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# Cross cultural consensus: development of the universal leadership model

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Retailers have demonstrated mixed results during international expansions. However, home market saturation and the economic climate are forcing more and more retailers to look beyond their borders for revenue. A critical participant in the internationalizing effort is the expatriate manager. Unfortunately the literature is unclear and at times conflicted over how to select and prepare expatriate management for their leadership role. Therefore, this study was designed with the purpose of uncovering various factors which may lead to expatriate retail management success.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Based on the lack of unanimity in the literature this study adopted a qualitative research methodology in order to develop some consensus regarding successful expatriate leadership attributes. Grounded theory was employed utilizing extensive in-depth interviews as the primary data gathering and analysis tools.

**Findings** – A multi-dimensional construct emerged from the data requiring all dimensions to be utilized for a successful retail expatriate assignment. The construct of “Universal Leadership”, is proposed as formative, comprised of reflective sub-dimensions; Ability, Adaptability, Ambassadorship, and Awareness (Self), which we refer to as the Four A’s, for successful expatriate management assignments. Several propositions are put forward as suggestions for future research in the use of the universal leadership model for both selection and training of retail expatriate managers.

**Originality/value** – The study develops a theoretical platform for expatriate leadership success allowing for cultural and business variation. Awareness is introduced as a critical attribute in achieving success as an expatriate success. The universal leadership model proposes attributes beneficial for training and also selection which is critically under examined in the literature.

**Keywords** Leadership, Retailing, Cross-cultural, Expatriate, Internationalising, Universal

**Paper type** Research paper



International business has established a robust frame of research since its inception as a unique academic discipline 50 years ago (Seno-Alday, 2010). Comprised of four perspectives, the frame represents a meta-category of international business research; factors unique to international business, processes involved in internationalising, stakeholders affected by internationalization, business impact of internationalization (Seno-Alday, 2010). An examination of this body of international business scholarship reveals gaps requiring additional research, particularly the impact of culture within the international business context. For example, are there cultural aspects which cross geographic or ethnic boundaries (Roslin and Melewar, 2004) or does culture affect international retailers in focused ways? Lack of insight into the effects of culture is particularly acute when it comes to leadership studies.

One often cited decisive factor for retailer success in the global economy, is the effective development of “global managers” (Pucik and Saba, 1998). Global (in contrast to expatriate) managers are oriented toward global markets and comfortable exercising leadership in international cultures (Pucik and Saba, 1998). Global managers develop when retailers transfer learning from their international expansion(s) into actionable improvement. Further, global managers develop skills when they are exposed repeatedly to varying cultural, skill and demand situations (Wu and Lee, 2007). However, expatriate managers have been demonstrated to possess many of the same skills as global managers. Further, it is through their international assignments that expatriates can develop a global manager perspective (Pucik and Saba, 1998; Wu and Lee, 2007). Therefore, for this research we focus on expatriates, who are foundational to both successful internationalization and the development of global managers.

Culture in international business is often described as a fixed and monolithic element within the extant literature. Culture is often examined through a particular lens, in an attempt to develop a better understanding of the impact it will have as known and fixed element in research. The management literature is unclear about transferability, universality or global nature of leadership behavior in an international context (Dorfman *et al.*, 1997). There is limited research, which indicates that some leadership styles may function in differing international environments (Walumbwa and Lawler, 2003). However, there is extensive evidence that effective leadership approaches in one culture, may be ineffective or worse, inflict psychological damage on employees in another culture (Acar, 2010; Chen and Kao, 2009; Owens and Quinn, 2007). We examine leadership in the international context using grounded theory, through which a theoretical perspective of universal leadership emerges from data. This research investigates universal leadership characteristics, which cut across cultures and geographic boundaries. As a result this research provides insight into leadership attributes which in combination, enhance retail expatriate performance. The research focus is on retailing in an international environment, to best accommodate the methodological requirement of purposive and homogeneous sampling.

### Statement of the problem

Rapid economic growth in international markets has drawn the attention of retailers interested in developing diverse international markets (Bennett *et al.*, 2000). This is particularly true for retailers in Western economies. The top targets for retailer expansion are; China, Kuwait, India, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Chile, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Peru and Russia (Kearney, 2010). However, expansion into international

growth markets has not come easily for most retailers. Retailers entering foreign markets must focus on how managers interact with local workers and consumers to achieve business success. The fact that many retailers' international expansions have ended in failure (Burt *et al.*, 2003) provides a strong impetus for studying how the leadership skills of expatriate managers may impact the success or failure of such ventures.

Literature reviews serve to identify gaps for further investigation as well as congruity with the emergent themes. Grounded theory methodology, which we follow here, engages the literature after data gathering. This manuscript however, is organized using a traditional format, beginning with a literature review, followed by methodology, a description of the sample and review of the data. Finally, based on these results, we provide research propositions to guide future scholars in the further exploration of the findings.

### **Literature review**

#### *Internationalisation performance*

During the past two to three decades, internationalization by retailers has seen a significant increase, driven by the desire to take advantage of opportunities for additional resources. Some retailers (e.g. Wal-Mart, and Gap) originally sought out international markets to leverage inexpensive labour and materials of production, and then targeted these same markets for retail expansion (Girod and Rugman, 2005; Evans *et al.*, 2008). Economic growth in emerging markets makes them attractive alternatives to highly saturated retail marketplaces found in the West. Existing market saturation, is increasingly making internationalization the primary strategic growth channel for retailers (Vida *et al.*, 2000).

Yet opportunities in less saturated foreign markets are not always realized. Several highly successful retailers have generated only marginal performance while others have failed in their internationalization. South American markets saw the withdrawal of Home Depot and J.C. Penney from Chile. Wal-Mart, has either withdrawn or restructured in several Asian markets and Germany (Bianchi and Arnold, 2004). Internationalization failures are not limited to North American companies, as Ito-Yokado (Japan), Tengelmann (Germany), and Galeries Lafayette (France) are among the many who have expanded internationally and failed (Etgar and Rachman-Moore, 2007). Why did these retailers fail in the international marketplace when their experience, knowledge, and competitive advantages led to highly successful domestic operations?

Research investigating potential factors impacting performance in foreign markets, can be divided into two broad streams: the first examines external factors particular to the target market (e.g. economic stability, exchange rates, and political climate) (Burt *et al.*, 2003); the second examines internal (corporate) factors (e.g. managerial decision-making, organizational culture, management vision, and international market mind-set), as sources for performance or failure (Evans *et al.*, 2008). Both of these streams have one important resource in common, the expatriate manager (Hsieh *et al.*, 1999). Unfortunately for internationalising retailer, these authors note that failure rates for expatriate managers can exceed 70 percent.

