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10-2012

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Youssef, Carolyn M. and Luthans, Fred, "Positive Global Leadership" (2012). *Management Department Faculty Publications*. 138.  
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# Positive Global Leadership

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## Abstract

In the wake of increasing globalization, today's organizational leaders are faced with unprecedented complexity. To help meeting the challenge, this article proposes a new positive approach to global leadership. After first providing the background on positivity, positive global leadership is carefully defined and its similarities and differences with both the established and contemporary leadership theories are noted. The discussion then turns to how positive global leadership addresses three major challenges in the global context of distance, cultural differences and cross-cultural barriers. The article concludes that this new positive approach can help global leaders to leverage diverse strengths in themselves and their environment to more effectively meet the escalating challenges they face now and in the future.

**Keywords:** Positive global leadership, Positivity, Positive leadership, Psychological capital, Positive organizational behavior, Cross-cultural leadership

## 1. Introduction

Everyone now realizes that today's leaders are operating in a global context. Despite recent economic troubles across the world, the degree of globalization continues unabated. For example, cross-border mergers and acquisitions increased by 37 percent in 2010 and even though Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has leveled off, a closer look shows that the hit FDI inflows have taken in developed countries has been more than offset by the notable increases to developing and transition economies.

Although this increasing globalization is certainly not new to the theory, research and practice of leadership (e.g., see Sloan, Hazucha & Van Katwyk, 2003), the understanding and dimensions of effective global leadership continued to be a challenge as indicated by this special issue. In particular, comprehensive new theoretical frameworks and perspectives for systematically developing global leaders have been lacking (Hall, Zhu & Yan, 2001), even though virtually every leadership (and management) theory has now been tested across cultures (e.g., see Dickson, Den Hartog & Mitchelson, 2003; Gelfand, Erez & Aycan, 2007 for comprehensive reviews). To date, this cross-cultural research on leadership has greatly depended upon Hofstede's classic framework emphasizing country differences or some of the more recent frameworks such as offered by the GLOBE project also focused on differences (see the November 2006 issue of the *Journal of International Business Studies* for a debate highlighting the merits and limitations of each framework). In their recent comprehensive review, Chen, Leung and Chen (2009) question the criticality of cross-cultural differences for advancing knowledge in the area of cross-national

research. They highlight the need for theoretical frameworks that go beyond finding cross-cultural differences (or similarities), to also using cross-cultural research as a way to build out toward diverse perspectives that can facilitate theoretical innovation and new, "frame-breaking" insights, which also may be applicable in single-culture contexts.

The purpose of this article is to present positive global leadership as a developmental conceptual framework that goes beyond cultural similarities and differences by establishing common ground for leveraging diversity, both locally and globally. We begin by reviewing the growing positivity literature that is relevant to global leadership. We then offer a new conceptual framework for positive global leadership that relates positivity to both the established and contemporary leadership theories, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence. Unique challenges of the current global context are then introduced, and finally positive global leadership is proposed as an effective approach for leading within and across cultures.

## 2. The role of positivity

While the importance of positivity per se is not new to the study and practice of organizational leadership, it has taken on an added emphasis and new applications in light of the realities of a fundamentally different organizational context (Luthans & Avolio, 2009), a major component of course being globalization. There is also now a stronger realization that positivity and negativity are paradigmatically distinct and not simply opposite ends of the same continuum (Cameron, 2008; Luthans & Avolio, 2009; Seligman

&Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A clear understanding of what positivity constitutes is a necessary prelude for conceptualizing a new framework for positive global leadership.

Based on positive psychology, positive organizational scholars define positivity in terms of “elevating processes and outcomes” (Cameron & Caza, 2004, p. 731), “intentional behaviors that depart from the norm of a reference group in honorable ways” (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p. 209), “outcomes . . . which dramatically exceed common or expected performance . . . spectacular results, surprising outcomes, and extraordinary achievements . . . exceptional performance,” and “an affirmative bias in change, or toward an emphasis on strengths, capabilities, and possibilities rather than problems, threats, and weakness” (Cameron, 2008, p. 8).

We like to use a mathematical metaphor to demonstrate positivity – specifically, a positive number by definition has to be larger than zero, and when added to another number, the result is larger than each of the two individual numbers. That is, an observable phenomenon or set of phenomena are considered positive if they add value, leaving the context, process or outcomes within which they take place elevated, uplifted, improved, or very simply, better. Moreover, in this meaning positivity precludes negativity.

This is not to say that positivity cannot occur under predominantly negative conditions. In the same way that positive and negative numbers can offset each other, positivity can offset negativity. Although the resultant may be positive or negative depending on the strength of the pull in each opposing direction, it is impossible for positivity to yield a more negative result, or one that is just as negative. There has to be improvement. There has to be growth and enhancement.

Finally, positivity precludes neutrality, complacency, resistance to change, or maintenance of the status quo. Positivity is dynamic. Although positive and negative forces may numerically seem to “cancel” each other, the resultant of human positivity is not just zero, but instead a newly elevated equilibrium point. Even when “just enough” positivity is generated to counter existing negativity, the process through which the downward pull is resisted and overcome to restore balance can result in learning and growth (Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998).

