

# Want to become a Global Leader? Here are the holistic skills you need to develop

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## Abstract

We live in a world where climate change, sustainability, human rights, cultural inclusion, and new technologies are on the agenda alongside traditional economic factors. We, therefore, need leaders who have that holistic outreach. They only get that if we change the traditional leadership education to reflect the new reality, we live in.

## Keywords

Leadership, Globalisation, Intercultural leadership, Modern Leadership

**Paper type:** Viewpoint

We all know them — the leaders who develop great ideas into great companies or the leaders who are truly admired by people both inside and outside the organisation they are leading. These leaders we admire exist on all levels, in all societies, and in any form you can imagine. This article is about what characterises these extraordinary leaders and what you can do to develop your skills in the right direction if you want to become an admired leader.

First, I want to give a little personal introduction. In 2001, I founded Gugin, which is now a globally operating consulting and leadership training firm. Over the years we have been working with more than 600 companies and organisations, where many of them have been in some kind of distress that is often caused by bad leadership. Over the years, I have talked to and coached hundreds of leaders who suddenly found themselves far outside their comfort zone. They ended there because their organisation was in a situation it has never been in before. It can be a crisis, where they must make drastic changes to survive. It can be in a merger or acquisition situation or a situation where changes in the surrounding society force the company to make unplanned dramatic changes. It is in cases like this where the true leaders stand out and where most fail. This article is about what you can do, not fail when your leadership skills are most needed.

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## ***Become Cultural Intelligent***

Most negotiations fail because of cultural or personal misunderstandings. Most mergers or acquisitions fail due to cultural clashes. Most international companies fail because they don't know how to leverage cultural diversity in their organisation. When you graduate and you stand there with your diploma after years of hard work, you might be tempted to assume that now you know everything. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. To succeed, you need to develop a high level of cultural intelligence that enables you to navigate and succeed across all kinds of very different cultures. I am not only talking about national cultures but all cultures. You might find that it is much harder bridging the gap between the salespeople and the R&D people in your organisation than it is for salespeople from around the world to agree on something. You will also realise that there is more than one truth to almost everything. Our different value systems and deep-rooted beliefs give us different opinions about what is right and wrong. If you do not accept and respect that there is more than one truth, you will end up not succeeding with anything except if you only deal with clones of yourself.

***Just because you are right does not mean everyone else is wrong.***

My company Gugin facilitates a lot of cross-cultural leadership training and coaching every year, and I also enable a number of executive leadership programs at top-ranking business schools. I have experienced that there are basically two types of leaders. One group believes they know everything and can tackle any situation and there is the other group who know that only humility will bring them and their team forward. The first group doesn't change its mind until their approach has had severe consequences for their organisation. This is why 2/3 of all mergers and acquisitions fail. Pure arrogance and ignorance. Nothing else. In a globalised and complex world, we all have to increase our level of Cultural Intelligence. Constantly. If we do not, we will fail, simply because we don't know to leverage cultural diversity. And if you can't do it, someone else can, and they will win the competition.

***How can you become more cultural intelligent?***

Initially, you have to adopt Socrates' words: "Wise is the man who knows he knows nothing". That means that despite your degrees and experience in life, there is still a lot to learn. It never stops.

- *Accept and respect that we only do things that make sense to ourselves. It might, however, not make sense to anyone else. So instead of judging people for behaving in a way you don't understand or even disapprove of, try to find out why that person is behaving in that particular way*
- *When you have discovered the underlying values behind his or her behaviour you must seek to reconcile the different values.*
- *If you are culturally intelligent, you never seek a compromise. A compromise always has to loser, because the parties involved have all given up something to reach a solution. If you are culturally intelligent you develop a solution where all parties get more than they expected. With the right training and exercise, that is feasible.*

### *Talk to strangers*

It is a huge barrier to make contact with strangers outside your own cultural comfort zone for many people. I think that is partly because most parents tell their children they should not talk to strangers. That makes a lot of sense when you are a child, but you need to do the exact opposite as an adult leader. Despite most leaders talk to a lot of people every day, many of them still feel lonely. That is mainly because they only speak with people with whom they have a professional relationship and therefore have to keep a certain facade. This circumstance doesn't make you a better leader - on the contrary. So in order to keep yourself aware that we are not all alike, spend as much time as possible with people who you would usually not talk to. Speak with the homeless people in the streets. When you travel to speak with as many locals as possible and show real interest in the life, they are living. If you are already a leader, you are already a privileged person. Spend some time helping those who can use your help and experience for moving on in life.

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Now you may ask yourself. Why should I do that? It is not my job, and I don't have time. The answer to that question is that you are wrong. You become a far better global leader if humility is one of your values. You develop that value by interacting and understanding as many different people and cultures as possible. And yes, you have time. Engaging yourself with a diverse group of people instead of clones of yourself is probably the best leadership education you can get. Einstein once said: "There is a need for science and research as long as children can ask questions, no adult can answer." In your world that would translate into: "There is a need to speak with new groups of people as long as I don't understand and embrace all other people's behaviour." When you talk to strangers, you become a far better leader and you develop skills you can't develop at any business school or university.

### *Do things in new ways - even if you don't have to*

We human beings are by definition, boring. As soon as we have found a solution to a problem, we stick to that solution without exploring the best solution. Academics are usually better when it comes to searching for more solutions despite they already have one. But that only applies to their professional life. In daily life, they are just like anyone else. Imagine you are moving to a new city in a new country. Everything is new. Your mind-set has changed. You have to explore new options for almost everything. How do you get from your home to your workplace? Where do you do your shopping and how do you organise your life in a new culture, perhaps in a language you don't speak. As stressful as it may be, it is also adventurous. Trying out different routes to work to see which one works best can be fun. When you have found it, you stick to that route - right?

The world around us is continuously changing and become increasingly complex. And it changes and becomes more complex at a faster pace than ever before in history. So to remain on top of the game, you should imagine that every morning you wake up in a new, unfamiliar place. Your team and organisation will love it too. Just because you have many fixed procedures, rules, traditions, and habits in your organisation doesn't mean they are the right ones and the best ones.

Of course, you cannot change everything every day, but you can create small, diverse teams whose tasks are to find and propose new ways of doing things you do today. It can be anything from logistics and production to how you can reduce waste and minimise your environmental impact.

Constant change has several advantages. It facilitates continuous improvement. It makes employees happier, but most importantly, it makes you comfortable with change. Everybody is talking about we should be ready for change, and we should all embrace it. The reality is different. We don't like change because all changes are associated with risks. We human beings are, per definition, risk averse. Making change an everyday exercise, we train our brain to become more positive to change because it learns that it is not the end of everything just because you have to change something.

To summarise the article, you can make yourself three important steps to become more culturally intelligent. Firstly, you have to train your brain to look for commonalities before it carries you away, emphasizing all the differences when you meet new people. Secondly, you must talk to strangers, even if you don't have to. Seek other perspectives. And lastly, you must force yourself to do things in new ways, even if you don't have to. It is a constant process that never stops. But I assure you that once you have started, you will find it very rewarding.

#### **About the Author:**

*Prof. Dr. Finn Majlergaard, CEO GUGIN Consulting firm, is an experienced teacher, and management consultant. Throughout his professional career, he has combined development of professional skills with academic and has taught at several universities and business schools around the world. He holds a DBA from International School of Management, Paris. New York, Tokyo, and Shanghai, and an MBA from Henley Management College, UK. He is specialized in intercultural management, globalization, global leadership development and innovation. He has developed and carried out number of training programs and courses for both academia and practitioners.*

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