#### *Expatriates*

Expatriates are generally managers who at the firms request are temporarily located in a foreign environment. This request is generally to aid in the development or

integration of a foreign business venture. The level of the integration is dependent on the goals as delineated by the parent company (Alexander and Myers, 2000). The expatriate manager will need to be prepared to be confronted with additional responsibilities while on assignment. Further, they will be challenged by unanticipated cultural situations in both the business and social environment (Bonache Pérez and Pla-Barber, 2005). Internal corporate factors which most affect the expatriate include; managerial decision-making, organizational culture, management vision, and international market mind-set (Evans *et al.*, 2008). These factors directly impact to expatriate leadership, and should be addressed through preparation and training (Wu and Ang, 2011). Expatriate literature is fairly well developed in its examination of factors impacting success through training, yet contains only scant information on selection. As a result, retailers often select candidates who are inappropriate for foreign assignment, are inadequately trained, have incomplete and/or inappropriate information (about institutional and cultural norms of the foreign market), and are ill-prepared to perform. Lacking the necessary inter-cultural leadership skills not only disrupts the effectiveness of the expatriate, but can also disrupt the effectiveness of the international operation (Bianchi and Ostale, 2006).

In order to solve complicated inter-cultural problems which occur in interdependent international business, expatriates need to develop a global attitude, knowledge, and skills (Kedia and Mukherji, 1999; Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). Inadequate skill development and cultural preparation may lead an expatriate to create problems, as opposed to solving problems when interacting with foreign nationals. This exacerbates the implementation of corporate practices and can cause inter-employee conflicts (Han *et al.*, 2002). Expatriate adaptation to lifestyle, communication, customs, and business practices in the foreign environment can retard their performance. Expatriates may lack a global perspective and harbor ethnocentric tendencies, which if shared and supported by the company can further impede performance contributing to internationalization failure (Goda, 2005). Preparation, driven by a universal leadership paradigm, can provide for effective professional development of expatriates, which is critical to the competitiveness in the global market.

### *Culture*

Culture has been defined as pertaining to the values, ideas, symbolism and their related materials which together impact human behavior (Kroeber and Parsons, 1958). The international management literature details the prominence of culture in preparation and training for expatriate assignments (Cavusgil *et al.*, 2005; Dawson *et al.*, 2006; Steenkamp *et al.*, 1999). However, the literature is less clear on how culture impacts leadership while on assignment (Morrison, 2000).

The seminal work on culture in international management is Hofstede's (1984) Cultural Dimension Model. While Hofstede's model has been critiqued as static and comprised of sweeping cultural generalizations (Gerhart, 2008; Gerhart and Fang, 2005), it is still widely used for cultural research (Fang, 2003; McSweeney, 2002; Søndergaard, 1994; Williamson, 2002). Hofstede originally conceptualized four dimensions of national culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity. Later, a fifth dimension (long term orientation) was added to the model (Hofstede and Hofstede, 1997). Leadership research based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions has had as its basis, an expectation that abilities and skills will vary

by culture (Gerstner and Day, 1994). Variation, based on fixed cultural dimensions, creates a leadership orientation which is predictable (Gerstner and Day, 1994). This predictability therefore forms a foundation for training and selection of potential expatriates, to enhance performance during their assignment (Gerstner and Day, 1994).

Insensitivity to culture by expatriate managers however, will have a negative impact on international retail performance (Owens and Quinn, 2007). The ability of an expatriate to understand and to integrate with a culture reflects their cultural intelligence (CQ) (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004). Cultural intelligence measures an individual's cognitive, physical (actionable), and emotional understanding of a culture (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004). The holistic approach to culture offered in CQ as opposed to Hofstede's static approach, is seen as more successful in developing leaders who can function in culturally diverse environments (Alon and Higgins, 2005). Additionally, significant alliances between personality and CQ have been proposed especially in multi-cultural environments (Ang *et al.*, 2006).

#### *Personality*

The Big 5 model currently prevails in psychological personality trait theory (Ewen, 2013). The Big 5 model is comprised of five personality factors; agreeableness, extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience and neuroticism have been proposed to represent this stability (Goldberg, 1990). Following in the Hofstede tradition, the personality dimensions within the model are considered stable over the life of the individual (McCrae and Costa, 2003). Further it has been suggested that linking CQ and Big 5 in the international context can be predictive of performance (Ang *et al.*, 2006). The resulting positive linkages are expressed as follows: metacognitive (CQ) with conscientiousness (Big 5); behavioral (CQ) with agreeableness and emotional stability (Big 5); motivational and behavioral (CQ) with extraversion (Big 5); metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral (CQ) with openness to experience (Ang *et al.*, 2006). More specifically, it has been posited that the combination of CQ and the Big 5 are predictive of leadership performance in the international environment (Hirschfeld *et al.*, 2008; Judge *et al.*, 1999; Alon and Higgins, 2005).

However, research has also indicated that the Big 5 and trait theory in general, are too general to be predictive (Ewen, 2013). Additionally, research has demonstrated that generalized personality orientations are not stable across varying situations (Mischel and Peake, 1982; Barrick and Mount, 1993). Not surprisingly therefore, variability in personality has been demonstrated when individuals are subjected to cultural changes (Shao and Webber, 2006). As opportunities, tasks and challenges alter in the foreign environment, personality traits can be leveraged differentially making them less than reliable as indicators of leadership performance (Baron and Markman, 2005). Therefore, both the culture and personality literature discount universality in the international context. Expatriates would require a fit reassessment of their personality traits and abilities to suit the host nation's culture. These factors therefore make the use of personality traits unlikely to serve as a foundation for expatriate success in either selection or training.

#### *Universal leadership*

Leadership has been described as the ability to persuade individuals to perform certain tasks or adopt group goals absent the overwhelming power to command the act

(Hogan *et al.*, 1994). Effectiveness in leadership has been described as an optimized combination of leader-member relations, task structure and leader position power (Fiedler and Chemers, 1967). However, it is also acknowledged that external situational elements, motivation of the group and members can all impact the effectiveness of leadership (Fiedler and Chemers, 1967). Clearly by that acknowledgement many factors involved with internationalization and the introduction of the expatriate would qualify as elements which would impact effectiveness. As a result, the past 60 years of management literature on “leadership” has generated no consensus on the components of effective leadership (Hurt and Homan, 2008).

