

# ARE WE REALLY GLOBAL LEADERS?



GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

ASSIGNMENT 2: ARTICLE

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***“She doesn’t act like a real Indian. I’ve been around Indians and they’re not like her. She’s telling the class incorrect things about how people act in India.” – European CEMS Student<sup>1</sup>***

Imagine thinking you know someone’s culture more than they do. You know how they should act or how people do things in a country you have never stepped foot in better than someone that has grown up there. The quote above is from a conversation I had with a student during the semester after a classmate expressed how she felt things in her country were done during a class discussion. Despite my European classmate never having been to India, he felt that he knew better. This made me realize that we are often under the illusion of knowing other cultures when in most cases we know nearly nothing.

Through movies, news channels, social media, and even in university classes, we tend to hear a narrative pertaining to a glorified west that needs to help other countries. We live in a globalized world that has given us the illusion of understanding cultures and people more than we really do. This semester, I was surrounded by classmates from all over the globe, with 18 different nationalities, and now more than ever, I realized that there is still a multitude of things to learn and understand. More specifically, my journey through CEMs made me understand that we are guided by the western way which often overlooks emerging markets. This made me question: are we truly global leaders or are we western leaders? If we genuinely want to be global leaders, we need to understand how to learn about cultures that are not like our own and adapt ourselves to various circumstances (Bensberg, 2023).

This article will discuss 3 aspects of becoming a global leader based on what I have learnt this semester: knowing, doing, and being. Knowing will dive into the differences between being a good western leader over being a good global leader. Doing will explore how we can turn ourselves into better global leaders through application of our knowledge and in the last part I will investigate what actually being a global leader means.

### **Knowing: The Difference Between Being a Global vs. a Western Leaders**

At the start of the semester, one of my first readings described leadership symbols in the Pacific Islands, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South America as wearing large canine teeth from ‘large’ and ‘ferocious’ animals whilst in comparison describing the power of western leaders through job titles and status (Hartog & Dickson, 2017). Despite third world countries having some of the biggest economies in the world, people still view them as social projects (Loefstrand, 2022). This is often further emphasized in class discussions and readings given through a western perspective which show a ‘superior’ west (Silver, 2021). After this reading and my past experiences throughout my masters, I was convinced that this would be another semester of “the west is best!”. To my astonishment, this Global Leadership class was different.

The first thing I learnt was that knowing is the core to all success. ‘Knowing’ refers to having the basis from theories and methods to accomplish something successfully (Baldi, 2016). If we do not know, for example, how the west differs from the rest of the world, we may be inclined to believe that it is better. For example, family members are often significantly more worried

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<sup>1</sup> I have kept the names of the people out of the article, but I am happy to give more context if needed.

if we want to go live or travel in an emerging economy in comparison to a western country, as iterated by CEMs alumni, Felix Bensberg<sup>2</sup> (2023).

Knowing can come through many ways such as class discussions, readings, and the news (Das, 2021). With that said, the most effective to me was when people from different countries, such as Mira Gayed from Tanzania and Dr. Rakesh Chitkara from India, came to speak to us in class to share a ‘local’ idea of how things worked in their respective countries. This was more authentic than what any book or teacher could have told me and brought me one step closer to understanding more about their respective fields and countries.

Before becoming a global leader, we need to know what it means to lead in a cross-cultural world, including emerging economies. To do this, we need to emerge ourselves into new information, whilst keeping an open mind that we still have so much to learn. If not, we may be the ones to think we know someone else’s culture better than they do, like my classmate believed. This semester showed me that there is so much I can learn from the past experiences of others and just by listening to peoples’ stories. Once we are able to know, then we can move towards doing.

### **Doing: The Next Step to Becoming a Global Leader**

Although knowing is the start to becoming a global leader, it is not enough. We can know the differences in cultures or leadership methods that best work in different countries, but implementing this knowledge into our leadership takes us into ‘doing’ (Baldi, 2016). Realistically, in the highly volatile world we live in, the relationship between knowing and doing is hard to balance (Baldi, 2016). Therefore, we must move into doing before we know everything we need to know (Baldi, 2016).

