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Women in Global Leadership: Asian and African Perspectives¹

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Abstract

Although the number of women in the workforce has continued to increase, women are still underrepresented in terms of leadership roles. Some studies have suggested that women leadership is advantageous to organizations, and that women are more adept at managing multi-dimensional diversity than men. Accelerated globalization requires collaboration in groups of people characterized by multi-dimensional diversity. However, there is little empirical research on the development of this subject overall and on women as global leaders.

This paper summarizes the process on how women leaders develop a global mindset, deal with diversity, and how they are encouraged or discouraged to become global leaders from micro, mezzo and macro perspectives. Three topics are covered: 1. qualitative studies based on different cultural perspectives (Japan, Indonesia, Korea, and South Africa) and disciplines (Business, Intercultural Communication, Management, Psychology and Sociology) providing readers with micro, mezzo, and macro levels of analysis, 2. an overview of women as global

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1. This paper is based on the research presented at the symposium session titled “Global women leaders: Exploring multi-dimensional diversity” of the 11th Biennial Conference International Academy for Intercultural Research, which was held in Shanghai, China in July 2019.
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leaders in academic institutions, business organizations, and multicultural contexts, and 3. examples of different types of diversity with a focus on gender, e.g., nationality, ethnicity, religion, economic class, and educational background.

The common denominators of what encourages and discourages women from becoming global leaders were identified so that these could be applied to different contexts. Further to this, the positive aspects of women global leadership, and how they have made contributions in specific contexts, were discussed. It is hoped that a multi-level and interdisciplinary analysis of this subject will contribute in some way to promoting women global leadership.

Keywords: global leadership, women leaders, multi-dimensional, diversity

Introduction

The new world of business, with its rapid changes, increased digitalization, artificial intelligence, machine learning, complex global interactions, and networked collaboration (Hecklau, Galeitzke, Flachsa, & Kohl, 2016; Schwab, 2017) requires a change in mindset, new definitions and applications of skills, as well as, competencies in management and leadership (Nikitina & Lapina, 2017). It is the role of the leader to address changes, and it has been argued previously that since organizations and employees often work outside their home countries on global tasks, leaders need to take into consideration how to motivate their employees in this unfamiliar environment. This has been identified as a key competence in global leadership (Mendenhall et al., 2008)

During the past three decades, research literature addressing global leadership has increased significantly (e.g. Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992; Mendenhall et al., 2012). According to Reiche et al. (2017), global managers initiate significant positive changes in organizations in a situation fraught with temporal, geographical, and cultural complexity. However, the definitions of global leadership are broad, varied, and difficult to clarify since these definitions lack detailed explanations (Mendenhall et

al., 2012) and tend to be anchored in different disciplinary and cultural perspectives. It has also been pointed out that research on this subject is often limited, due to unclear definitions, and a lack of conceptual framework or reference to the different dimensions of what “global” means (Mendenhall et al., 2012). According to Alcarazand, Sugars, Nicolopoulou, and Tirado (2016), globalization is not an equivalent to cosmopolitanism, because the former is characterized by asymmetries and power, which can be aligned with a quest for justice and responsibility.

Osland et al. (2006) underlined that to be successful on the global stage, there is a need for a certain kind of a mindset, and this is echoed in Bird’s study (2017) which reviewed 200 competencies from literature published in the early 1990s. However, few leaders are trained to deal with the complexity of a global setting, as well as the challenges that come with this (Story, 2011). Different core attributes, such as curiosity, international experience, international management development, cross-cultural training, and intercultural sensitivity, as well as constructive development and psychological capital all contribute to the development of the global mindset in leadership (Story, 2011). Only a small number of studies have focused on global leadership in relation to women leaders (Adler, 1997). Research has focused increasingly on women in leadership, and women leaders in selected cultural contexts (Kubu, 2018; Mayer, Surtee & Mahadevan, 2018), but the topic of women in global leadership roles (Ngunjiri & Madsen, 2015) has been neglected. According to Adler (1997) “global leaders are those people who most strongly influence the process of global leadership” (p. 174) and women leaders have become influential since the latter 1990s. Further to this, although women global leaders are still in the minority, this does not mean that they are not influential. Bunch (1991) noted that women leaders usually have come into play on the global stage in history, when humankind is confronted with critical issues. When examining the portrait of women global leaders according to Adler (1997), diversity defines pattern and the aspirations of people, and brings change driven by vision and not by hierarchical status. It is characterized by a broad-based source of power,