Closely related to positivity is the conceptualization of human flourishing also coming from positive psychology. Flourishing can be defined as functioning within an optimal range, where positive growth and generativity are evident. Flourishing has been distinguished from (a) mental illness, which would clearly represent the negative end of the continuum, and (b) languishing, which is a neutral state where mental illness may be absent, but where hollowness or emptiness are experienced (Keyes, 2002). However, unlike the algebraic addition in our mathematical metaphor, where one unit of positivity can be balanced by one unit of negativity, the tipping point between human flourishing and languishing has empirically been found to occur at a positivity to- negativity ratio of about 3:1 in the workplace, 5:1 in complex settings (e.g., an executive team or multi-cultural interactions), and 6:1 in personal relationships (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Gottman, 1994; Losada & Heaphy, 2004). This need for a higher relative level of positivity can at least be partially explained by the prevalent negativity bias in human thinking that must be overcome (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Cameron, 2008).

Particularly relevant to positivity and flourishing in general, and positive organizational leadership in particular, is positive organizational behavior (POB), which has been defined as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement” (Luthans, 2002b, p. 59). This POB integrates several dimensions of the positivity conceptualizations. It incorporates elevated processes and

outcomes, intentional behavior, exceptional performance, and an affirmative bias toward strengths, capabilities, and possibilities rather than problems, threats, and weaknesses. Most importantly, POB has a strong orientation toward growth and development through the inclusion of state like psychological resources (see Luthans & Youssef, 2007 for a detailed discussion of a trait-state continuum of positivity).

Specifically, four psychological resources have been identified as meeting the POB inclusion criteria of being theory-driven, measurable, developmental, and related to performance and other desirable work-related outcomes. These psychological resources are: (a) hope, which is “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency (goal-directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p. 287); (b) efficacy, which is “one’s belief about his or her ability to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action necessary to execute a specific action within a given context” (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998, p. 66); (c) resilience, which is “the developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, and failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 702); and (d) optimism, which constitutes a generalized positive expectancy (Carver & Scheier, 2002), as well as an optimistic explanatory style that attributes positive events to personal, permanent and pervasive causes and negative events to external, temporary and situation-specific ones (Seligman, 1998). Luthans, Youssef and Avolio (2007) have also comprehensively reviewed and assessed numerous other positive psychological constructs such as wisdom, forgiveness and courage for their relative fit with the POB inclusion criteria. The best fitting four psychological resources of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (i.e., the HERO within) have been found to constitute a valid and measurably reliable higher order multidimensional construct (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007), termed psychological capital or simply PsyCap (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). PsyCap is defined as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success” (Luthans, Youssef et al., 2007, p. 3). The underlying mechanism shared among PsyCap’s four constituent psychological resources is a cognitive, agentic, developmental capacity representing “one’s positive appraisal of circumstances and probability for success based on motivated effort and perseverance” (Luthans, Avolio et al., 2007, p. 550). This multidimensional core construct has been recently found in a meta-analysis to be significantly related to desirable employee attitudes, behaviors and performance in organizational settings (Avey, Reichard, Luthans & Mhatre, 2011).

### 3. Antecedents, processes and outcomes of positivity

Beyond the description of positivity offered above, in defining positive global leadership it is also important to identify some of positivity’s unique antecedents, processes and outcomes. Specifically, we will review a theoretical framework representing the antecedents, processes and outcomes particularly relevant to positive global leadership, recognizing that there are numerous other examples in the literature.

In terms of the antecedents of positivity, accumulated research over the years supports that about 50 percent of the variance in one’s happiness or life satisfaction (i.e., positivity, broadly defined) is fixed or “hard-wired” based on genetics and childhood develop-

ment (i.e., nature and nurture). About 40 percent of one's level of positivity is still malleable and thus open to development through intentional cognitive and behavioral choices. Surprisingly, that leaves only about 10 percent of positivity being determined by the situation or one's current circumstances (Lucas & Donnellan, 2007; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Keeping this percentage breakdown in perspective is critical for an accurate conceptualization of positivity in general, and particularly for positive global leadership, which as discussed next, is subject to numerous fixed trait, intentional behavioral and circumstantial factors. As we will note, these factors are exacerbated going across cultures.

Secondly, in terms of the processes induced by positivity, Fredrickson's (2001, 2003, 2009) well-known broaden-and-build model in positive psychology indicates positivity has a broadening effect on thought-action repertoires, and a building effect on physical, social and psychological resources. Negativity, on the other hand, is associated with narrower, more specific action tendencies (e.g., fight-or-flight). It results in the depletion of resources, which then need to be replenished through positivity. The added heterogeneity found in the global context and the resulting extensive demands on global leaders' physical, social and psychological resources make the broadening and building processes inherent in positivity particularly relevant for leadership across cultures.