Organizations are quick to point out the importance and need of leadership skills for their managers but are less quick to define those skills. A few scholars have made initial attempts to uncover commonalities in leadership skills. For example, Dorfman *et al.* (1997) empirically test six leadership behaviors in a multi-cultural context and determine three to be common: leader supportiveness, contingent reward, and charismatic. Using the US Department of Labor’s Occupational Information Network (O\*NET), Hurt and Homan (2008) identify four leadership dimensions that they find to be universal: consideration, task-orientation, visionary, and problem solving. Their research however is based entirely on a sample of US business people operating within the US business environment. The literature in general on leadership is still in search of a fundamental agreement on how to identify leadership (Dries and Pepermans, 2012). Studies related to leadership competencies in an international context describe several factors as contributing to leadership effectiveness: self-confidence, personal strength, leadership, teamwork, planning, organization, analytical skills, problem solving, and human relations (Commins and Preston, 1997). For the retail industry specifically, similar factors have been uncovered including personal values, organizational commitment and personal demographic characteristics, among others (Shim *et al.*, 2002). Expatriate managers need the appropriate competencies and skills to adapt to a new environment and effectively lead. While Dorfman *et al.* (1997) and Hurt and Homan (2008) may have uncovered some attributes which are “universally” suited to a US business context, there exists as yet no research which suggests that leadership attributes are universal in a cross-cultural setting. Accordingly, this research focuses on the international context for universal leadership as a key component of expatriate effectiveness and success.

### Methodology

The lack of depth and consensus in the expatriate training and utilization literature suggest that a qualitative research methodology would be appropriate for research into expatriate manager leadership (Taras *et al.*, 2009). Examining cultural context using qualitative methodologies has been suggested for the development of international business tools and education (Seno-Alday, 2010). Qualitative methods have also been cited as uniquely qualified in building theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The current theory-building research examines leadership in the international business environment. In particular, the attributes and behaviors, which may increase expatriate effectiveness across cultures. The lack of consensus in the literature indicates that the emergent process of grounded theory would be most appropriate (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Further, we will leverage Hofstede’s cultural dimensions that pertain to countries and regions associated with this research.

There is little in the extant literature which would point to the existence of a universal leadership construct, and indeed, Hofstede's work would support a proposition that leadership would not be universal. Reviewing the results of our empirical research *vis-à-vis* the Hofstede dimensions, adds further depth to our contribution to the literature and industry. We provide in table format, cultural dimension scores for 31 countries; descriptive statistics for the five dimensions; tests of mean differences across countries; and finally tests of mean differences within regions.

#### *Sample and interviews*

Grounded theory specifies the use of theoretical sampling to identify key informants, which was used here. To begin the research, the academics were interviewed to obtain sufficient information about expatriates including; the current international business climate, selection and training practices, and competencies related to expatriate performance. A variety of additional topics were discussed to assist in the initial development of questions for use in the participant interviews. The academics also supplied valuable contact information with international retailers for use in participant identification. The researchers maintain extensive contacts in the retail industry. Firms were polled to determine the extent of their expatriate use in their international businesses and their willingness to participate in the study. Participants with valuable in-depth knowledge of leadership in an expatriate environment were identified. Firms were asked to identify individuals whose expatriate experience was defined as successful. Further, the firms supplied each individual's expertise in international assignments, and identified expatriates currently on assignment or who had just recently completed one. From this information the initial list of possible participants was generated. From that list participants were selected to represent a variety of cultural backgrounds, with expatriate assignments outside of the US. Parent companies (e.g. the one for who the expatriate worked) were headquartered both in and outside of the US. The participant pool therefore had direct experience with successful expatriate leadership, from a variety of cultural and business perspectives. They also provided diverse personal backgrounds and assignment locations (see Table I). Theoretical sampling facilitates inductive reasoning drawing on the experiences of the participant from which theory can emerge (Glaser, 1978).

For expatriates all tasks become increasingly complex in an international context, even simple domestic challenges. Thus, the competencies required of international managers differ from those of domestic managers (Dawson, 2007). Furthermore, internationalization research indicates that some industries, due to the variety of tasks and pace, present unique opportunities and challenges for successful strategy implementation (Fraser and Zarkada-Fraser, 2000). Retail is one of those industries which combine a fast pace, utilizing a variety of skills, with complex interactions between both foreign and domestic associates. Therefore, retail was selected as the industry which would best fulfill the requirements of this investigation. Furthermore, from an industry perspective, international sales revenue is rapidly growing serving to drive its importance to retailers (Commins and Preston, 1997, Vida *et al.*, 2000).

Sample homogeneity in theory development is desirable to limit variation from industry specific factors (Calder *et al.*, 1981). It also reduces spurious conclusions due to unexplained covariance in the sample (Calder *et al.*, 1981). The sample industry retailing is homogeneous, while participant heritage and expatriate assignments were



Participant <sup>a</sup>	Industry	International responsibility	Industry assignment	International experience	Geographic region
Audrey	Education	Retail and Marketing Professor	International retailing	Eastern Europe	Eastern Europe
Barbara	Education	Retail and Marketing Professor	International retailing	Japan, Korea, China	Asia
Dawson	Retail	Merchant	Department store	Canada	North America
Debrinna	Retail	Leadership Development Management	Electronics specialty	Turkey, China, Mexico, Canada	Asia, Latin America
Elisandro	Hospitality	Management	Resort property	Chile	Latin America
Giriraj	Retail	Management	Discount store	India	Asia
Hyun-jae	Education	Retail and Marketing Professor	International retailing	Japan, Korea, China	Asia
Jagdish	Restaurant	Executive	Ethnic specialty	Europe, Asia, Middle East, India	Europe, Asia, MENA <sup>b</sup>
Langston	Education	Retail and Marketing Professor	International retailing	Europe, ASEAN <sup>c</sup> Region	Europe, Asia
Linda	Education	Retail and Marketing Professor	International retailing	Eastern Europe	Eastern Europe
Madhavi	Retail	Management	Building supply	Canada	North America
Nigel	Education	Retail and Marketing Professor	International retailing	South America and Eastern Europe	Latin America, Eastern Europe
Ritchie	Restaurant	Executive	Casual dining	Central and South America, Canada, Pacific Rim, Iceland	Latin America, Asia, Europe
Roberto	Retail	Executive	Apparel/footwear specialty	Germany, Spain, The UK, Sri Lanka, China	Europe, Asia
Sarah	Retail	Management	Warehouse club	Canada	North America
Serrefina	Retail	Management Development	Footwear specialty	Italy, South America, Pakistan, Africa	Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa
Shawn	Retail	Merchant	Department store	Canada	North America
Steve	Retail	Operations	Discount store	Japan Asia	North America
Susan	Retail	Human Resources	Department store	Japan, Germany, The UK	Europe
Wilkinson	Education	Retail and Marketing Professor	International retailing	Central and South America	Latin America
William	Retail	Management	Discount store	The UK	Europe

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>All participant names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality; <sup>b</sup>MENA: 20 Member Nations of the Middle East and North Africa (World Bank, 2012); <sup>c</sup>ASEAN: ten Member Nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEANSEC.ORG, 2012)

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**Table I.**  
Research participant  
matrix

heterogeneous. Spanning over 30 nations between residence and assignment (see Table II) the sample provides internal as well as external validity support through sufficient global reach enhancing the generalizability of the results.