the path to power and its lateral transfer, as well as a strong sense of leadership and visibility. At a women's global leadership conference in Houston in 2019 (World Oil, 2019), Shelly Zalis, CEO of *The Female Quotient* underlined that even now, women are “usually hired based on their past performance, while men are hired for their potential.” Zalis argued that global leaders should be hired based on talent and that women global leaders can “achieve great things. The key is passion” (World Oil, 2019). Recent studies on global leadership, with a focus on women global leadership profiles, found that women had stronger profiles than men, in terms of the Global Mindset Inventory, characterized by having a higher degree of passion for diversity, intercultural empathy and diplomacy (Javidan, Bullough & Dibble, 2016). Adler and Osland (2016), in a recent article, concluded that most of the researchers on leadership still revise a historical pattern of male leadership and do not recognize the contribution of women. In this study, the role of gender and work roles were studied to define leadership on a global level, and an attempt was made to identify new insights and develop an understanding of the role of women in global leadership.

Defining Global Leadership: Its Development and Impact

Today, neither people nor things are confined geographically. Both cross national borders and are interdependent on each other. This global era requires global leadership. According to Zalis (World Oil, 2019), women global leadership leverages elements from diverse cultural backgrounds. Wacker (2004) and Adler and Osland (2016) maintain that global leadership needs to be defined in a more refined manner. Women global leadership needs to be researched further, not only conceptually, but empirically to increase the depth of understanding of their contributions to “the processes and actions through which an individual influences a range of internal and external constituents from multiple national cultures and jurisdictions in a context characterized by significant levels of task and relationship complexity” (Reiche et al., 2017, p. 556). In this context, leadership must be grounded on the foundation of an understanding of the complex, diverse, and interdependent nature of globaliza-

tion. Leadership in such an environment requires particular skills and competences, including the ability to coordinate, cooperate, and integrate various demands in a harmonious manner. Global leaders must be open to listening to the opinions of others and engage them in decision making. A global leader must be ready to challenge conventions and traditions, and facilitate change. Women leadership has been less studied in comparison to male leadership. There is still controversy regarding women leadership, as well as its effectiveness in organizations despite examples that suggest otherwise (Eagly, 2007; Stoker et al., 2012; Kim & Shin, 2017). Even if there is scant literature on women leadership in a global context, it is suggested that women leadership is characterized by traits and competences that are desirable for this role (Adler & Osland, 2016) and when their voices are heard, they become more visible (Mayer & May, 2018). Through their emergence and capable traits as leaders, women can infuse a new wave and spirit into organizations. Women leadership symbolizes and substantiates hope, change, and unity in organizations (Adler & Osland, 2016; Chandler, 2011). Women leaders are characterized by more transformational, participative, and connective leadership styles than their male counterparts (Chandler, 2011, Eagly et al., 2003). These attributes result in contributions to building a community through embracing diversity (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017). The transformational, connective, and inclusive nature of women leadership is beneficial in managing people in global contexts, and guarantees the necessity and expected effectiveness of women in global leadership roles.

Cultural and Gender Bias in Global Leadership Research

The definition of global leadership should include perspectives other than Western ones. This study presents the perspectives of Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and South Africans. One shortcoming of previous studies is the scarcity of empirical research concerning global leaders in regions other than North America. In addition, most studies on women leaders come from Western nations. Adler and Osland (2016) constructed a list of women leaders in the most senior leadership positions, including president or prime minister. The first woman who appears on

this list is Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. Women leaders from India, the Philippine, Pakistan, South Korea and some other non-Western countries also appear on this list. However, the details of cultural and other contexts have not been considered in the analysis of the characteristics of women leadership. To address this shortcoming, this study underlines the observation that cultural context influences perceptions about women leaders, and cultural features must be considered in an analysis of women leadership.