Finally, with regard to relevant outcomes, using cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental evidence, Lyubomirsky, King and Diener (2005) meta-analytically demonstrate that positivity is not only correlated, but also causally linked, to numerous desirable outcomes in a wide range of life domains, including the workplace. Positivity has been specifically associated with managerial performance (Staw & Barsade, 1993), as well as a wide range of positive perceptions of oneself and of others, social competencies and skills, and creative capabilities that can be particularly relevant for global leaders (see Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005 for a comprehensive review).

#### 4. Positive leadership: conceptual framework, convergence and divergence

With this background serving as a point of departure, we now propose a conceptual framework for positive global leadership that relates positivity to established and emerging leadership theories, giving special attention to areas of convergence and divergence. First of all, it must be acknowledged that most leadership theories tend to be very positively oriented. However, none of these theories offer a specific definition of positive leadership per se, nor does the growing positivity literature explicitly do so. Thus, based on the above perspectives on the definitions, antecedents, processes and outcomes of positivity, we comprehensively define positive global leadership as "the systematic and integrated manifestation of leadership traits, processes, intentional behaviors and performance outcomes that are elevating, exceptional and affirmatory of the strengths, capabilities and developmental potential of leaders, their followers and their organizations over time and across cultures."

Breaking down this definition, effective positive global leadership should be systematic and integrated, over time and across cultures. One of the fundamental differences between positivity and negativity is that while negativity is characterized by singularity, a broader perspective is necessary for positivity. For example, a single negative component of a system can render the whole system dysfunctional, but a single positive component does not necessarily render it completely functional or effective (Cameron, 2008). Instead, positivity requires an integrated assessment of various components of a system that span time and contextual boundar-

ies. This is also in line with Chen et al. (2009) call for cross-cultural research that goes beyond simply detecting and explaining cultural differences, to also offer diverse perspectives that can facilitate theoretical innovation even for single-culture contexts. A conceptual framework for systematic, integrated positive leadership over time and across contexts would inform and be informed by positive leadership research and practice across cultures.

The definition also reinforces the established paradigm in the leadership literature that (a) leadership is a systematic integration of traits, processes, intentional behaviors and performance outcomes; and that (b) these traits, processes, behaviors and performance outcomes are manifested at various levels, including leaders, their followers and their organizations. Positive global leadership would not substitute these widely recognized dimensions of leadership, but instead expand on them and synergistically integrates their positively oriented characteristics.

As indicated, the key characteristics of positivity in general are that it is elevating, exceptional and affirmatory of strengths, capabilities and developmental potential. It can be argued that "exceptional" is by definition rare, unique and not generalizable. The positive psychology literature also describes character strengths and virtues as "trait-like" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). On the other hand, the developmental potential of positivity, which Luthans and Youssef (2007) refer to as "statelike psychological resources", Lyubomirsky (2007) as "intentional activities," and Cameron (2008) as "possibilities," renders positive leadership within reach for many managers through developmental processes. That positivity is "elevating" also conveys its dynamic nature and malleability over time.

##### 4.1. Relationships with established leadership theories

Positive leadership clearly draws from many existing leadership theories. For example, trait theories of leadership emphasize stable positive traits that can account for the emergence, role occupancy and/or effectiveness of exceptional leaders that "stand out" (Arvey & Chaturvedi, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). However, these trait theories do not recognize the developmental potential of leaders over time, nor do they explain the processes and behaviors of the leader that mediate or moderate the exceptional outcomes of these traits. Furthermore, they do not account for the characteristics of the followers or the context. Trait leadership theories converge with positive leadership on a wide range of positive traits and the resultant exceptional performance outcomes. In positive leadership, however, the emphasis is on the affirmatory bias toward strengths in general, which may dynamically evolve and reconfigure over time and across contexts, rather than the specific set of strengths. Thus, while trait leadership theories intersect with positive leadership, they also diverge in meaningful and significant ways.

Behavioral (Judge, Piccolo & Ilies, 2004) and contingency (Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971) leadership theories also inform several dimensions of our proposed positive global leadership, the most notable of which are the multiplicity, flexibility and adaptability of leadership styles over time and across situational factors and desired outcomes. Most of these theories do not necessarily emphasize exceptional traits or performance the way trait theories do. Moreover, there is limited emphasis on the processes through which the leader's and followers' strengths, capabilities and behaviors dynamically develop and interact to determine both leadership style and desired outcomes. Instead, leader and follower characteristics are usually treated deterministically as uncontrollable situational dimensions. Finally, behavioral and contingency theories in general are relatively silent regarding the long term, elevating impact of leadership on leaders, followers and especially



organizations. Thus, similar to trait theories, the established behavioral and contingency theories both converge with and diverge from our proposed positive global leadership.

