's extensive research has led him to believe that individuals are in fact able to develop these personal characteristics, particularly when they are self-reflective and highly motivated (Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002). In addition, experience, preferably in multiple cultures, facilitates the development of the sensitivity, judgment, and global savvy required to lead successfully (Bandura, 1977; DeSimone & Harris, 1998; Goleman, 2004; Spreitzer, Morgan, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997).

It is apparent that a summary of commonly proposed distinctive competencies would produce a long list of personal characteristics. To create a more meaningful framework for understanding global leadership needs, similar constructs can be clustered into broader competency areas. Such a strategy would produce a much shorter and more useful list, similar to the one presented in Figure 4. The priority competency clusters in this portfolio will be influenced by context variables such as the organization's culture and mission as well as the external environment and the nature of the specific task (Barrett & Beeson, 2002). As we have emphasized, not every individual is equally capable of achieving high levels of competence in all dimensions.

We propose that educators might begin to assist students in recognizing key personal characteristics and in addressing the role these characteristics play in global leadership effectiveness. However, the identification, development, and assessment of these competencies are the primary challenges of human resource professionals. Organizational settings provide the integrated performance management systems, extended time frame, and the authentic experiences that enable human resource professionals to recognize and facilitate the development of global leadership talent.

Insert Figure 4 Here

Character: A Key Distinctive Competency

Character. Trustworthiness. Integrity. These words capture some of the most powerful leadership concepts in a decade plagued by ethical misconduct and self-indulgence. Well over a decade ago, Bennis (1989) proposed that future leaders would require strong character. He repeatedly emphasized that the most important requirements for leadership effectiveness were personal characteristics and questioned the extent to which they could be taught through traditional approaches. Mintzberg (2004) holds a similar view, arguing that a large component of leader effectiveness is based on the individual's insight, vision, intuition and, most important, character.

Recent headlines have drawn our attention to the issue at hand:

- Bernard J. Ebbers, former chief executive of WorldCom, was found guilty of orchestrating an $11 billion fraud.
- Kenneth L. Lay and Jeffrey K. Skilling, former Enron executives, were accused of fraud and other charges.
- Joseph P. Nacchio Jr., former chief executive of Qwest Communications International, was accused of a $3 billion accounting fraud.
- John J. Rigas, founder of Adelphia Communications, was convicted of conspiring to loot millions of dollars from the corporate treasury.
- Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff, Lewis “Scooter" Libby, was indicted on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice in the CIA leak probe.

Given these and other current incidents, little doubt remains that leaders' credibility and trustworthiness are vital (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2004; Martini, 2004; Sankar, 2003). Many would argue that character—an innate sense of fairness, honesty, respect for others, and humility—is becoming the most resonant quality for global leaders in this century. In his book *Good to Great,* Collins (2001) notes the universally other- centered and modest nature of CEOs in the highest-performing companies. Research by Storr (2004) and others (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Mintzberg, 2004) also supports this position. In a recent interview (Finnie & Early,

2002), David Ulrich expressed the view that personal character was one of the key attributes of successful leaders. Likewise, when well-known international business leaders were questioned, character emerged as a critical component for effectiveness (Wolfensohn et al., 2003).

Judge's thought-provoking book, *The Leader's Shadow* (1999), drew attention to who leaders are rather than just what they do. He proposes that followers need to ask leaders, “Who are you? What do you believe in?" These questions are of critical concern, as a leader's character influences his or her goals, vision, strategies, work ethic, attitudes, perceptions, and other important factors (Hartman, 2001; Revans, 1983; Sai Baba, 2001; Thomas, 2000). Kolp and Rea, in their book *Leading with Integrity* (2006), argue that character is the central ingredient for global leadership effectiveness. Simons's (2002) research on behavioral integrity draws attention to the need for correspondence between what a leader says and what he or she actually does. It seems fair to question whether any portfolio of competencies is sufficient for developing global leadership excellence without the guiding framework of a strong character.

What does this emphasis on character mean for how human resource professionals and graduate business educators prepare and recognize global leaders? A model is presented of a holistic approach to leadership development that illustrates the relationship between common leadership competencies and distinctive competencies. Character, often neglected in leadership development strategies, is treated as the core personal characteristic that influences other distinctive competencies. In the following section, suggestions are given as to how educators and human resource professionals might rethink the effectiveness of current approaches and work together to address these interrelated components that form the essential portfolio of a high- performing leader.

Addressing the Competencies of Global Leadership: A Model of Requirements

We now address our third question, “How can these essential leadership requirements best be addressed within a competency- based framework?" The interrelated components that have emerged include: (1) a set of common competencies that readily can be acquired by most learners and that focuses on mastery of fundamental knowledge and skills, (2) a set of distinctive competencies derived from

personal characteristics that direct the application of common competencies, and finally (3) the distinctive competency of character—the core dimension that influences other aspects of leader behavior.

While the challenges of addressing common competencies have been discussed earlier in relation to a graduate business program, the key issues and methods are again summarized in the next section. Our focus here, however, is on the ways in which educators and human resource professionals might partner to identify and develop the more elusive distinctive competencies—personal characteristics and character.