There are few studies on South Africa in relation to women in leadership (Mayer, Surtee & Mahadevan, 2018). Although the number of women global leaders from South Africa is clearly on the rise, they are rarely acknowledged and there is only scant research on this subject matter (Jaga et al., 2017; Mayer & May, 2018; Mayer et al., 2018). Although there has been some effort to improve awareness of women leadership at a societal level, the management and communication style of women leaders have only begun to be appreciated in the business sectors of Asian countries such as Korea and Japan (Kim & Shin, 2017; Sueda, 2018). Women are underrepresented in terms of board members in both countries (Gladman & Lamb, 2013; Emelianova & Milhomem, 2019). Due to prevalent stereotypes of gender roles and role congruence, women leadership has not been evaluated consistently in Asian society.

In terms of the contextualization of gender intersectionality, leadership in theory and practice is still male dominated globally, and the voices of women leaders are not heard (Ngunjiri & Madsen, 2015; Adler & Osland, 2016). The objective of this study is to make a contribution to the discourse on women in global leadership from the vantage point of different cultures. For this reason, research data from Japan, Indonesia, Korea and South Africa, along with their respective cultural contexts have been specifically examined in this study, since these cultures are often marginalized in discourses of international women leadership which often focus on American case studies.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm and Design

A hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, which is orientated towards life experiences and interpreting life texts, has yielded rich and detailed descriptions of women leaders voicing their perspectives on global leadership (Creswell, 2013). The modern hermeneutics of Dilthey (2002) was used to create *verstehen* [understanding] from an in-depth perspective. To construct, analyze, and interpret the data, a self-reflective attitude, as described by Ratner (2002), was employed. This was an important step for contextualizing the data within the diverse cultural context to which they belonged. Self-reflection and a thorough intersubjective validation process by all four researchers was integral. The findings are discussed in the following sections. To provide the reader with detailed and specific insights in terms of cultural research context, research samples, as well as, data collection and analysis were summarized and noted for each context separately. At the same time, the findings in each context were identified for transferability (Jensen, 2012).

Research Samples, Data Collection and Analysis of the Four Studies

Insights were provided regarding research sample, data collection, and the data analysis process in four different research contexts. All studies are qualitative in nature and focus on women leaders. However, it should be noted that the sample size, data collection methods, and analysis are not uniform.

The Japanese research context. The life story of a former Japanese woman executive, Ms. A, was analyzed from both micro and macro perspectives. Ms. A is in her 70s and a pioneer global leader in Japan. She started her career as a secretary, was promoted to customer service supervisor, the first for any woman in Asia, and continued to get promoted until she was an executive in a global chemical company in Japan. She does not have a college degree. Six sessions of in-depth interviews were conducted from May 2014 to February 2017. A life map of her career was created from researched data, and four sessions of in-depth interviews were conducted, based on this map. The length of the inter-

view sessions ranged from 90 to 120 minutes. Interviewing the same research participant 10 times made it possible to identify: 1. the factors that encouraged her and discouraged her from reaching the highest management position, 2. how she dealt with different kinds of diversity, and 3. when and how she acquired a global mindset.

The Indonesian research context. The subjects were Indonesian health workers who were either nurses or care workers, in Japan and/or in Indonesia after working in Japan. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 61 Indonesian nurses and 79 care workers who had 10 years work experience. A total of 12 cases were examined in depth, in terms of their expressions of feelings and emotions of taking on a leadership role. Of these, eight worked for approximately 10 years in Japan and four returned to Indonesia, all of them taking on leadership roles. During their 10 year stay in Japan, six out of eight of them were married and two of them had children. Two of them were single. As for returnees to Indonesia, all of them were married, and three of them had children. Eight were Muslim, and three were Christian and Hindu respectively.