Exchange leadership theories (e.g., LMX) emphasize the relationships between leaders and followers. They incorporate the mechanisms through which social exchanges between leaders and followers lead to mutual understanding, trust, respect, appreciation, loyalty, and a sense of obligation to provide added attention, support and feedback to some followers to the exclusion of others. Outcomes of high-quality exchanges in terms of follower attitudes, behaviors and performance are also emphasized (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). Exchange leadership theories share with our proposed positive leadership a systematic, process-oriented approach to integrating leader and follower behaviors and performance outcomes. Another shared dimension is the dynamic approach to follower development over time. On the other hand the exchange theories give only limited emphasis to the leaders' and followers' positive traits, capabilities and developmental potential independent of each other or their relationships. Moreover, exchange theories are often criticized for their "unfairness" to the followers who are in the "out-group" for being treated formally and given limited feedback and support, in comparison to the "in-group" receiving most of the attention of the leader. As we will explain later, positive global leadership does adopt a relational approach, but one that is more inclusive of follower diversity. Thus, exchange leadership theories cannot be equated with positive global leadership despite their apparent commonalities, because they also diverge in important ways.

A final category of established leadership theories are the charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1998) and transformational (Bass & Avolio, 1994) leadership theories. These theories emphasize leaders' abilities to influence their followers' perceptions and actions in terms of rallying their support toward a clearly articulated vision, inspiring them, and meeting their needs, through exemplary behavior and self-sacrifice that set the leaders' apart from the rest. In addition to the inspirational impact of the charisma or personal charm of the leaders due to these exceptional qualities (as perceived by their followers), transformational leadership theories also include the intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration of the followers with the ongoing purpose of developing them.

In relation to positive global leadership as delineated here, charismatic and transformational leadership theories emphasize exceptional leader characteristics, although only characteristics that are observable by their followers or interpretable such that they may be conducive to the desired influence. They also emphasize influence processes and tactics as leaders relate to their followers. Some of the influence tactics of charisma may also be negative, manipulative, or self-serving, which diverges from positive leadership's emphasis on elevating the followers and the organization, not just the leader. On the other hand, the intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration components of transformational leadership lend it more readily to benevolent processes aiming at helping and developing followers toward their full potential, rather than manipulating or subduing them. In other words, transformational leadership can be related to flourishing and elevating processes and outcomes in relation to followers. In other words, transformational leadership overlaps with positive global leadership more than any of the other established leadership theories but still lacks the focused positivity and global perspective.

#### **4.2. Relationship with emerging leadership theories**

Building out from the established theories we briefly reviewed, several leadership theories that have more recently emerged offer

potential valuable insights toward conceptualizing positive leadership in general, and, through their cross-context applications, to positive global leadership. For example, ethical leadership (Martin, Resick, Keating, & Dickson, 2009; Resick, Hanges, Dickson, & Mitchelson, 2006; Toor & Ofori, 2009) has a clear emphasis on elevating processes, intentional behaviors and performance outcomes. Positive character strengths and virtues such as integrity and altruism (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) are integrated with more follower-oriented, exchange processes such as collective motivation and encouragement. These dimensions are clearly elevating to the leader, the followers and the context, and can only be manifested through consistent application over time and adaptability across situations, rather than through a singular approach. Ethical leadership is also supported across cultures (Martin et al., 2009). However, ethical leadership is much narrower in its conceptualization than positive global leadership as conceptualized here. Thus, ethical leadership can perhaps best be considered as a subset of positive global leadership.

Another example is spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003, also see the 2009 special issue on spiritual leadership in the *Leadership Quarterly*) which emphasizes intrinsic motivation through a sense of membership or community due to positive interactions and exchange mechanisms between leaders and followers, as well as a sense of calling, both of which are promoted through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love (Fry & Slocum, 2007). Furthermore, altruistic love is conceptualized to incorporate a wide range of positively oriented traits, processes, intentional behaviors and performance outcomes such as kindness, forgiveness, integrity, courage, empathy/compassion, honesty, patience, trust/loyalty and humility. Spiritual leadership can lead to elevating processes, behaviors and outcomes for leaders, followers and organizations. It can also facilitate value congruence through spiritual anchors such as perfection, compassion, passion, inspiration, investigation, dedication, appreciation, determination, and cooperation (Karakas, 2010), which are consistent with the affirmatory bias emphasized by positive leadership as described earlier. Furthermore, positive global leadership is broader and more inclusive than other value based leadership approaches (e.g., religious leadership), making it particularly relevant across cultures. Thus, although still in its nascent stages in the organizational leadership literature, at present spiritual leadership could be considered a unique form or subset of positive leadership, but not yet equated with positive global leadership.

Authentic leadership is another example of an emerging leadership theory that is particularly relevant and applicable to positive leadership. Harter (2002, p. 382) defines authenticity as "owning one's own personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs . . . that one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings." Avolio and Luthans (2006; also see Luthans & Avolio, 2003) conceptualize authentic leadership as a developmental process that draws from the leader's life experiences, positive psychological capital, and moral perspective, as well as a highly supportive organizational climate, to yield higher self-awareness, self-regulated positive behaviors, continuous positive self-development and ultimately veritable, sustainable performance.