Grounded theory allows for a variety of methods through which data can be obtained to represent the phenomenon. Data can be sourced from; artifacts, focus groups, surveys, literature review, observation, coding, memo-ing, and interviews. In-depth interviews with participants were used as the primary data gathering tool because of the rich detail they generate (Glaser, 1978). Interviews were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions designed to generate detailed descriptions of experiences, and lasted approximately one hour. While each interview had the same initial structure, additional topics were also explored based on insights gleaned from prior participants (Morrison *et al.*, 2002). The interviews where possible were obtained face to face with expatriates on assignment in their assignment location. Those participants who had completed their assignment, where possible were interviewed face to face as well. A few of the remaining interviews could not be accommodated face to face and were conducted over the phone. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The international experiences of expatriates and academics can be seen in Table III. Participants included 15 retail executives and six international retailing academic scholars. Participant firms were headquartered in the US, the UK, and Canada. Combined, the practitioner and academic experience covers seven of the top ten nations for retail development (Kearney, 2010), and the BRIC countries; Brazil, Russia, India, China. The broad international practitioner and academic experiences reflected in this

Participant <sup>a</sup>	Home nation
Audrey	The USA
Barbara	The USA
Daniel	The USA
Dawson	The USA
Debrianna	The USA
Elisandro	Chile
Giriraj	India
Hyun-Jae	South Korea
Jagdish	India
Langston	The UK
Linda	The USA
Madhavi	India
Nigel	The UK
Ritchie	The USA
Roberto	Spain
Sarah	The USA
Serefina	Italy
Shawn	The USA
Steven	The USA
Susan	The USA
Wilkinson	The USA
William	The USA

**Table II.**

Participant home nation

**Note:** <sup>a</sup>Participant name is a pseudonym

sample provide a substantial cross-cultural foundation for use in investigating the universal leadership paradigm.

*Coding*

The gathered data were put through a series of rigorous coding methods. In grounded theory there are three types of coding; open, axial and selective. Coding is an iterative process employing constant comparison, between the data and the relevant literature to guide further insight. Researchers may be required to gather additional, or recode, data for appropriate categories. Themes and theory emerge from the data through the process of coding and constant comparison (Glaser, 1998). Constant comparison was conducted between interviews and coding categories, to search for commonalities (Strauss, 1987). The literature was consulted throughout the interview process, in an effort to identify gaps for further exploration, as well as support for emerging themes.

Through constant comparison a determination of saturation can be made. Saturation indicates no significant new information is forthcoming from additional interviews, and the data continue to confirm existing concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The research team determined that theoretical saturation was achieved for both industry and academic key informants in the process of the current study.

*Open coding*, the initial step, is designed to identify as many themes as possible from the data. During open coding there are no restrictions on data use; thus datum is allowed to reside in multiple code categories (Glaser, 1978). Inclusion in multiple code categories allows the researcher to develop the greatest understanding of the data. In this coding phase over 200 individual code categories are identified.

*Axial coding* accumulates data into broader-meaning code categories. Through axial coding a level of abstraction is generated moving away from the raw data. Inductive reasoning during this phase helps to identify emergent themes. Axial coding develops a more tightly bound set of themes, represented here by 60 axial code categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

*Selective coding*, the final step, results in the development of central coding categories. The central code categories represent all of the main coding categories and become the focal point of the research. Using inductive and deductive reasoning, the raw data are abstracted to more theoretical levels, from which constructs emerge (Glaser, 1978). Through the selective coding process, a multi-dimensional universal leadership construct emerged. Comprised of four sub-dimensions; Ability, Adaptability, Ambassadorship and Awareness (self), which we refer to as the “Four As.”

Asia	Eastern Europe	Europe	Latin America	MENA	North America
China	Hungary	France	Argentina	Dubai	Canada
Hong Kong	Poland	Germany	Brazil	Egypt	USA
India	Romania	Greece	Chile	Jordan	
Japan	Russia	Iceland	Costa Rica	Kuwait	
Pakistan	Ukraine	Italy	Honduras	Saudi Arabia	
South Korea		Spain	Mexico		
Sri Lanka		The UK			

**Table III.**  
International experience  
nations

### Universal leadership

Questions regarding expatriate leadership began at the general level, inquiring about “skills needed to be successful”. Participants consistently linked leadership to themes (e.g. relationship, capability, language, conduct, ethics, and principles), as opposed to skills (e.g. complex problem solving, goal setting, social judgment, and creative thinking) which are the hallmark of leadership literature (Mumford *et al.*, 2000). What emerged was attribute connectivity; that is, these were not individual leadership attributes but an interrelated and mutually supportive attribute set. Many of the contextual themes represented in the data could be grouped under common functional themes (e.g. culture, diversity, flexibility, communication, open minded, and change management) describing the expatriates’ fit and function during the foreign assignment. Further analysis with the remaining descriptors resulted in more refined groupings under common contextual themes. Four themes representing sub-constructs emerged reflective of the multi-dimensionality of Universal Leadership: Ability, Adaptability, Ambassadorship and Awareness (self).

The combination of these sub-constructs, with no single construct superior to another, is necessary to be an effective expatriate leader. Further, no sense of hierarchy emerged from the data among the constructs. These factors were discussed by participants as needing to work in combination, but varying in priority and application according to the situation. The skills that relate to the four factors are summarized with a brief contextual note using *in vivo* terminology of the participants in Tables IV and V. To illustrate the four emergent Universal Leadership sub-constructs, data from the interviews are provided.

#### *Ability*

Ability is discussed by the participants as business acumen. Examples include, fulfilling job requirements, and/or leveraging the “system” to generate support. Ability allows international colleagues to view the expatriate as capable, which is important to both expatriate and corporate success. Ability engenders a sense of trust in the expatriate, enhancing working relationships with the expatriate manager. Ability was described using a variety of contextual descriptors:

Giriraj (*India*): Capable: “I look for people who have proven themselves . . .”.

William (*Germany*): Process: “Be reflective in your decision making; analyze the situation before taking action”.

Steve (*Japan*): Team Builder: “Demonstrate that you are working as a team . . .”.

Dawson (*Canada*): Professional: “Work hard, be informed and have strong leadership”.

The academic data are supportive of the necessary inclusion of ability in the model. This can be seen in the data which follows as an example:

Langston (*The UK*): “. . . buying and negotiating skills, numerical competency, and strategy are foundational to the expatriate . . .”.

Hyun-Jae (*South Korea*): “Expatriates at a minimum must be able to manage the day to day”.