The Korean research context. Data was collected from seven women leaders at managerial levels of global multinational companies in the high technology and IT industries. All of the companies had subsidiaries overseas. A convenience sampling method was applied to collect data. The subjects were invited to an in-depth interview which lasted approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. During the interview, they were asked to talk about their mindset and style regarding leadership when they manage their employees. Most of them were in their 40s and highly educated, six of them had completed postgraduate programs. Their average tenure was 12 years and 5 months. They were all in middle level managerial positions, except one respondent who was at an assistant managerial level.

The South African research context. Women leaders from the Higher Education Resource Services South Africa (HERS-SA) were invited to participate in this study. HERS-SA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) which supports women leaders in higher education

institutions. Snowball sampling was implemented. A total of 900 women were invited to participate, of which 23 agreed voluntarily to participate in the qualitative part of this study. The ages of the subjects ranged from 32–58 years, representing a diverse group from the four race groups as defined by the South African Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, including 3 Africans (A), 5 Indians (I), 4 Colored (C) and 11 White (W) South African women (self-defined). 13 of these worked in academia (professors, heads of departments) and 10 women worked in administrative (management) positions, with 1–32 years of work experience. Data was collected through implementing 30–60 minute semi-structured interviews, conducted either in a face-to-face setting or via Skype. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The observations of one of the researchers from a higher education institution in South Africa was recorded in the field notes. Interview data was analyzed through a five-step process of content analysis: Step 1: Familiarization and immersion, Step 2: Inducing themes, Step 3: Coding, Step 4: Elaboration, and Step 5: Interpretation and checking (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelley, 2006).

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

All studies have adhered to contextual ethical considerations. Although these studies are based on a limited small sample size, have differences in the contextual application of methodology, and have different time frames and perspectives, the data underlines the similarities of women global leaders in terms of their mindsets and visions. The limitations of qualitative single studies, as well as the differences in terms of planning, conduct, analysis and reporting, must be considered. Even so, these studies have yielded some interesting insights.

Findings

The findings from all four studies have been summarized in this section. The Japanese study is followed by the Indonesian, Korean and South African studies.

Japanese Findings: The Meaning of Being Global

A series of in-depth interviews with Ms. A can be condensed into

three points. Firstly, there were both encouraging and discouraging factors on her road to a top management position at micro, mezzo, and macro levels interacting with each other in a complex manner. Although Japanese businesses started to give employment opportunities to women after the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1985, the majority of female employees were expected to be content in assisting the men. At the macro level, male dominance was pervasive. However, when examined from a mezzo level perspective, some global companies such as Ms. A's company, made inroads in Japan, and promoted women to management positions in many regions geographically. The micro level perspective, reveals that qualities such as having an inquisitive mind and having an excellent command of English resulted in her being promoted to becoming the first female customer representative in the Asia Pacific Region. This broke down the barriers in terms of not having a university degree, her gender, and lack of knowledge about the system in terms of how to become a member of the upper management.

Secondly, Ms. A worked with various levels of diversity as a director. When she served the company as a director, the systems department had already become very important in any industry worldwide. Furthermore, it should be noted that many people were laid off in the early 1990s, and the situation surrounding the Head Quarters (HQ) installing a new universal system in a Japanese branch created a very tense situation. As the system had been developed without any involvement of Japanese users, the project team found many defects in the new system, and the engineers were opposed to installing the new system in Japan. Even though, the European division had decided to use their own system, this only resulted in the HQ in the USA wanting their new system to be adapted in the Asia Pacific Region, all the more. Ms. A's task was to reconcile universalism and relativism, as well as, differences in nationalities, region, gender, and level of expertise.

Thirdly, she understood what it took to be a global leader when she went to see her former supervisor in the HQ to explain why her project team had to reject their request. She was impressed by her former supervisor's humble manner of communicating with her, and his attitude

toward her. He communicated with anyone with a sense of respect for each individual regardless of their position or title. She started to recognize that being *global* does not necessarily mean crossing geographical borders, or simply communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, and refers to a state of mind. She noted that, “Globalization resides within our mind”.