Like psychological capital, empirical research supports authentic leadership as a higher order, multidimensional construct comprised of leader self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing (leaders' ability to fairly and objectively consider diverse viewpoints in making decisions; Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). It is also important to note that authentic leadership has a validated published measure and has been found to be related to desirable attitudes, behaviors, and performance in the workplace, even be-

yond those accounted for by ethical and transformational leadership (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

Authentic leadership is closely associated with our proposed positive global leadership because it systematically integrates, affirms, and seeks to elevate positive characteristics, processes, behaviors and outcomes in leaders, followers and organizations over time and across contexts. For example, authentic leadership development systematically takes place within a positive organizational context in which planned and unplanned trigger events are purposefully leveraged to enhance self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-development (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). Unplanned trigger events may be unpredictable, but organizations can also intentionally plan and design trigger events that can challenge leaders to accelerate their development (Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Moreover, authentic leadership emphasizes follower development over time through relationships characterized by integrity, mutual trust, transparency, and reciprocity, as well as an organizational culture of openness, sharing and inclusiveness (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005).

Authentic leadership is also a developmental, dynamic process that involves exploring and striving toward multiple desirable “possible selves” over time and across diverse contexts and interpersonal relationships (Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). This renders authentic leadership broader than the narrow historical perspectives on authenticity, which entail being true to oneself whether one’s actual self is positive or negative (Harter, 2002). This is because in authentic leadership, positive future selves can be intentionally selected and pursued through self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-development (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). Thus, authentic leadership can also be considered a form of positive leadership, but like transformational leadership lacks the focus on positivity and the global, cross-cultural context of positive global leadership.

## 5. Positive leadership in a global context

Leading across cultures presents global leaders with numerous challenges, as well as unprecedented opportunities. Global leaders are “people in business settings whose job or role is to influence the thoughts and actions of others to achieve some finite set of business goals . . . usually displayed in large, multicultural contexts” (Gessner, Arnold, & Mobley, 1999, p. xv). We now turn to making the case for positive leadership as conceptualized so far as being well-positioned for leveraging the diversity and multiplicity of the global context, mitigating its challenges, and capitalizing on its opportunities. The three unique challenges of the global context of distance, differences and barriers frame the discussion of the effectiveness of the positive approach. Although the specific challenges and opportunities facing each global leader are likely unique to his/her particular context, we adopt a higher-level perspective suggested by Chen et al. (2009) that lends itself to adaptation and application across a wide range of contexts, or even locally.

### 5.1. Challenge # 1: distance and positive global leadership

Leading from a distance poses unique challenges for both leaders and followers. Distance can occur in many forms (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002; Napier & Ferris, 1993). First, there is the more tangible, objective physical distance. This type of distance is obviously exacerbated in global settings due to geographic dispersion, although growing numbers of telecommuters among leaders and followers are facing similar challenges even locally. Broader than physical distance is structural distance, caused by organizational structure dimensions such as centralization, departmentalization,

and span of control. Structural distance may grow with an organization as it expands locally, then globally.

There is also the important notion of psychological or social distance. This third type of distance is experienced when leaders and followers perceive significant status or power differentials that hinder their intimacy, transparency or openness (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002; Napier & Ferris, 1993). While these differentials can be experienced due to position in the organizational hierarchy, they will likely be magnified through cross-cultural differences (e.g., power distance). Psychological distance can also be experienced due to demographic or value system dissimilarities, which have recently shown significant growth trends, both locally, and especially globally.

Together, these various forms of distance pose significant strain on the relationships between leaders and their followers. When leaders are physically, structurally, socially or psychologically distant from their followers, the frequency of their interactions and quality of their exchanges may suffer (Napier & Ferris, 1993). Empirical research supports the benefits of leading proximally, and the disadvantages of leading from a distance (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia 2004; Burrows, Munday, Tunnell, & Seay, 1996; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Howell, Neufeld, & Avolio, 2005; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996).

While it may be more difficult to lead cross-culturally due to distance challenges, positive leadership can help to mitigate some of these challenges. First, positive global leaders will adopt a systematic, integrated approach to their own, their followers’ and their organizations’ strengths and capabilities, and will affirmatively leverage and develop those strengths and capabilities toward new possibilities. In the context of distance, this may mean that global leaders may, through their proactive hope pathways, find new ways to leverage the quality of their infrequent interactions with their followers across time and space limitations. This may turn those rare interactions into important teachable moments and intentional, planned trigger events for development, growth, trust-building and intimacy (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). They may also emphasize positive interactions and feedback with their distant followers in order to affirm their positive traits, skills, attitudes, behaviors and performance. Such positive interactions can motivate followers, broaden their perspective and build their psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Global leaders taking this approach to promote the positivity necessary for the flourishing of their followers. In other words, positive global leaders will find ways to turn their limited interactions with their followers into invigorating and elevating experiences.