Therefore, it is clear that a successful expatriate must at least have the foundational knowledge to perform the job tasks to which they would be assigned. This therefore

	Context	Cross cultural consensus
<i>Ability</i>		
Economics	Understand business	
Good listener	Understand what is being said not just what is said	
Hard work	Type A	
Language	Able to understand what is being said not just what is said	
Mentor	Willing to bring others along	
Organization	Ability to be prepared	
Performance	Proven past performance	
Goal setting	Establish motivate toward the goal	
Process	Analyze before action	
Proven	Shown success in a variety of positions	
Resilience	Capable of learning from mistakes not repeating	
Respected	Treat with and engender	
Servant leader	Put people and company first	
Social skills	Ability to engage with others	
Team builder	Works with not has other work for	
<i>Adaptability</i>		
Flexibility	Work and social	
Culture	Foreign country	
Culture	Local	
Diversity	Market	
Diversity	Company	
Change mgt	Accept and lead	
Integrate	Not become	
Open minded	Willing to listen	
Communication	Understand what is being said not just what is said	
Language	Willing to learn	
<i>Ambassadorship</i>		
Communication	Clear and concise	
Communication	Greet and appreciate	
Culture	Corporate	
Corporate	Culturally similar to the company can lead the culture by doing	
Relationship	Bridge between cultures and connect	
Inspiration	Provide vision for the goal	
Values	Timeless	
Professional	Represent the company spirit and attitude	
<i>Awareness (self)</i>		
Capable	Can do attitude	
Communication	Clarity	
Conduct	Professional	
Corporate	Alignment	
Culture	Personal values mesh with corporate	
Entrepreneurial	Independent and risk	
Ethical	Core principles	
Global perspective	Willingness to learn	
Independent	Needs little hands on management	
Passionate	Care about company and others	
Principles	Enduring	
Resilience	Capable of recovery from set back	
Self testing	Willing to push for self-improvement	
Values	Able to live by your values regardless of culture	
Understand self	Self-aware	

**Table V.**  
Four A's referenced

Four "A's"	
Ability	<i>Nigel's reference</i>
Adaptability	Manage day to day
Ambassadorship	Communication skills
Awareness (self)	Ability to identify challenges
	Soft skills [...] personal skills
	<i>Dorfman et al. (1997)</i>
Ability	Leader supportiveness
Adaptability	Charismatic
Ambassadorship	Contingent reward
Awareness (self)	-
	<i>Hurt and Homan (2008)</i>
Ability	Task orientation
Adaptability	Problem solving
Ambassadorship	Visionary
Awareness (self)	Consideration

helps determine a selection guideline and/or a training standard which could be applied to all potential expatriates.

*Adaptability*

Adaptability was discussed by the participants in the form of two distinct perspectives. One perspective related to their personal life and the ability to adjust to a variety of different cultural milieu. The second perspective related to the ability to make and accept changes within the company, the business environment and the people around the expatriate. For example:

Serefina (*Italy*): "Be open to suggestions made from people living in the country".

Dawson (*Canada*): "Understand why they do and what they don't do".

William (*Germany*): "Be open-minded, make it a family decision; try a typical grocery shop...".

The duality in the nature of adaptability toward personal and professional can be seen in the data gathered from the academic participants as well. An example of this data can be see here:

Wilkinson (*The USA*): "... balancing communication skills is required as they are not equivalent [...] different demands are placed in the office environment and the social and home environment...".

Nigel (*The UK*): "Expatriate assignments are measurably more complex. The expatriate inhabits two worlds, work and home. In this context, each to varying degrees is foreign".

Adaptability therefore reflects not only the ability to adjust to a new cultural reality but the ability to make continual adjustments. Expatriates work in an environment where to some extent they are accommodated out of deference resulting in assistance with cultural and language differences. However, in their home and/or social environment they can anticipate less assistance and their families even less. Therefore the comfort and skill which a potential candidate can demonstrate toward adaptability

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offers another tool beneficial in the selection of potential candidates. The ability to learn various cultural elements which can ease the transition, identify another aspect of training which could be offered to potential candidates.

### *Ambassadorship*

Ambassadorship describes the ability to work within the native culture, while representing the goals of the parent corporation. Ambassadorship is about communicating the vision for the assignment, while engendering local support for corporate expectations. This type of communication is strongly impacted by corporate culture, especially cultures which highly rank people-related principles (Sherwood, 1990). Ambassadorship may require leveraging corporate for support to make necessary alterations in assignment goals. This concept arose frequently in an implicit as well as explicit manner:

Madhavi (*India*): "I try to make people understand the culture of the (their) country also reflects on their own culture".

William (*Germany*): "I look for [...] good ambassadors".

Ambassadorship was also alluded to in the academic data, albeit in a slightly less direct way. The industry participants describe ambassadorship directly, positively and from a beneficial perspective. The academics were more oblique in their reference and more cautionary as seen here:

Langston (*The UK*): "Expatriates must be sensitive as to how to use cultural differences".

Hyun-Jae (*South Korea*): "The ability to identify cultural challenges and minimize their impact is essential".

Ambassadorship is a central success element for the expatriate. Ambassadorship provides a bridge between the goals and culture of the host company and corporate. Success can only be achieved when both sides can see the same vision. Any attempt to force an unwelcome change in the host country environment can be met with frustration and often negative consequences (Dupuis and Prime, 1996). Therefore, developing selection processes for expatriates that seek individuals who can present desired developments in culturally acceptable terms would benefit internationalising firms. Further this is a skill that could be developed (Mullett *et al.*, 2004) which identifies another area for training.

### *Awareness (self)*

An attribute which is not represented in the literature emerged, awareness (self), which is a sense of personal understanding. Awareness (self) is a gauge of the individual rather than the assignment. The extant leadership literature is silent on awareness as a key attribute for success. This is an intrinsic attribute, representing a firm and unshakeable sense of one's abilities, values and ethics. In order to be effective, these values and ethics should align with those of the parent company, and be sufficient to achieve the assignment goals. The awareness (self) is comprised of an internal check of the strength of the other three attributes and an external ability to exude confidence to his team. Together they indicate an ability to achieve success during the assignment. This attribute was described:

Roberto (*Spain*): "Need to [...] have ethics".

Elisandro (*Chile*): "Have strong core values, have ethics".

Madhavi (*India*): "Don't change to be Canadian, take your positive strengths and layer it into the new culture".

This construct was only obliquely described in the academic data. This is to be expected as it is not described in other international research. The data referred to awareness in oblique terms associated with activities as seen here:

Langston (*The UK*): "... willingness to move...".

Barbara (*The USA*): "be aware of their soft skills [...] personal skills...".

Awareness (self) is a tool which can offer tremendous advantages to companies seeking to increase expatriate success. From a selection standpoint it offers an internal orientation of candidates toward comfort with themselves. An individual lacking a clear sense of what is important to them and/or lack confidence in the transition would not be a good candidate. This trait does not lend itself to training therefore it becomes an essential criteria on which to base expatriate selection which is currently absent from the selection process.