Indonesian Findings: In Search of Subjective Well-Being

Indonesian women, after arriving in Japan, started working as candidates studying for the National Examination for 3-4 years. Eight of them successfully passed the National Examination and remained in Japan. Of the eight cases who stayed in Japan for 10 years, only one became a sub-leader armed with a personal perspective of a global leader. In addition, two cases of Indonesians who failed and returned home were followed-up in this study.

The factors motivating the Indonesian woman to take a global leadership role can be summed-up as follows: She has a strong global vision to become a bridge between Japan and Indonesia to contribute to the betterment of well-being in both societies. She wants to build an Indonesian dialysis center to transfer knowledge from Japan to Indonesia.

Her experiences helped create a vision of her mission. She met Japanese patients who needed kidney dialysis. She reaffirmed that she wanted to become a specialist. Confidence in leadership experience as a preceptor was important. She was given the role of a preceptor to lead young Japanese nurses in 2014 and was promoted to the role of a sub-leader in 2017. Being Catholic, her religion also helped her to cope with difficulties in taking on leadership roles. Support from the organization in career development was also important, as a *mezzo* factor. She was given permission to enroll in a graduate program at a university, while working full-time. She had a deep appreciation of her superiors. Her good relationships with people at work helped her move forward in her career. Her overall subjective well-being (SWB) was high enough to take on the role of a global leader.

Factors that discouraged Indonesian women from taking on a leadership role, included a lack of self-efficacy in terms of being a foreigner in

a Japanese organization, negative feelings of being unmarried at their age (micro), a negative atmosphere in the workplace for an Indonesian to take on a leadership role (mezzo), as well as the pressure of high expectations coming from their parents and Islamic teachings for getting married and raising children (mezzo and macro). How proactive individuals were in taking on a leadership role, depended on their expected overall SWB, which consisted of their SWB at work and SWB in their private lives including family life.

Korean Findings: Opening and Embracing Leadership

Findings from interviews showed that Korean women leaders implemented a balanced leadership style, which included both opening and closing behaviors (Rosing, Frese, and Bausch, 2011). Building on the trust in their employee's potential and capabilities, they empowered their employees to concentrate on their tasks. Employees were encouraged to embrace the spirit of being experimental and take risks. One interviewee stated, "I try to give them autonomy when working on their tasks, so that they can identify the best solution, but if they are in trouble and their work is going wayward, I give them a suggestion." Another interviewee mentioned that "when supervising my subordinates, I try to show my trust in their ability and give them room to think and generate a new approach when working on their tasks." Because they are managing a team, women leaders monitor and control the progress of each team or person to ensure that there is a positive output overall. While balancing out such two seemingly conflicting behaviors between opening and closing behaviors, the findings from the interviews suggest that women leaders place more importance on opening and embracing leadership behaviors than closing and controlling behaviors.

Furthermore, the findings also underlined the importance of an organization's support on diversity management, in terms of cultivating women leaders and enhancing their leadership effectiveness. One interviewee stated that "my organization is supportive of gender diversity, and among practices related to this, I like the flextime policy which I benefit from the most. Due to this, I was able to balance my work and life. Such a policy makes me more committed to work and gives me

confidence . . . I generally feel satisfied working here.” Another mentioned that “I felt hopeful and motivated when I saw that there was a woman manager to be seated in an executive position, which was never imaginable 10 years ago. But things are changing now, and I aim high and wish to achieve the same in the future.” These observations suggest that diversity and particularly practices related to female advancement within organizations can enhance the psychological confidence and efficacy of women managers, which makes them hopeful and optimistic about working for these companies. More importantly, it clarifies that promoting women managers to an executive position and thus, setting a role model up for women workers in middle level positions provides motivation for them to be optimistic about their future careers, and this enhances efficiency in terms of work and taking on other leadership roles.

South African Findings: Enriching Life Spiritually Across Cultures and Gender

The South African women leaders underlined that leadership generally is connected to your career, life values at work, workplace spirituality, holistic well-being and a leadership identity that is influenced by South African categories of race and gender.