Common Competencies: Building Blocks of Leadership Effectiveness

Our earlier discussion concluded that fundamental knowledge and basic skills could be developed through mastery of a set of common competencies, and that this component is productively addressed in both academic classrooms and formal training environments. While challenges exist, a common competency approach has considerable merit in helping learners meet well-defined performance standards. Behaviors associated with communication, human relations skills, and team effectiveness, for instance, can be identified, developed through instructional interventions, demonstrated in simulated settings, and assessed by those familiar with the standards applied to make judgments regarding mastery. Such competency-based models, while posing a number of challenges, are effective in accomplishing program goals. Although individuals' backgrounds and past experiences may affect their initial performance, it is expected that with sufficient time and resources, nearly all learners will acquire and demonstrate the targeted behaviors.

Competency-based training by human resources professionals in organizational settings might parallel those efforts made in academic programs. The development of common competencies might profitably be viewed as a continuum from the business curriculum to the training classroom. Learners who come from academic programs can build on competencies previously acquired. As discussed earlier, these common competencies may be generic or organization-specific; they may include those skills required of a particular industry or they may be transferable. Common competencies can be specified that clearly link behavioral outcomes to the organization's strategic goals (T. Bingham, 2005).

Those interested in advancing their careers can readily identify the vehicles that facilitate such development, from structured training programs to coaching activities (Stoker & Van der Heijden, 2001; Stuart & Lindsay, 1997). Many of the methods employed (lecture, case studies, role plays, team activities) parallel those frequently used in academic settings. In all cases, however, it is expected that mastery can be achieved by the majority of learners through training interventions and readily assessed by those responsible for designing development activities. Such competencies are viewed as the building blocks of effective global leadership.

Developing Distinctive Competencies: A Partnership

We have labeled the set of personal characteristics that enable individuals to navigate through uncertain and multicultural environments *distinctive competencies* and proposed that such characteristics emerge as authentic behavior only when individuals are free to choose among options as they confront and address challenges in the field (Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999). A wide range of theorists and scholars agree.

Few authors have been as blunt as Mintzberg in their skepticism of the ability of traditional academic approaches to develop distinctive competencies. In a recent book, Mintzberg questions the value of an MBA degree alone as preparation for leadership effectiveness, writing, “Using the classroom to help develop people already practicing management is a fine idea, but pretending to create managers out of people who have never managed is a sham" (2004, p. 5). The most meaningful learning opportunities are characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty; those that involve intercultural dimensions may be particularly valuable experiences (Cockerill, 1989; Cockerill, Hunt, & Schroder, 1995; Freedman, 1992; Raelin & Cooledge, 1995; Tyre & Von Heppel, 1997).

Clearly, recognition of the ways in which experience shapes perceptions and decisions is an ongoing challenge of competency-based designs (Ashworth & Saxton, 1990; Martin & Staines, 1994; Townley, 1994). Here, we argue that distinctive competencies, including character, develop over time and that individuals vary substantially in their potential to develop and display a particular distinctive competency. We are also convinced that elements of the leadership environment influence the relative

importance of various personal characteristics required for effectiveness. It therefore becomes apparent that the needs of global leaders are best addressed through a partnership between educators and human resource professionals. Figure 5 draws attention to the variety of methods available to those professionals who seek to strengthen distinctive competencies for global leadership.

Educators: Opportunities and Responsibilities

If educators and human resource professionals share the goal of positioning the most capable individuals in leadership roles, they must work together closely to identify and develop leadership talent. The sections that follow describe activities in which business educators might engage as they focus more directly on an individual's distinctive competencies, particularly the core concern of character. In many cases, human resource professionals also have a complementary role to play.

Insert Figure 5 Here

The Admissions Process

The first way in which educators can address distinctive competencies is to recognize their importance in the graduate admissions process. Those responsible for admissions must ensure that the most relevant distinctive competencies have been identified so that the process can be designed to assess each applicant based on those specific criteria. In some cases, organizations that regularly recruit from a select number of universities have hosted sessions to familiarize administrators from academic programs with the competencies they believe are most vital for effective leadership (Marriott Academic Summit, 2000). Such a dialogue helps to better align university admissions with the selection process graduates inevitably will encounter.

Whenever possible, interviews are one of the most useful tools in making judgments regarding personal characteristics, and a set of standard questions can be designed to elicit information regarding the

competencies judged to be most important. Numerous companies, including TalentPlus and others, offer their services in designing assessments to capture industry- specific distinctive qualities.

While it is accepted practice to assess applicants based on written self-reports of their leadership experiences as demonstrated in community and scholarly organizations, sports teams, and other activities, additional opportunities can be created to make judgments about an individual's personal characteristics and to send messages about the importance of specific competencies. Application essays might provide opportunities for prospective students to respond to a situation in ways that reveal their flexibility, decisiveness, or intercultural sensitivity. They might describe a leader they admire, allowing the admissions team to better assess their values and ethical framework. While it is impossible to make definitive judgments from such limited information, increased attention to character in the admissions process clearly signals its importance. Students, like employees, receive messages about what is valued by noticing where educators focus their attention.