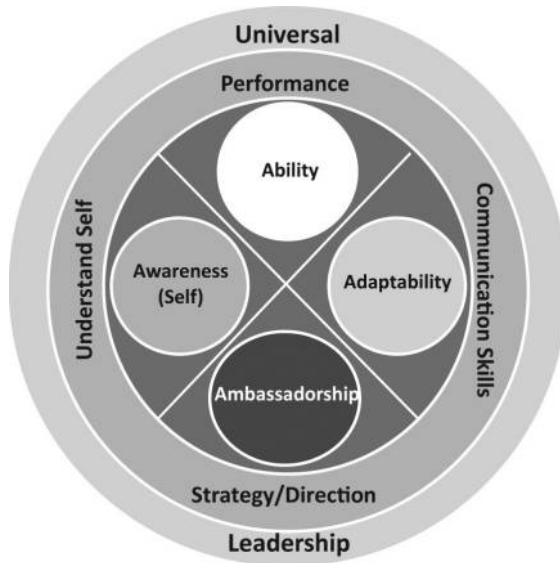
The review of the academic literature focuses clearly on the identification of competencies (skill sets) for successful expatriate assignments (Furuya *et al.*, 2009; Han *et al.*, 2002; Haslberger, 2005; Morgan *et al.*, 2004). Many of the competencies described in the literature are closely related to the attributes found in universal leadership. However, different from the present study, the interconnected nature of the attributes is not readily apparent. Lacking in the literature is the holistic relationship central to universal leadership, which exists among the attributes. The lack of strong and supportive connections among these attributes found in the extant literature is reflective of the absence of a unified model of cross-cultural or universal leadership.

### Results and propositions

Through this research, universal leadership is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct comprised of the Four A's. A schema is provided to more clearly represent the interrelation of the four dimensions. Each attribute is depicted in a relationship which can be represented as particularly relevant to the attribute: ability to performance; adaptability to communication skills; ambassadorship to strategy and direction; and awareness (self) to understanding of self. The conceptual model of Universal Leadership can be found in Figure 1.

These findings are unique from the present literature, where little evidence points to universal leadership. At present the literature on international leadership both incomplete and to an extent conflicting (Dorfman *et al.*, 1997, Hurt and Homan, 2008). This study provides further clarity in the expatriate leadership literature, by developing a model for universal leadership through the use of a grounded theoretic approach. Using the extant literature in the analysis phase, the results should have revealed a series of leadership attributes, related to world regions (e.g. Latin America vs Eastern Europe), and in some cases to specific nations (e.g. Brazil, Poland). The cross-cultural literature, much of it based on Hofstede's (1984) seminal work on cultural dimensions, formed the foundation for that expectation. This is not unexpected, as this particular lens in international business toward culture has changed little in the past 30 years (Leung *et al.*, 2005). Thus to further examine the findings, the Hofstede





**Figure 1.**  
Universal leadership  
model

dimensions were revisited for the 32 countries represented in this research (see Table VI). The variation among these cultural dimensions, across countries as well as within the various regions in our sample, was tested for significance. These tests were performed using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Analyses of the scores reveal that indeed there is a statistically significant difference between nations among the five dimensions (see Table VII). The countries are significantly different, and a *t*-test of the means reveals a statistically significant at  $p < 0.000$  (see Table VIII). In other words, for the five dimensions which are in much of the international expatriate research no cultural similarities are found (Leung *et al.*, 2005).

We then examined the dimensions across five of the six regions in the study (MENA is excluded as Hofstede assigns all countries the same score). Additionally, only the four original dimensions are analyzed, leaving out LTO due to the limited number of countries for which that score is provided (Hofstede and Hofstede, 1997). Examining regional groupings of cultural dimensions is a common practice established by Hofstede (1984). ANOVA revealed results similar to those across individual countries. That is, there were significant differences in all dimensions within each region at the  $p < 0.05$  level, and for all but one dimension/region (MAS in North America) at the  $p < 0.10$  level (see Table IX). Thus we can say clearly that the expectation of leadership attributes varying across nations and within regions is reasonable.

The significance of the statistical variation found in the data, fostered expectations that our data would generate differing leadership attributes predicated on the location of the expatriate assignment and or the expatriates native country. However, our data coalesced around common success attributes which together formed the emergent theme of universal leadership. Thus, although the existing literature would support a different conclusion, we put forward propositions based on the data emergent from the depth interviews.

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO
Argentina	49	46	56	86	N/A
Brazil	69	38	49	76	65
Canada	38	80	50	45	20
Chile	63	23	28	86	N/A
China	80	20	66	40	118
Costa Rica	35	15	21	86	N/A
Dubai <sup>a</sup>	80	38	52	68	N/A
Egypt <sup>a</sup>	80	38	52	68	N/A
France	68	71	43	86	N/A
Germany	35	67	66	65	31
Greece	60	35	57	112	N/A
Honduras <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hong Kong	68	25	57	29	96
Hungary	46	55	88	82	N/A
Iceland <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
India	77	48	56	40	61
Japan	54	46	95	92	80
Jordan <sup>a</sup>	80	38	52	68	N/A
Kuwait <sup>a</sup>	80	38	52	68	N/A
Mexico	81	30	69	82	N/A
Pakistan	55	70	14	50	N/A
Poland	51	58	61	75	34
Romania <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Russia	95	50	40	90	N/A
Saudi Arabia <sup>a</sup>	80	38	52	68	N/A
South Korea	60	18	39	85	75
Spain	57	51	42	86	N/A
Sri Lanka <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ukraine <sup>b</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The UK	35	89	66	35	25
The USA	40	91	62	46	29

**Table VI.**  
Hofstede cultural  
dimension scores

**Notes:** Power Distance (PDI); Individualism (IDV); Masculinity (MAS); Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI); Long Term Orientation (LTO); <sup>a</sup>The Arab World (Hofstede designation) all nations same score; <sup>b</sup>Hofstede has yet to score (N/A)

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Variance
PDI	22	60	35	95	58.9091	17.14618	293.991
IDV	22	76	15	91	48.3636	22.58855	510.242
MAS	22	81	14	95	53.5000	19.17774	367.786
UAI	22	83	29	112	70.0909	22.71754	516.087
LTO	11	98	20	118	57.6364	32.48468	1055.255

**Table VII.**  
Statistical analysis of the  
Hofstede dimensions

### *Propositions*

The first proposition seeks to further examine the inclusive nature of universal leadership. The existence of this construct was actually alluded to by one industry participant who sourced candidates for international opportunities:

Cross cultural  
consensus

Test value = 0						
	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (two-tailed)	Mean difference	95 percent confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
PDI	16.115	21	0.000	58.90909	51.3069	66.5113
IDV	10.043	21	0.000	48.36364	38.3484	58.3788
MAS	13.085	21	0.000	53.50000	44.9971	62.0029
UAI	14.471	21	0.000	70.09091	60.0185	80.1633
LTO	5.885	10	0.000	57.63636	35.8129	79.4599

**Table VIII.**  
Means test all countries

Test value = 0							
		<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (two-tailed)	Mean difference	95 percent confidence interval of the difference	
						Lower	Upper
Asia	PDI	14.429	5	0.000	65.66667	53.9681	77.3652
	IDV	4.543	5	0.006	37.83333	16.4247	59.242
	MAS	4.933	5	0.004	54.5	26.1012	82.8988
	UAI	5.249	5	0.003	56	28.5778	83.4222
Eastern Europe	PDI	4.111	2	0.054	64	-2.9796	130.9796
	IDV	23.286	2	0.002	54.33333	44.2938	64.3729
	MAS	4.535	2	0.045	63	3.2256	122.7744
	UAI	19	2	0.003	82.33333	63.6885	100.9782
Europe	PDI	7.528	4	0.002	51	32.1897	69.8103
	IDV	6.824	4	0.002	62.6	37.1292	88.0708
	MAS	10.367	4	0.000	54.8	40.1242	69.4758
	UAI	5.984	4	0.004	76.8	41.164	112.436
Latin America	PDI	7.439	4	0.002	59.4	37.2301	81.5699
	IDV	5.582	4	0.005	30.4	15.2792	45.5208
	MAS	5.022	4	0.007	44.6	19.9443	69.2557
	UAI	42.458	4	0.000	83.2	77.7593	88.6407
North America	PDI	39	1	0.016	39	26.2938	51.7062
	IDV	15.545	1	0.041	85.5	15.6159	155.3841
	MAS	9.333	1	0.068	56	-20.2372	132.2372
	UAI	91	1	0.007	45.5	39.1469	51.8531

**Note:** <sup>a</sup>MENA is not represented as Hofstede has only a single score for each factor therefore reducing variability to 1.0

**Table IX.**  
Means test by region<sup>a</sup>

William (*Germany*): "What I look for are people who have proven themselves (*ability*), can build on expertise (*awareness*), understand the culture of people (*adaptability*), and are good ambassadors (*ambassadorship*)" *Items in parentheses added.*

Based on these findings, we propose that:

- PI.* Universal leadership is a formative construct which requires the application of all four factors of universal leadership (Adaptability, Ability, Ambassadorship and Awareness).

The factors of universal leadership lack hierarchy, which allows the model to adapt for effectiveness. The personality, knowledge and skill level of the expatriate permit the four factors to be leveraged differentially in support of leadership. As the needs of the expatriate environment change, factor emphasis can be reallocated, to continue to support effective leadership. Therefore we propose that:

- P2.* Universal leadership exhibits no hierarchy among the four factors. The universal leadership model as discussed in the prior proposition is all inclusive but flexible in its application. This allows the elements within the model to be applied at differing strengths to better respond to the shifting demands the expatriate will face during an assignment.

This flexibility allows for the moderating affect that cultural norms can impose during an expatriate assignment. As discussed in the literature, these cultural moderators can occur at a variety of levels throughout an expatriate assignment. Therefore it is proposed:

- P3a.* Universal leadership attribute application can be moderated by the assignment nation's business cultural norms.
- P3b.* Universal leadership attribute application can be moderated by the assignment company's cultural norms.
- P3c.* Universal leadership attribute application can be moderated by the assignment company's departmental cultural norms.
- P3d.* Universal leadership attribute application can be moderated by the assignment nation's social cultural norms.

The literature discusses personality as ostensibly stable, but may be subject to variation when influenced by situational factors similar to varying cultural norms (Goldberg, 1990). Cultural norms can vary at national, business, social, corporate levels, and departmental levels. The flexibility provided in the universal leadership model offers the ability to differentially leverage factors situationally. Through the expatriate's personality, a more effective leadership style can develop as they acculturate to new environments. Therefore we propose:

- P4a.* Universal leadership attribute application can be moderated by the personality dimensions of the expatriate.
- P4b.* Universal leadership attribute application can be further moderated by changes to expatriate personality dimensions due to shifting environmental situations.

The fifth proposition indicates that potential expatriates need to possess the intrinsic attributes related to universal leadership. The data indicate the need to truly understand one's self before accepting an international assignment, resulting in the factor of Awareness (Self). The ideas discussed related to personal values, integrity and ethics, as can be seen in these quotes which follow:

Giriraj (*Canada*): "... leadership, they are someone who can make a difference, have ethics".

Madhavi (*India*): "... must possess personal leadership, be self-aware and resilient".

These are intrinsic attributes of leadership fundamental to the individual. These internal measures (along with ambassadorship and adaptability) could serve as selection criteria to identify suitable candidates for international assignment. The intrinsic nature of these elements, unlike extrinsic elements makes them not well suited to training. Therefore, screening for the presence of the intrinsic elements (e.g. awareness of self) would provide a threshold candidates would need to meet for inclusion as an expatriate candidate. Therefore, we propose that:

- P5.* Intrinsic elements related to the four attributes of universal leadership can serve as a selection tool.

Finally, many elements within the model are extrinsic in their application. As such, they provide valuable guidelines for use in training. When pressed into service, these elements which are more than simple skills, could serve as the foundation for how to best prepare candidates for their international assignment. As an example, elements of ambassadorship such as message clarity being expressed in culturally accepted terminology could be a focal training point. Therefore, we further propose that:

- P6.* Complex extrinsic skills and behaviours which are inherent in the four attributes of universal leadership, can provide a foundation for best practices training programs, designed to prepare candidates for expatriate assignment.

### Discussion and implications

Despite the growth in knowledge in the domain of international business, one area which has lagged in development is our understanding of expatriate leadership. This may have been hampered by assumptions that each assignment requires unique leadership skills and training (Dorfman *et al.*, 1997). Recently however, scholars have found evidence of certain factors which might transcend cultures, including personal values (Roslin and Melewar, 2004). These researchers find that “Asian” values share similarities to constructs “... commonly associated with relationship marketing...” (p. 42). Other constructs include satisfaction, trust, and commitment, which have been shown to exhibit cross-cultural equivalence in empirical studies (e.g. Runyan *et al.*, 2010). Due to these new studies, scholars have begun to challenge this assumption of singularity, calling for investigations into factors which moderate or mediate leadership behaviors (Han *et al.*, 2002). However, stable leadership relationships are required to examine moderation or mediation. Culture and personality are addressed in this study. The literature portrays culture and personality as responsive to environmental variation (Gerstner and Day, 1994). This requires national (macro) and within-culture (micro) level examination. We propose a model of expatriate leadership containing four fixed elements, with flexibility to respond to cultural and personality variation. We identify a new factor in the expatriate leadership domain, awareness (self). Universal leadership is new to the international business literature, and allows scholars the opportunity to operationalize the dimensions which comprise the construct.