To be influential in the arena of global leadership, their “career must be embedded in their social and cultural setting and needs to go beyond it.” Women leaders place emphasis on cooperation and work ethics, as well as strategic management. This is because these factors enable them to provide advice on local and global levels, not only in relation to their own context in higher education, but also with regard to global leadership in general.

Women leaders feel that to have a global mindset and to achieve things that go beyond the norm, they must strive for values which contribute to the well-being of humanity, through showing respect, making a difference and enriching life across cultures, gender and race. The valued mindset must be positive about being successful and be based on the idea of giving your very best.

Spirituality is a key to global cooperation, since it strives for spiritual

growth and the completeness of all. Women leaders feel that being guided by a higher power not only enhances constructive cooperation on micro and mezzo levels, but also helps them connect to other leaders in the world, in a meaningful way.

Identity creation is another key to nurturing a constructive global mindset. Creating a self-worth which helps individuals to unlock the potential of the self and others, becoming self-conscious with regard to the impact they can make in the world, as well as how they can support other women to develop as players on the global stage, all contribute to this.

Finally, women leaders feel their mindset is often impacted by race and gender which create barriers, because these categories have been used to suppress them historically. However, they feel a need to transform these categories so that they can grow and become entities that are influential and impactful and create diverse workplaces that are free from racism and sexism. They also wish to help reform women leadership on a global level.

It can be summed up, that the global mindset of a woman leader is characterized by an awareness of these factors, a perception of their advantages and the disadvantages, as well as the challenges to creating more women leaders with a global mindset and make contributions to the world.

Discussion

The findings from these four studies have helped define the global mindset of women leaders, as well as the positives of women global leadership, and their contributions to the world.

The Global Mindset of Women Leaders

The global mindset of women leaders is comprised of three main components: the quality of cosmopolitanism, authenticity and spirituality in terms of their global vision for society, and a universal sense of well-being.

Women global leaders possess the quality of cosmopolitanism, which is one of the key constructs of the global mindset (Reiche et.al, 2017). In

the findings of this study, cosmopolitanism was observed to be in an emergent state in interaction with each context, rather than an attribute the leader possessed. The key characteristics of cosmopolitanism observed in this study were: reconciliation, openness, and authenticity. This was especially prominent in the Japanese subjects in this study. The two key characteristics of cosmopolitanism suggested by Levy et al. (2007) were reconciliation and openness. The women global leaders in our studies succeeded in reconciling seemingly conflicting values and needs. They managed to reconcile both global and local needs, the familiar and the foreign, and the traditional and the transformational. At the same time, cosmopolitanism requires openness, which allows leaders to make explorations into new frontiers and learn from alternatives. Authenticity and connectivity were observed in this study, in addition to the above mentioned two key characteristics. When leaders are authentic and treat others with respect, not as a professional entity but as an individual regardless of diversity such as status, gender, and ethnicity, this helps create spaces within their minds where they can think about alternative ways to handle difficult situations.

Authenticity (Breithaupt, 2015) is another component, which was observed across the board. In order to work with employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, women global leaders listen to their employees carefully and endeavour to be honest and fair to every employee to build trust. Authenticity combined with cosmopolitanism allows women leaders to engage in mindful communication.

Finally, spirituality and a global vision for societal and universal well-being is an important component in this mix. Respecting colleagues at work, regardless of diversity that may present itself in many layers, requires global leaders to go beyond having a mere sense of a superordinate human being, which transcends social or personal identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). This is clearly demonstrated in the data in this study, through these women leaders who are not only concerned with their own organizational or national benefits and well-being, but extend these concerns to all of humanity. This is in line with previous studies, even though these are few and far between (Ayman and Korabik, 2015).