Gabriel Hawawini, dean of Insead (an international business school with campuses in France and Singapore), describes one example of how the distinctive competence of character was addressed within the university admissions process. Hawawini not only agrees that business schools should make every effort to admit only applicants with high ethical standards, but he also has led a restructuring of Insead's admission process to include two alumni interviews that assess the individual's ethical framework. While it is admittedly difficult to determine an individual's character from such brief encounters, Hawawini agrees that this practice sends a strong signal to prospective students who then self-select. His position is clear: "no ethics, no entry" (Holstein, 2005, p. 9) Once admitted, a no-tolerance position on issues of academic integrity contributes further to making clear the importance of this dimension.

Curriculum Content and Industry Guests

Course content relevant to distinctive competencies can introduce students to the leadership challenges that lie ahead. Such exposure can take many forms, from current events and case studies that focus on leaders who have demonstrated "break-through thinking" or "optimism" to courses that address cultural differences in perceptions of trust and ethical behavior. Numerous opportunities are available to

surface and discuss the options leaders confront and the decisions they make, and how those choices reflect not only personal traits, but also an individual's character and ethical framework.

The best examples and insights might come from industry guests who speak with students about the distinctive competencies required for success in their organizations. As Hartman (2006) proposes in his work on teaching character, the best way to instill character is through "a life lived in a good community" (p. 77). If this is true, then he reasons that students should have "great respect for the opinions of intelligent people of good character who are experienced in business" (p. 77). Educators and human resource professionals can work together to place business executives in classes where they can help students gain an appreciation for the importance of good judgment, innovation, or optimism by recounting their personal experiences. Vivid examples from managers in the field can illustrate clearly how distinctive competencies contribute directly to leadership effectiveness. Such discussions lay a foundation that facilitates students' future acquisition of these key distinctive competencies.

Out-of-Class Leadership Experiences

In the business curriculum, the presence of a particular personal characteristic, whether the target is agility or self-discipline, can be observed in at least a limited manner if learners have opportunities to engage in carefully designed out-of-class experiences. Human resource professionals might arrange for students to engage in projects that address an organization's real problems and dilemmas. Partnerships between businesses and universities where students spend the term working on a relevant issue are particularly valuable. Experiences of longer duration increase opportunities for distinctive competencies to be displayed and assessed.

Internships and mentorships are another powerful set of opportunities that organizations can provide for students. Human resource professionals should identify appropriate work experiences and design internships that offer students realistic job challenges. These relationships have a number of benefits, including allowing employers an opportunity to observe a potential employee's distinctive competencies as demonstrated in a real work setting.

Travel Abroad

Students can also develop distinctive competencies that support global leadership through travel abroad. International experience, preferably in several cultures, is invaluable in developing the sensitivity, open-mindedness, judgment, and global savvy required to lead successfully (Bandura, 1977; DeSimone & Harris, 1998; Goleman, 2004; Spreitzer et al., 1997). Providing internship experiences in foreign countries or other travel opportunities allows students to experience firsthand the diversity that later will help them establish community and build consensus.

Research Partnerships

A growing number of universities and businesses have recognized the mutual benefits that can be realized through research partnerships. While there are a variety of goals that can be accomplished when academics and practitioners work together, in this case executives bring their most pressing challenges to the attention of researchers, who then work with them to address specific issues. High-priority questions might well relate to identifying the future competency needs of global leaders, how distinctive competencies are best developed, and related assessment issues.

One established partnership that strives to capture the research and creative thinking of academics and bring it to bear on management issues is the Organizational Learning Center developed by the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Fulmer, 1995). In this case, a “consortium of innovative organizations" works with MIT researchers to create learning organizations through collaborative research and practice (p. 9).

Certainly, human resource professionals involved in forging this type of relationship could well focus on leadership competencies, thereby contributing substantially to their organizations' success.

Human Resource Professionals: Opportunities and Responsibilities

Acknowledging distinctive competencies as they are demonstrated in academic settings does not guarantee that students will apply the behavior appropriately on the job or that they will ultimately achieve high levels of competence. The process of building distinctive competencies is a continuum.

Modest beginnings in the business curriculum move forcefully into the organization, where recognizing, developing, and rewarding the most critical distinctive competencies is a central and ongoing HR activity (see Figure 6).

While human resource professionals and educators can partner by focusing more directly on personal characteristics within the context of a student's academic program, distinctive competencies develop over time and with experience in the field. It is only within the ongoing organizational environment that personal characteristics can be meaningfully observed, fostered, and assessed. As Roehling, Boswell, Caligiuri, and Feldman (2005) emphasize, human resource activities have the potential to make a strong contribution to the organization's competitive advantage and value creation. The following section makes it clear that the primary responsibility and opportunity for developing distinctive competencies falls on human resource professionals.

