Nurturing Global Talent

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The development of global talent is seen by many organisations to be central to their success in today’s global marketplace. Organisations realise that to remain competitive they need people that are able to operate effectively in complex global environments. Individuals need to work within multiple cultures and in different geographical and cultural settings. Global talent need to be able to manage and lead under conditions of uncertainty, be willing to embrace new challenges and be culturally sensitive. Most organisations realise that such talent is developed through careful training and engagement.

Global talent needs to be nurtured. Organisations need to attract, develop and retain individuals that are able to be assigned global roles working with cross-border responsibilities and with multi-cultural teams. More importantly, they need employees that can lead teams and effect change within such complex environments. Developing such ‘global leaders’ is seen by many organisations to be a strategic priority (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2012). This article discusses the importance of identifying and developing individual employee’s global competencies and the competency based assessment techniques many organisations are employing to help nurture their global talent.

How can global leadership competencies be assessed?

There are a number of assessment instruments used to develop global leaders. As experts qualified to use an assessment tool called the Global Competencies Inventory (GCI) it is this instrument that we will discuss in this paper. We have used GCI in a number of contexts and in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom (UK), Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE) and found it an effective and reliable instrument.

The GCI measures seventeen dimensions of personality predispositions associated with effective intercultural behaviour and global management skills. The GCI assesses individual competencies in three domains; Perception Management, Relationship Management and Self-Management. Collectively these three domains predict how an individual employee is likely to manage and lead in a different culture or within a culturally diverse team environment. Examining each competency enables the individual to examine their strengths and weaknesses and identify areas for development. Additionally, collective group assessments, allow for organisations to evaluate common areas that warrant development.

The first of these competency domains relates to Perception Management. This factor addresses how individuals perceive the world around them. It assesses how individuals perceive people from different cultures and how flexible they are when faced with cultural differences. This also assesses how quickly an individual makes a judgement about those from other cultures and their curiosity towards other cultures. These personality predispositions are obviously important for anyone wishing to manage and lead in a global context. Effective intercultural behaviour is seen as central for global leaders. In particular we measure five dimensions of Perception Management:

- Non-judgmentalness – not rushing to make judgements about cultural differences
• Inquisitiveness – the desire to understand new ideas, values and situations
• Tolerance of ambiguity – how an individual manages ambiguity in relation to new situations
• Cosmopolitanism – curiosity about new countries and cultures
• Interest flexibility – flexibility in searching for and adopting new interests

The second competency domain the GCI includes is Relationship Management. This assesses an individual’s ability to develop and maintain relationships. It considers how they interact with others and how they manage interpersonal relationships. It considers how interested an individual is in developing and managing relationships in a cross-cultural environment. It examines relationship interest and interpersonal engagement and how individual attitudes and values influence relationships. Managing relationships in an intercultural environment is an essential aspect of global leadership. The GCI measures five dimensions of Relationship Management:

• Relationship interest – awareness and interest in people from other cultures
• Interpersonal engagement – desire to engage with people from other cultures
• Emotional sensitivity – ability to empathise with other people
• Self-awareness – awareness of your own values and interpersonal style
• Social flexibility – ability to adapt behaviour to fit in

The third and final domain assesses Self-Management. This factor explores the individual’s ability to adapt to a global work environment, whilst maintaining a clear sense of self-identity. Maintaining a stable self-identity is an important aspect for individuals in new culture environments. Similarly global leaders must be capable of managing their emotions and stress in complex cultural environments. The GCI measures six dimensions of Self-Management:

• Optimism – positive outlook towards people and situations
• Self-confidence – belief in one’s own ability
• Self-identity – ability to uphold one’s own beliefs and values
• Emotional resilience – emotional strength and ability to deal with setbacks
• Non-stress tendency – ability to remain calm when faced with stressful situations
• Stress Management – extent to which stress reduction techniques are used

The GCI provides a full report of the individual’s global competencies and an assessment of each of the three dimensions; Perception Management, Relationship Management and Self-Management. The report indicates for each competency low, moderate or high. In addition the report provides an overall competence score for each individual. It is these scores that provide the basis for development.