Positive Attributes of Women Global Leadership

All four studies suggest that women global leaders can competently work with and manage a group of very diverse people. This outstanding quality is referred to as cultural intelligence and is defined as “an individual’s capability to function and manage effectively in a culturally diverse setting” (Ang et al., 2007, p. 337). Cultural intelligence is comprised of three dimensions: cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral. The women global leaders in this study not only acquired the knowledge of other cultures, but were also open-minded and confident about acting in culturally appropriate ways. Moreover, they proved to be functional in unfamiliar situations and were able to systematically build a repertoire on how to handle any diversity they were confronted with.

The experience of being a minority in society provides women leaders with a relevant background and experience of collective oppression. This predicament makes women leaders predestined for being a more compassionate leader with more empathy toward others. Women global leaders are able to transform their challenging and negative experiences of being a minority in society, into a positive mindset that can bring the best out of a multicultural workforce.

Women Leaders: Their Contribution to Global Leadership

In this rapidly changing world, there is so much ambiguity, and the workplace is expected to become increasingly diversified. What used to be ordinary or common may no longer be relevant tomorrow. Diversity management, which is closely related to inclusion management (Roberson, 2006), is essential. Successful women global managers, as shown in this study, contribute to cultivating an inclusive atmosphere in their respective context, with a cooperative and embracing attitude. This attitude is supported not only by the qualities of cosmopolitanism, authenticity and spirituality in terms of a global vision for societal and universal well-being, but also by intercultural sensitivity, intelligence, as well as, inclusive and positive diversity management. The underlying motivator to this, is the will to make a change and a difference in the world for a sustainable, future-oriented world in which power-relations are balanced, leaders cooperate on equal levels and where individuals

and collectives work together for overall improvement.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The objective of this article was to identify what encouraged and discouraged women to become global leaders and to identify which elements were transferable from one context to another. Focusing on the positive side of women in global leadership, their contributions in specific contexts were identified. In addition, an effort was made to make a valid contribution to this discourse from Asian and African perspectives.

In conclusion, women leaders in this study have the three desirable attributes of a global mindset. Cosmopolitanism, authenticity, and spirituality enable them to make positive contributions to the world. Furthermore, they have intercultural intelligence and an innate ability to exercise sensitivity with a positive mindset toward different cultures. They are able to manage diversity through inclusion, and focus on cooperation. The women leaders interviewed in this study were situated in various contexts in terms of their global region, national and cultural orientation, and occupation. Despite individual and collective differences within the contexts of their exposure, the findings showed that these women had common mindsets, competencies, and views, such as: 1. connectivity and relatedness with themselves, the environment, and the global future, 2. a long-term perspective, with a higher vision and goal for a global community embracing diverse demands, and 3. a transformational nature, symbolizing change and hope. Global leadership entails embracing and respecting diversity, striking a balance between the traditional behaviors of a manager versus opening behaviors, and harmonizing external challenges versus internal demands. These are all attributes characterizing women leadership.

This study suggests that women in global leadership have what it takes to be future-oriented, sustainable, and culture-sensitive global leaders, not only from Western perspective, but also from Asian and African perspectives. At the same time, other challenges and influencing factors encountered by women global leaders on macro and mezzo levels, which are often neglected in large-scale quantitative studies, were identified.

Societal support and trust in women leaders are important sources of encouragement, and serve to enhance their leadership. Such support is integral in a male dominated cultural context where stereotyped views on the role of genders is prevalent. This study underlines the importance of support at all levels, whether it is at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, to legitimize women global leadership and improve its effectiveness.

For future research, it is recommended that more studies focus on women global leadership across different cultures from macro and mezzo level contexts. This will serve to contribute to the current discourse and provide culture-specific perspectives on relevant topics. It is hoped that this will underline the positive and synergetic aspects of women global leadership and provide new perspectives on this subject.

On a practical level, the research findings in this study can contribute to increasing awareness on cultural and gender biases in organizations and societies related to women global leadership. Findings can be used to identify new insights and develop new programs, tools and synergies to develop and advance women in leadership based on culture and context specific approaches, which are not based on Western concepts. Future research and applications will definitely contribute to a more advanced and holistic understanding of women global leadership through developing a better understanding of unidentified cultural and gendered perspectives.

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