Positive global leaders may also leverage organizational capabilities and resources such as electronic communication technology or frequent travel to increase interaction frequency despite physical distance. Positive global leaders’ agentic approach and ethical perspective will propel them to intentionally seek out their distant followers, rather than passively adopt an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” mindset. Over time, distant followers (in all three types) may reach an elevated point in their development and maturity where their needs for proximity or psychological closeness to the leader may diminish as they independently explore and refine their own psychological capital resources such as confidence in their abilities, hope and optimism, and resilience when faced with obstacles and setbacks. The relationship may then dynamically evolve into one of collegiality, camaraderie, and mutual appreciation, rather than dependence and mentorship. In fact, distance may even be strategically leveraged to accelerate this developmental process toward independence and maturity. Most importantly, the positive global leader’s agentic approach and positive appraisals of the situational challenges (in this case, distance), modeled to the followers and directed toward their development and growth,

are critical for initiating and sustaining the psychological capital necessary for the benefits of positive global leadership to accrue over time.

### **5.2. Challenge # 2: cultural differences and positive global leadership**

There is no doubt that cross-cultural differences present leaders, followers and organizations with unique challenges, both locally and globally. People and cultures coming together, with their diverse beliefs, value systems, perceptions and action tendencies, in pursuit of common organizational goals, is the most obvious challenge facing global leaders. Several conceptual frameworks (e.g., Hofstede, Trompenaars, GLOBE, and many others) have been developed to explain cross-cultural differences, and numerous empirical studies have been conducted to test the validity of those frameworks, many of which in the context of leadership. Reviewing these frameworks is beyond the scope of this article and is available in this special issue and elsewhere (e.g., see Dickson et al., 2003 for a comprehensive review). Suffice it to say here that these extensive efforts have significantly advanced the body of knowledge on global leadership and management in general, and have identified specific cross-cultural similarities and differences.

This comparative analysis on pinpointing the universals (etics) and the contingent (emics) characteristics of culture (Graen, Hui, Wakabayashi, & Wang, 1997) we would argue may be helpful but insufficient and problematic for effective global leadership. Drawing from the foreign investment literature (Agarwal, 1994; Kogut & Singh, 1988), Shenkar (2001) challenges the assumptions of the construct of “cultural distance” often used to predict entry modes of global organizations. Many of the challenges Shenkar (2001) offers also apply to the comparative approach commonly utilized in cross-cultural leadership and organizational research. For example, cultural differences are assumed to be symmetrical, stable, linear, causal and discordant. Thus, the further “cultural distance” is, the more pronounced the challenges will likely be, discouraging high commitment modes or necessitating further controls.

Although lack of familiarity certainly offers unique challenges, this negatively oriented, “gap” approach to cultural differences treats them as nuisances to be eliminated or mitigated, rather than unique strengths, capabilities and possibilities to be embraced and leveraged. This negatively oriented “deficiency” approach cannot be reversed through focusing on the universals, an extreme approach that seeks to eliminate or ignore all differences and emphasize the lowest common denominator that remains true across cultures (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Lonner, 1980). This universalist approach also attempts to eliminate all forms of uniqueness in pursuit of sources of congruence. Both of these approaches are ethnocentric and consistent with what positive psychologists would refer to as a type of “disease model” metaphor. Their popularity and conventional wisdom would lead Luthans and Avolio (2009) to refer to them as an example of an “advocacy” approach.

On the other hand, as introduced earlier, Chen et al. (2009) warn against an extreme emphasis on cultural differences and/or similarities, and make the case for integrating eclectic theoretical models, diverse perspectives and findings toward a better understanding of both single-culture and cross-cultural contexts. For example, consider the numerous occasions in which intra-cultural differences or diversity within an organization may be more pronounced than national intercultural differences across geographically dispersed operations on a particular phenomenon or cross-cultural dimension. Research and practices that attempt to systematically understand, affirm and integrate the unique characteristics of diverse contexts would be in a better position to

capitalize on those differences for a better understanding of the phenomenon or construct in question, rather than discounting inconsistencies as measurement error simply because they do not “fit” the preconceived differences or universalities.

A unique conceptual framework that can facilitate the development of an integrative approach to positive global leadership would be Chen and Miller’s (2011) recent application of the Chinese relational perspective as an effective business mindset. The relational perspective goes beyond interpersonal relationships. It is a mindset and sense-making model that views, interprets and maintains order through complexity using a connective, process-oriented approach that is constantly redefined and readjusted by the context. Integration, balance and harmony, rather than final definitions or resolutions, are sought as end goals. Paradox is considered rational and appreciated, rather than viewed as irrational, resisted, and to be eliminated. Opposites are viewed as interdependent, integrated within a “both/and” framework, and conducive to new possibilities, rather than mutually exclusive alternatives that should somehow “cancel out.” This is also consistent with Luthans and Avolio’s (2009) proposed “inquiry” approach to positive organizational behavior, which seeks appreciation and integration, rather than “advocacy” of a particular paradigm.