Insert Figure 6 Here

Performance Management

We have noted that, with the exception of character, the specific distinctive competencies most essential for success vary depending upon the organizational or leadership context and nature of the task. An organization that has recently been downsized or gone through a merger, for instance, may seek a leader who demonstrates high levels of empathy and optimism. In times of crisis, decisiveness and agility may be valued more highly. Human resource professionals play a key role in drawing attention to the need for a defined set of explicit distinctive competencies related to global leadership and an integrated performance management system that supports these outcomes. While distinctive competencies such as decisiveness or action-orientation are often organization- or position-specific, all systems must emphasize and reinforce the importance of character. As one author suggests, “There are no right ways to develop the wrong people" (Mintzberg, 2004, p. 20).

Human resource professionals are best positioned, then, to ensure that the following personnel processes are implemented and aligned:

1. Identify the core distinctive competencies for each position. Research partnerships, described earlier, are only one means of identifying high-priority competencies. Recall that distinctive competencies are organization- and context-specific. Emil- iani (2003) describes the process of determining an organization's high-priority competencies (typically four to eight primary competencies). Only after organization- and position-specific competencies have been identified can methods be designed to clearly communicate them to all organizational members. It is critical that “competencies espoused" be identical to “competencies-in-use" (Emiliani, 2003). Since organizational needs change, the process of identifying or reaffirming central competencies continues on a regular basis.
2. Create a selection process that seeks to identify those individuals who have the potential to achieve high performance levels in the target competencies, with particular attention to character. It's not just about the grades, courses taken, or length of work experience. Letters of recommendation must provide more specific information to guide employers in making decisions based on personal characteristics. The task of creating guidelines that improve recruiters' ability to make informed judgments from application materials falls on human resource professionals.
3. Set and clarify performance expectations, as distinctive competencies are often elusive. While standard setting is always a complicated task, human resource professionals can clarify the behaviors that lead to judgments about an individual's personal characteristics and that indicate the extent of his or her competency development. In this regard, critical incidents are a particularly powerful tool for communicating how distinctive competencies are expressed relative to a particular organizational context.
4. Create methods to continuously observe and assess performance, as individuals develop and hone competencies over time. On the job, employees' responses to unanticipated dilemmas

and their decision-making and problem-solving strategies can be readily observed; examples of empathy, cultural awareness, or agility may present themselves in a variety of circumstances. Human resource professionals must work with senior executives and others to find ways to capture these “moments of truth" and use them to help employees understand how their performance can be improved. Assessment, in this case, is ongoing. An employee may show initial promise during the interview process or within the first weeks on the job, but then competency levels plateau quickly when more complex challenges are presented.

5. Create developmental opportunities by formalizing coaching and mentoring activities. One-on-one discussion provides some of the most powerful feedback for performance improvement. These close relationships allow for more accurate judgments to be made regarding an individual's potential.

Mentors might also assist in identifying developmental opportunities such as recommending their protégé for positions that require experience in other cultures. Clearly, there is no substitute for the opportunity to express relevant personal characteristics in cross-culture encounters. In addition, the daunting responsibility for continuously assessing character might well be placed on those who are in a position to observe employees closely in situations where the maximum range of response options and, subsequently, the most valuable insights into individual character are available.

Individual goal-setting and personal development plans are particularly appropriate development vehicles not only for human resources professionals, but also for longer-term coaching and mentoring relationships.

When employees know the distinctive competencies required to move to the next level, they can set personal goals consistent with the organization's priorities. Such activities contribute to effective succession planning, since skill gaps can be identified and employees can establish a clear career path focused on the personal characteristics required for the next position.

Ethical Codes of Conduct

Creating ethical cultures requires an ethical workforce. Employees must understand the organization's expectations and norms of behavior. Human resource professionals can facilitate the creation of ethical codes that specify expectations for behavior (Stevens & Brownell, 2000). Once established, such codes need to be visible and regularly communicated. As with academic integrity policies in business schools, a no-tolerance policy for breaches in codes of conduct sends a strong organizational message. Employees must believe that their actions have immediate consequences. The March 2005 dismissal of Harry Stonecipher, CEO of Boeing, for his conduct is one example of how an organization can send a strong signal that character matters.

Role Modeling

When leaders demonstrate high standards of integrity and consistently “do the right thing," they serve as role models and reinforce messages about the importance of character. When individuals of strong character are encouraged and promoted, an organizational culture develops that serves to strengthen the commitment to hire and promote based on character, as well as on other, more readily identified leadership competencies. To neglect character as a criterion throughout the personnel process puts the entire organization and its future at risk.

Insert Figure 7 Here

In-House Team Discussion Sessions

Keeping a clear focus on the importance of character and other distinctive competencies requires ongoing attention. One way to accomplish this goal is to create cross-functional employee teams charged with discussing ways in which distinctive competencies are demonstrated within the organization, as well as the ways in which particular competencies might be further realized. Specific means of recognition and

reward might also be addressed, as peers often generate meaningful approaches to reinforce behaviors that matter most in achieving excellence.

Identifying the most critical distinctive leadership competencies, and then creating systems to clearly communicate, develop, and assess these goals places human resource professionals at the heart of global leadership development (Figure 7). When viewed as a continuum, it becomes apparent that leadership development is a lifelong pursuit. While educators may have an impact on students during their academic experience, human resource professionals have a much larger role to play as they take up the task and carry high-performing individuals into a limitless future.