Using the GCI as a developmental tool

The initial GCI assessment provides a valuable starting point for an individual’s personal development. Taking the scores for each dimension and looking at the overall competency score enables effective personal development planning. We have used the GCI effectively in a number of contexts and countries to help individuals and organisations identify and develop their global leadership competencies.
One area that we have used the GCI effectively has been to encourage and support the development of women in Science and Technology. The lack of women in senior positions in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) is seen to be a priority development area for all UK universities (Howe-Walsh, Turnbull and Page, 2012). Whilst the GCI is equally reliable for men and women, we were invited to run a trial of the GCI for women within our own institution to encourage more women to apply for senior roles. In 2012 we began a programme of GCI assessments. Each of the women who participated undertook a GCI assessment and attended a group workshop. As well as the workshops we provided one-to-one feedback which is a valuable part of the assessment process. This provided an opportunity for individuals to explore their areas of strength and identify specific competencies that could be developed further. The feedback sessions also allowed for individuals to discuss their personal development plans. After six months the GCI workshop programme and one-to-one feedback was evaluated with each participant. The initial programme has been very successful leading to a rise in the number of applications to senior positions. The trial programme has been extended to other faculties.

We have also used the GCI in the Middle East. One example has been our work in the UAE. Working with a global airline in the country we conducted a series of GCI assessments with their UAE National employees. The assessment was well received by both the individual employees and the organisation. We supported the programme with a leadership workshop and individual feedback and personal development planning sessions. In addition to identifying individual’s global competencies and areas for personal development, the programme enabled the organisation to evaluate the collective developmental needs of their employees.

As well as being used by a number of commercial organisations to develop global talent, it is also a popular assessment used by educational institutions to develop student’s global competencies. A number of USA universities use it on their Masters Degree programmes and in the UK, The University of Portsmouth Business School introduced the assessment for students on their prestigious Masters in Business Administration (MBA) course in 2012. This is the first UK University to offer the GCI assessment to its students. Most students on the MBA course expect to take up management roles within industry when they graduate and global competencies are essential to their success. Students work with faculty staff to identify their individual developmental needs and agree a personal development plan to build their competencies. Developing our students into global talent is seen as a priority.____

Our expertise is in the area of Global Competency assessment and this has worked effectively to identify current competencies and develop skill gaps. Our experience in profit and not for profit sectors has shown that the GCI is an effective assessment tool to evaluate current competencies and those who undertake the assessment report they have greatly benefitted from it.

**Other uses of the GCI**

In addition to its use as a developmental tool, global organisations are increasingly using the GCI in the selection of new employees and the choice of expatriates for overseas assignments. Organisations are keen to recruit those individuals who are culturally
competent and able to manage and lead in a global environment. Expatriation remains a key strategy in the internationalisation of operations. Developing business in overseas territories to expand current markets as well as transfer knowledge to overseas staff relies upon successful international assignments. It is essential to understand in advance of any assignment how well the expatriate is likely to adjust to a new culture and develop meaningful business relationships, as failure can be very expensive for the organisation. Organisations are therefore keen to make sure they only send those individuals that they feel will manage in a different culture. Assessing the likelihood the assignment will be successful in advance is useful and the GCI is used by many organisations for this purpose.

The GCI is often used as part of a wider leadership development programme in organisations. In many cases it is as part of a strategic Human Resource Development initiative which may include a range of approaches such as executive coaching, mentoring, action learning and facilitated by a range of experiential and reflective practice. As with any employee engagement activities it is essential to review and evaluate the outcomes for the individual.

Summary

Attracting and retaining global talent is seen to be a strategic priority for many global organisations. Developing global competencies amongst employees is the key to ensuring that managers are able to lead teams in complex cultural contexts. Global leaders need the ability to manage relationships and themselves in cultures other than their own. They need to lead under conditions of uncertainty and be willing to embrace new challenges and cultures. In summary, global leaders need strong Perception Management, Relationship Management and Self-Management skills. Global organisations need to nurture such skills and the smart ones are already doing so.

References