The resulting leadership approach of this relational perspective will likely be “ambi-cultural” in nature, integrating the best of various cultures while avoiding the restrictions and biases of each (Chen & Miller, 2010). This is because within a relational perspective, individuals constantly define and redefine themselves by the context, the social networks they belong to, and the unfolding of events over time in an overlapping framework of past, present and future. Possibilities are viewed to lay beyond the individual, making these linkages integral for survival and success at the individual, group, organizational and societal levels. What the individual leader brings to the table becomes more focused on character, wisdom, values, “legacy-building,” and the ability to balance diverse stakeholder interests and a broader set of long term goals, rather than just technical expertise, managerial savvy, or short term transactional competence. This approach is clearly integrative and appreciative of a broader set of strengths, capabilities and possibilities that lie within the leaders, the followers and the organization. It is even applicable to seemingly adverse linkages such as those with competitors, which are also viewed to be open to harmonious, balanced orchestration of simultaneous competition and cooperation. This balanced, long term, process-oriented approach can add a dimension of stability to the tremendous uncertainties of leading across cultures without being too restrictive.

As an example for applying an integrative approach to positive global leadership, Story (2011) recently proposed a global leadership development model, in which leaders’ psychological capital (a multidimensional construct integrating hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism through positive agentic positive appraisals of present circumstances and future success potential – see earlier discussion) can facilitate the development of (a) a global mindset, (b) self-authored identity, and (c) intercultural sensitivity. A global mindset goes beyond understanding and appreciating cultural similarities and differences, to also include “an openness to and articulation of multiple cultural and strategic realities on both global and local levels, and the cognitive ability to mediate and integrate across this multiplicity” (Levy, Taylor, Boyacigiller, & Beechler, 2007, p. 27). In other words, a global mindset incorporates the cognitive abilities for both differentiation and synergistic integration of cross-cultural complexities (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). These cognitive abilities can enhance the positive global leader’s ability to process global information, relate to diverse stakeholder groups, and still make effective and relevant de-



cisions at both the global and the local levels (Beechler & Javidan, 2007; Bouquet, 2005).

Self-authored identity (Kegan, 1982) develops in stages across one's lifespan. Positive global leaders are conceptualized to have reached mature stages in which they are capable of self-regulating their roles and relationships through personally set rules, standards and a value system that helps them maintain consistency despite situational complexity and uncertainty. They are also able to recognize the limitations of their own systems and the validity of others' perspectives, which is critical for effective positive global leadership. Finally, intercultural sensitivity refers to the positive global leader's ability to adopt ethno-relative perspectives (Bennett, 1993). This ethno-relativity allows positive global leaders to experience their own culture as one of many, identify complex and subtle cultural patterns, habitually express themselves through multiple culturally appropriate affective and behavioral systems, and eventually experience an expanded self-view that can readily move into and out of multiple world views.

Through positivity and psychological capital development, positive global leaders can more readily and agentically develop a global mindset, self-authored identity and intercultural sensitivity (Story, 2011). The systematic and integrated approach of building these developmental capacities is consistent with our definition of positive global leadership, and can facilitate the transfer of the leader's domestic capabilities to global settings. Thus, positive global leaders are capable of broadening their influence and effectiveness by expanding their own capabilities over time and across situations through consistent appreciation and integration of the alternative cultural perspectives and belief systems of their followers and their organizations' diverse operations. For example, according to Clapp-Smith, Luthans, and Avolio (2007), psychological capital mediates the relationship between cognitive capacity and cultural intelligence and the development of a global mindset.

### 5.3. Challenge # 3: cross-cultural barriers and positive global leadership

Although we have proposed that positivity can offer unique possibilities and advantages for cross-cultural leadership, there are also significant barriers that need to be acknowledged and overcome by effective positive global leaders. Extreme positivity that can lead to denial or minimization of such cultural challenges is unrealistic, irresponsible and hazardous. We will now discuss several examples of these barriers, which may be present in most business contexts, but are likely to be more pronounced when leading cross-culturally. We propose positive approaches to dealing with them in a systematic, integrative manner. Specifically, we discuss the challenges of corruption, institutional deficiencies, and language. These barriers may be related to, but also go beyond the challenges of distance and cultural differences discussed above.

Corruption represents a significant barrier and threat to international trade, foreign direct investment, joint ventures, and other forms of global business, as well as the economic growth and quality of life of the countries in which it is prevalent (Al-Sadig, 2009). A recent meta-analysis showed a strong relationship between institutional factors such as political, legal, economic and socio-cultural factors and national corruption. A feedback loop has also been recently suggested, where weak institutions may facilitate corruption, but corruption may also in turn weaken those institutions, although the former effect is likely stronger than the latter (Judge, McNatt & Xu, 2011).

While corruption may be a worldwide problem that is challenging to global corporations in general, positive models may be more effective in tackling the barriers created by corruption than

traditional approaches. For example, based on his work in association with the Corruption Perceptions Index, Lambsdorff (2007) argues that increasing institutional complexity through expanded policymaking and regulations may facilitate, rather than hinder corruption. Enforcing harsh penalties for corruption alone may not be the answer as it can simply lead to "a conspiracy of silence." On the other hand, positive approaches such as certifying local agents and intermediaries to signal their honesty and trustworthiness and creating asymmetric penalties that encourage whistle-blowing can increase the uncertainties and transaction costs associated with corruption while offering more viable and ethical alternatives. This is also in line with the relational approach described earlier, which can facilitate trust building and discourage unethical short-term exchanges.