Conclusion

Developing tomorrow's global leaders is not an easy task, and the concept of leadership has never been simple or static. As human resource professionals look to partner with universities to prepare individuals for the challenges ahead, they should expect that nearly all business graduates will have acquired a set of common leadership competencies. In addition, educators will have the opportunity to assess and shape the character of those seeking leadership roles. We have provided one example of a common competency-based component of a business program and shown how it was implemented with business executives' participation.

Ultimately, however, it is in the field as individuals confront leadership dilemmas that distinctive competencies and individual character are fully revealed. Human resource professionals are best positioned to apply competency-based approaches to create healthy, high-performing organizations and to ensure that the personal characteristics essential to effective global leadership, including character, are identified, elicited, and assessed. When individuals confront cultural differences, how do they respond? What choices do they make? Distinctive competencies come to bear in such moments, and are an inseparable part of the fabric that defines a global leader's effectiveness.

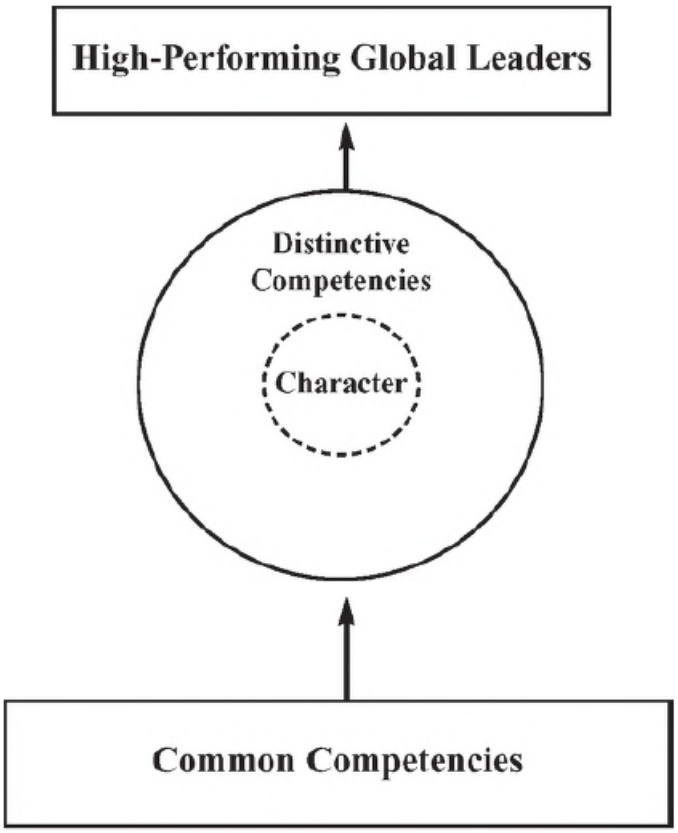

Figure 1. Competencies Required of Global Leaders

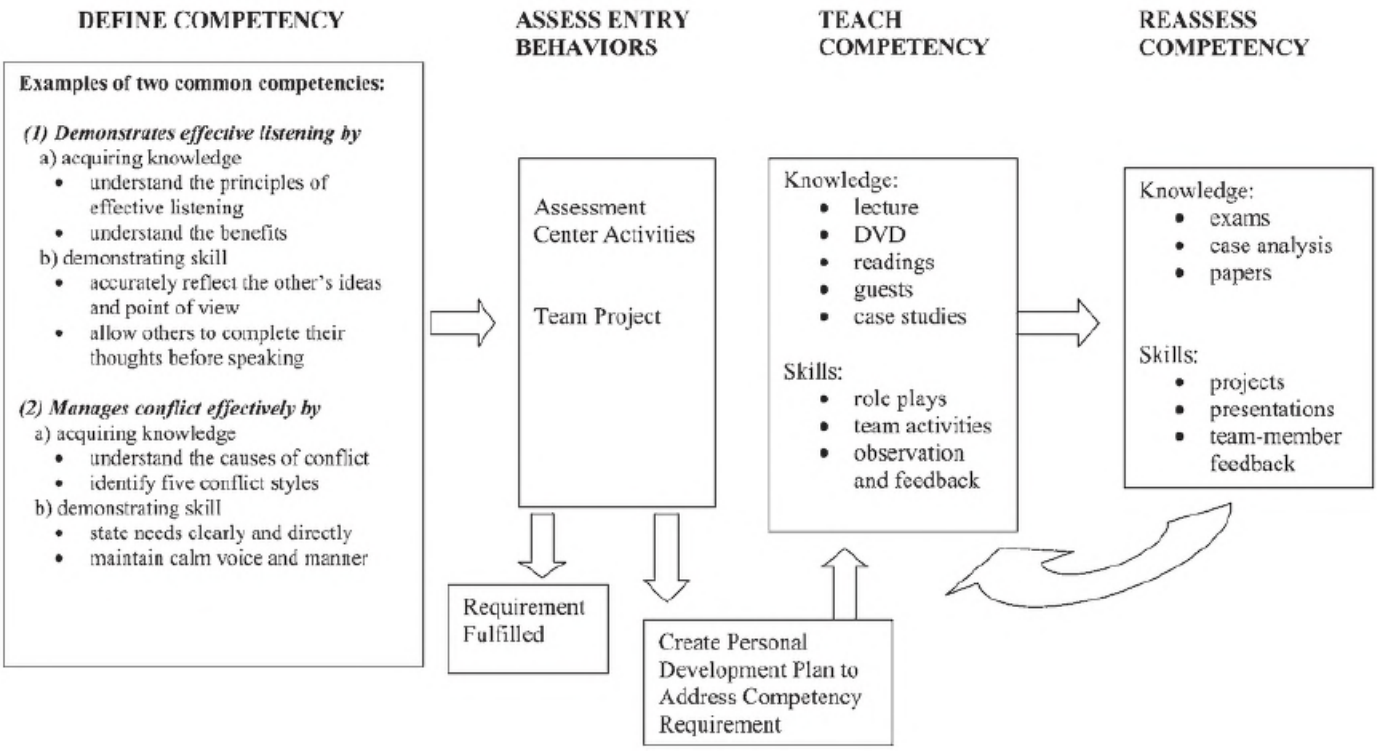

Figure 2. Sample Common Competencies in the Leadership Development Component

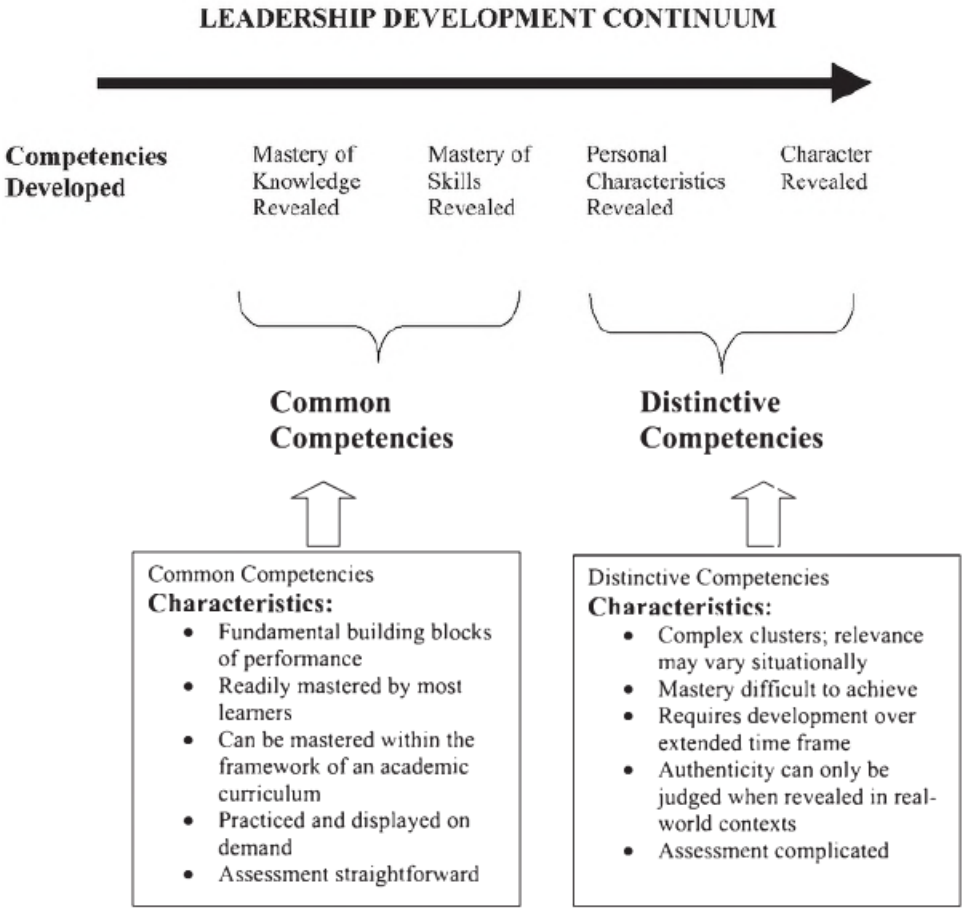

Figure 3. Global Leadership Competencies: A Developmental Continuum

The following distinctive competency clusters are among those that characterize effective global leaders.

(1) Intercultural: Cultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, global mind-set

(2) Social: Emotional intelligence, empathy, self-control

(3) Creativity/Resourcefulness: Breakthrough thinking, innovativeness, synergistic orientation

(4) Self-Knowledge: Self-efficacy, self-reflective

(5) Positive Outlook: Vision, passion, optimism

(6) Responsiveness: Flexible, agile, opportunistic

(7) Decision Making: Decisive, sound judgment, intuitive

Distinctive Competency Requirements Are Influenced by Context:

Features of the task, organization, and environment affect the relative significance of a distinctive competency cluster.