The emergent attributes (Four A's) identified in this research may relate to those described by Dorfman *et al.* (1997) as universal: leader supportiveness, contingent reward, and charismatic. For example, similarities can be seen between leadership supportiveness and ability, charismatic and adaptability, and between contingent reward and ambassadorship. However, contrary to our findings that the Four A's are

mutually supportive and strongly related, Dorfman *et al.* (1997) present their attributes as discrete. This may be due to their empirical testing of theoretical constructs already in the literature. The lack of inclusiveness and the missing awareness (self) construct create distinct differences between our findings and that of Dorfman *et al.* (1997).

Hurt and Homan (2008) examine four factors of universal leadership: consideration, task-orientation, visionary, and problem solving. However, their conceptualizations are more restrictive in definition than what our data reveal. Here too, there could be possible associations between attributes of Hurt and Homan (2008) and those of universal leadership: task orientation and ability; problem solving and adaptability, visionary and ambassadorship, and consideration and awareness (self). The Hurt and Homan (2008) factors however, represent a static delineation of skills lacking any interconnectivity and comprehension. Further, their factors demonstrate a lack of content validity representing only a portion of the emergent universal leadership constructs. As an example, visionary (ability to see a way forward) (Hurt and Homan, 2008) is only a fraction of the ambassadorship construct. Ambassadorship is not only seeing the way forward, but also the ability to develop culturally acceptable navigation strategies around conflicting goals to achieve success. This task accretion can be applied to all of the remaining Hurt and Homan (2008) attributes, revealing a lack of inclusiveness, comprehension and interrelation. Therefore, we conclude that our findings are substantively distinct and provide value to the literature.

Based on the analysis of the data, the emergent universal leadership model can be seen as a formative construct. By this, we mean that universal leadership is represented as the sum of all of its indicators. Unlike a reflective construct, changes to any of the indicators fundamentally changes the conceptualization of the construct itself (Bollen and Lennox, 1991). Thus, if a construct (e.g. ability) were absent, the construct would cease to be universal leadership, and require re-definition as a different concept. Furthermore, the data indicate that the first order dimensions (ability, ambassadorship, awareness, adaptability) are likely to be reflective constructs.

A significant contribution is the identification of the construct of awareness (self), which is un-identified in the extant literature as necessary for expatriate leadership (Dorfman *et al.*, 1997; Hurt and Homan, 2008). Its intrinsic nature, referred to as self-efficacy in the psychology literature, is difficult to achieve (Bandura and Cervone, 1983). The expatriate who exhibits awareness (self) has a strong sense of their capabilities and values, and can make the necessary adjustment in the intensity of the other dimensions of universal leadership.

The sample while homogeneous in industry was comprised of participants with broad international experiences as a result of their native country, the country of their parent corporation and/or the country of their expatriate assignment. These experiences provide insight into leadership effectiveness across a vast array of cultures and personalities. The statistical analysis of the Hofstede scores is a testament to the variability of the experiences included in the sample. However, the emergent themes in our data, point to a universal construct which is culturally invariant. This has important managerial implications. Culture, thought to vary across nations but be stable within, provided a perception that leadership style could be predictable (Gerstner and Day, 1994). Predictability formed the foundation for expatriate selection and training oriented toward the specifics of each assignment. Unfortunately, the

unique elements utilized for one assignment might not be applicable for assignment to another nation or culture.

However, the stability provided by the universal leadership construct across cultures, provides a solid framework for both selection and training of expatriates, for any international assignment. Gerstner and Day (1994) note, Hofstede's dimensions provide a level of cultural predictability. Thus, the universal leadership model while stipulating that all Four A's must be employed, allows for varied intensity in their application, predicated on the culture of the assignment.

The success of expatriates in the field has a direct impact on company performance. This study begins a process to define those attributes best suited for the selection and training of successful expatriates. This research is further supported by the inclusion of international retailing academic experience. The academic input not only provided a foundation for the research it also frames the direction for teaching and further research under the umbrella of universal leadership. This study emphasizes the need for proper selection and training of expatriates who can integrate and apply these attributes during their assignments. Universal leadership provides a unique intrinsic selection criterion, awareness (self), and identifies areas for training through the remaining extrinsic attributes.

### Limitations and future research

The study is limited by singularity of the business context within its participant mix. The sample does represent a broad variety of retail formats and management levels. This limited focus was by design to reduce unexplained covariance and spurious correlations during the grounded theory process. The industry itself was selected because of the broad array of business experiences found in the retailing, as well as its rapid pace.

Further examination of other business sectors would be invaluable to the validation of the universal nature of the construct. While we were able to achieve saturation with our participants, given the prior limitation there may be other variables as yet uncovered. We were not able to uncover any divergent themes among our sample that related to culture. However, we cannot disconfirm that in certain cultures there may be a divergence from the stated model.

This is an exploratory study and while the results of this study are clear with tremendous benefits to both academia and industry, it has not been tested outside of this research. Future research should address operationalization of the four A's of universal leadership. Although we conceptualize the construct as formative, we feel strongly that the first order factors (ability, adaptability, awareness (self) and ambassadorship) are reflective. This is the foundation for the construct flexibility. Cultural variations may be addressed in any or all of the four factors, when adapting to different settings.

This study also identified two streams that would be beneficial for future research: examination of the four factors from the perspectives of acquired and innate. From a training perspective, identifying skills which can be trained, such as social interaction in a cultural context, can lead to enhancing the leadership tool kit of expatriates before an international assignment. From a selection perspective, it would be important to identify the innate characteristics (e.g. ethics, awareness of self), which could be used as an effective screening tool for the identification of potential expatriate candidates.

Both poor selection and training have been cited in the literature as elements leading to poor performance during expatriate assignments.

### Contributions

This research contributes to the literature through careful application of qualitative research methods to generate an effective leadership platform for international study; universal leadership. This multi-dimensional construct describes the necessary factors which must all be applied for a successful international expatriate assignment. This platform allows for the testing of cultural impacts in the micro; work and interpersonal environments, as well as the more macro; national/social environment. The model highlights competencies to be stressed during an expatriate training program, and the importance of integrating all four A's to achieve success while on assignment. This study adds to the literature and industry in the important attributes required of a candidate for success which must be either existing or the subject of training in preparation for the international assignment. Finally, the study adds insight into both literature and industry on attributes that are important in the selection of successful expatriates. As has been discussed throughout this research, sending the right person on the assignment is nearly as important as providing them with the appropriate training.

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