In terms of positive global leadership, leaders who possess positive traits such as courage and wisdom; have developed positive capabilities and psychological resources such as hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism; and are intentional about behaving ethically, authentically and in ways that systematically and integratively affirm the strengths, capabilities and potential of their followers and their organizations over time and across contexts; will likely be at a distinct advantage compared to their less positive counterparts. For example, positive global leaders as conceptualized earlier may possess higher levels of self-awareness and engage in more agentic self-regulation, which may induce more ethical behavior (Avolio & Luthans, 2006). They may also find a broader range of pathways to overcome obstacles such as corruption or weak institutions and still be able to operate in various international contexts. Their efficacy and resilience may facilitate positive appraisals of less-than-optimal circumstances, increase probabilities of success despite setbacks, give them the "stamina" to stay the course despite challenges, and even motivate them to be more proactive agents of positive change in the countries where they operate. Their optimistic explanatory style may facilitate a realistic, yet still positive, outlook regarding present and future circumstances.

Language is another challenge that global organizations face on a regular basis (Harzing, Koester & Magner, 2011). Although English is perceived as the common business language worldwide, the indiscriminate use of English in global organizations continues to present leaders with challenges (Zander, Mockaitis, & Harzing et al., 2011). Language goes beyond the direct meanings of the spoken words. It also constitutes systematic, often subtle forms of social expression that may be difficult for foreign speakers to pick up on, even when fluent. These challenges are further exacerbated when English is not the native language of both the leaders and their followers. Language use can also be indicative of power or wealth differentials across operations within the same organization, across organizations, or even across countries (Kandogan, 2011). Assuming that the use of English as the common language is adequate for all global business contexts would lead to suboptimal results comparable to solely focusing on cultural universals and/or differences, instead of productively and innovatively integrating them.

In the context of positive global leadership, leaders that insist on using one language to the exclusion of all others may not be able to integrate the diverse capabilities of their employees, because they may lack a systematic approach to understanding and capitalizing on those capabilities if they are obscured by language barriers. For example, a leader may not pick up on, let alone affirm an employee's exceptional communication skills if those skills are expressed in a language that the leader does not understand. To the leader, the employee's inability to speak the same language may be evaluated as a deficiency and perceived as a barrier to effective communication. On the other hand, a positive global leader will be more likely to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources,



effort and confidence to learn, become literate in, or at least gain appreciation of, other languages. This openness to appreciating (and respecting) other languages (and cultural dimensions) may place the leader in a better position to leverage the follower's exceptional communication skills by placing the individual in the right context (e.g., where the follower would interact with business partners or customers that speak the same language or mentor employees with a need to operate within the same language and cultural dimensions).

## 6. Practical implications

Although the major purpose of this article has been to provide the theoretical understanding of positive global leadership and how it can address today's global challenges, this approach also has implications for effective practice. In particular, positivity in general and the core construct of positive psychological capital in particular have been clearly found to be (1) open to development (e.g., see Luthans, Avey, Avolio & Peterson, 2010; Luthans, Avey & Patera, 2008) and (2) related to desired attitudinal, behavioral and performance outcomes (e.g., see the recent meta-analysis, Avey, Reichard et al., 2011). Importantly, unlike most leadership approaches, positive global leadership can be practically developed in relatively short training programs (for specific guidelines see Luthans, Youssef et al., 2007, Chapter 8; Luthans, 2012) and can potentially be an effective approach to performance management. For example, recent experimental (Luthans, Avey et al., 2010) and longitudinal (Peterson, Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa & Zhang, 2011) studies indicate that PsyCap causes performance and more directly an experimental analysis found that the level of leaders' positivity influences their followers' positivity and performance (Avey, Avolio & Luthans, 2011). In other words, in addition to the rich theoretical foundation for positive global leadership outlined in this article, there are also some very practical ways to implement this new approach with effective results.

## 7. Conclusion

Positive global leadership offers a systematic and integrative approach to developing, managing and leveraging the traits, processes, intentional behaviors and performance outcomes of leaders, their followers and their organizations over time and across contexts in ways that are elevating, exceptional and affirmatory of their strengths, capabilities and developmental potential. It draws from the growing positivity literature (e.g., positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship, positive organizational behavior, and positive psychological capital), as well as established (e.g., trait, behavioral, contingency, exchange, charismatic, and transformational) and emerging (e.g., ethical, spiritual, and authentic) leadership theories. The positive dimensions of these theories are expanded into this new context of leading across cultures. While globalization presents leaders with unique challenges and opportunities, positive global leadership as presented in this article can leverage diverse strengths and capabilities and facilitate development and growth over time, both individually and in the local and global environment.

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