Task Complexity: High task complexity, priority need for *Decision-Making* competencies

Strength of Organizational Culture: Weak organizational culture, priority need for *Positive Outlook* competencies

Environmental Uncertainty: Highly uncertain environment, priority need for *Responsiveness* competencies

Degree of Cultural Diversity: High degree of cultural diversity, priority need for *Intercultural* competencies

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Sample characteristics compiled from: Bennis, 1989; Collin, 1989; Conger & Ready, 2004; Funakawa, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Kolp & Rea, 2006; McNally & Parry, 2000; Mintzberg, 2004; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Townsend & Cams, 2003; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004.

Figure 4. Context-Specific Distinctive Competency Clusters Required by Global Leaders

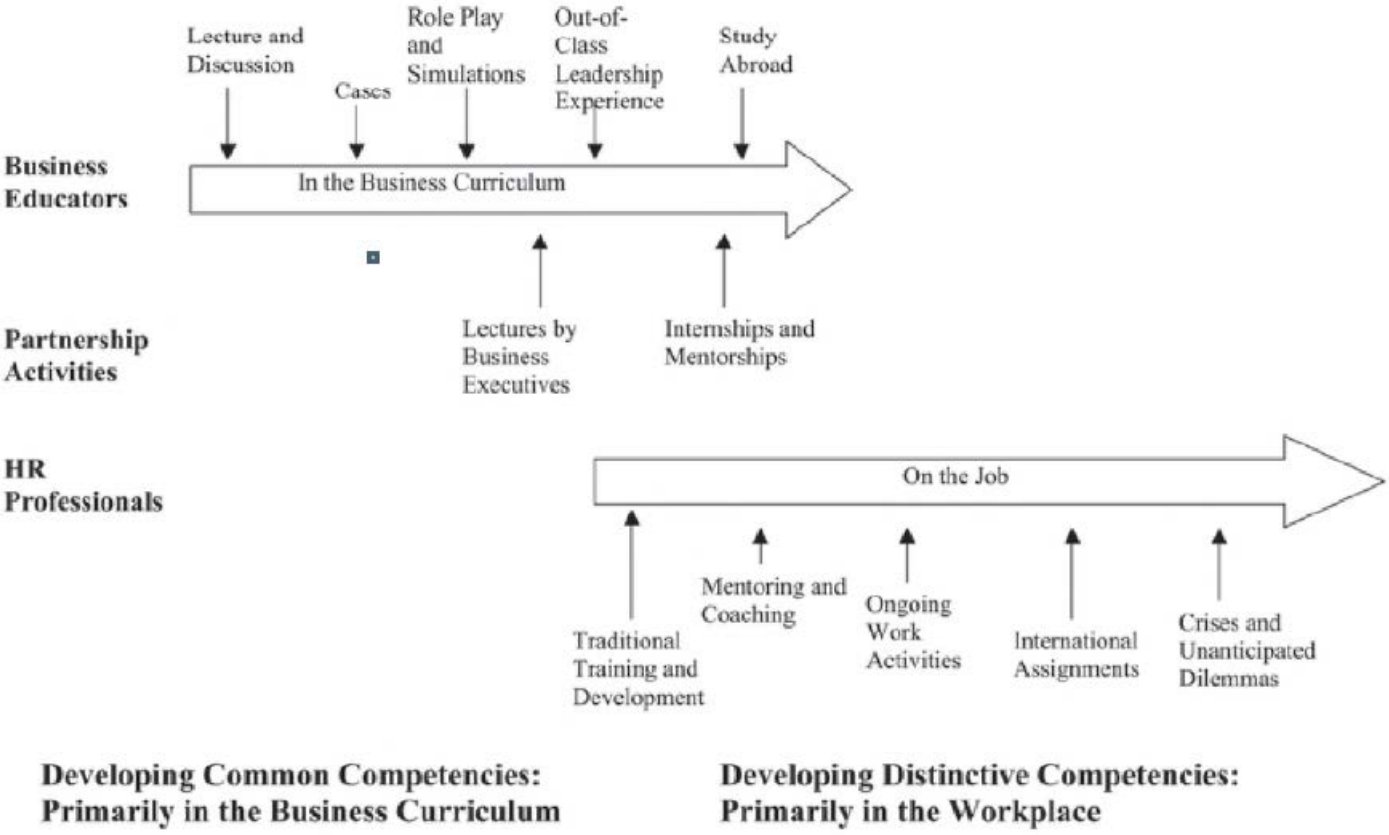

Figure 5. Learning Strategies.

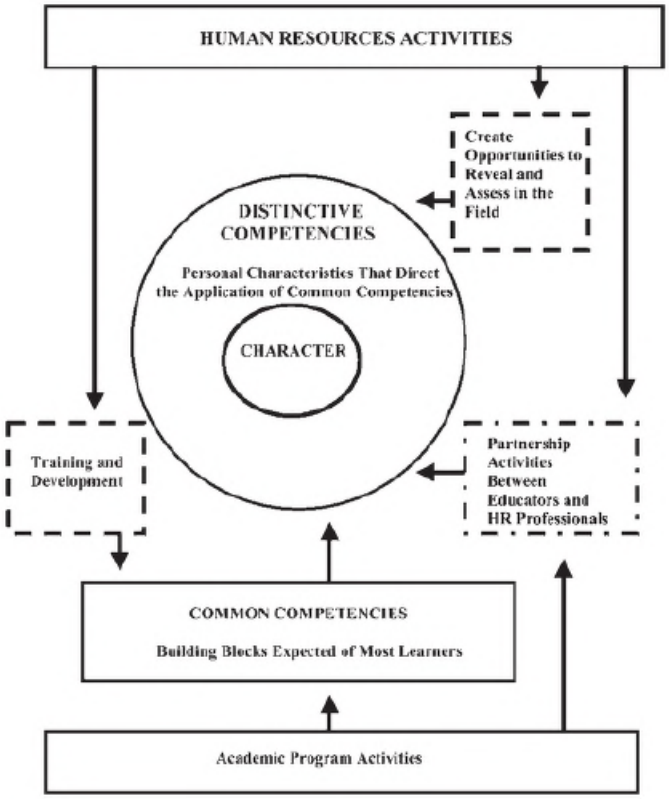

Figure 6. The Development of Competencies for Global Leadership

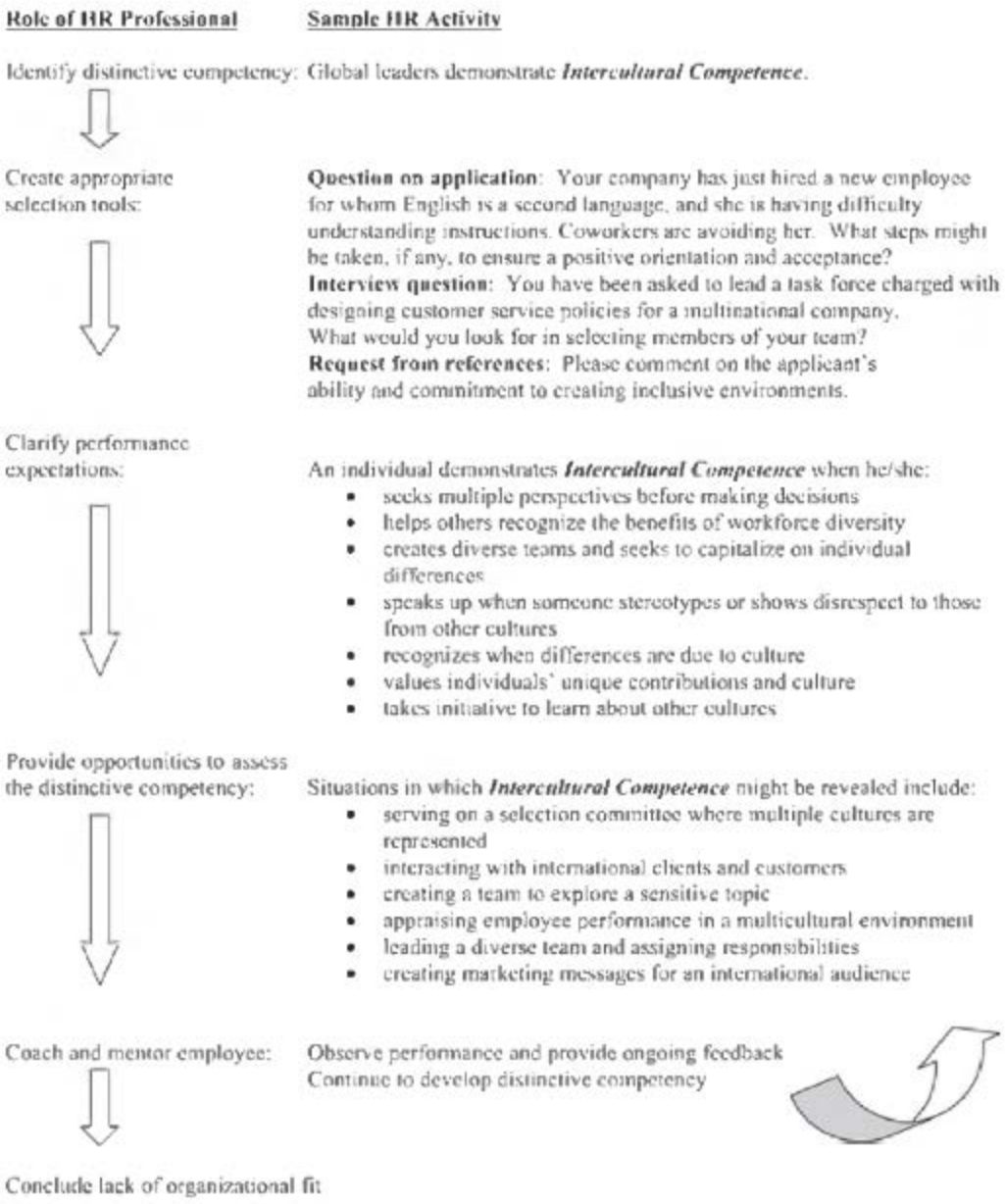

Figure 7. Developing Distinctive Competencies: The Role of Human Resource Professionals in Performance Management

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