Through globalization, we face a greater opportunity now than ever before to connect with people that are different from us (Lutkevich, 2021). This allows us to test our knowledge in diverse environments, with different people, and in various cultures. By allowing ourselves the opportunity to work with people from different places, we become more aware of how to handle situations that are uncommon to us (Das, 2021). This is especially important as we often struggle to deal with differences, even small ones (Bensberg, 2023). This was made evident to me this semester when I was put in a team with Ivey Business School home students. Something as small as the platform we used to communicate our work on felt odd to me. Having used WhatsApp as a means of communication throughout my tertiary education, moving to Facebook seemed strange and even unprofessional. This experience was different and something I only learnt through doing and would likely never have known without social interactions.

These interactions are important for us to gain a greater ability to work with people that are different from us. With that said, they may bring us a false sense of ability as we tend to naturally group with individuals that are similar to us. For example, despite there being 18 different nationalities in my class, there was little diversity. We may have slightly different backgrounds but most students were European, raised in similar circumstances, and had similar financial standing (Bianchi, 2023). The slight differences that were there were seen in various ways, from the people that sat next to one another, to the friend groups that were formed.

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<sup>2</sup> Felix Bensberg is a CEMs alumni that has lived in different countries, both Western and third world. He is currently working with in a company that deals with frontier markets.

Therefore, we need to consciously put ourselves into situations where people are different from us or have experiences they can share. Moreover, if given the opportunity to go to a new country, we should integrate with local communities to expand our knowledge (Bensberg, 2023).

This is especially important if going for work in emerging economies when having a western background. As mentioned by Mira (2023), going into a place with a ‘solution’ that was fostered by foreigners will not aid communities. Solutions are rather found by taking the time to discuss with locals to understand problems and foster solutions together (Gayed, 2023). Taking this extra time will differentiate those that are western leaders from those aspiring to be true global leaders. In that sense, it is important to understand why we are ‘doing’ (Reuther, 2023). With time, putting ourselves into situations that allow us to practice will move us from just doing to being.

### **Being: Personal Values, Goals, & Self-Reflection**

To really be a global leader, I have learnt that we need to understand that the western way is not necessarily better, it is just different. This can be seen when given the opportunity to listen to different perspectives, and experiences. By remaining open-minded and willing to learn, we can be better leaders. This includes moving away from our prejudices about emerging economies and aiming to truly understand them over time. Like in all countries, there are stereotypes we must not succumb to, such as ‘all Canadians are nice’ or ‘most Indians are poor but happy’ (Munjal, 2022). To move away from these, we must take time to change. As mentioned by Aneta Kosinska (2023), people need to hear something seven times and they will change on the eighth. While we may fall prey to some biases, a true leader is able to understand their failures and build from these. We must be vulnerable and willing to fail to become better (Reuther, 2023). To do this, we need to understand our personal values, goals, and allow time for self-reflection which will bring us into ‘being’ (Baldi, 2016).

As it is impossible to know everything about every culture, being a global leader does not mean being an expert. Rather, this semester made me understand that it means firstly understanding myself and what I stand for and secondly, learning to understand the people I work and interact with. It is important, as a leader, to work on our mindsets, our thoughts, and our behaviours (Reuther, 2023). Moreover, as being a global leader means potentially working in teams of people that we are very different to, it is important to work on our emotional intelligence. This will help us better understand our emotions, and those of the people around us. Additionally, as global leaders, we need to know when we have the strength to lead, or when it is best for us to follow and learn.

Ultimately, our education forms a bridge between knowing and doing. We can learn about different cultures and through discussions, we can also learn about how things are done in different places. With that said, until you go to a new place, you will never be able to truly understand the culture (Bensberg, 2023). Therefore, to be a global leader, we need to be willing to travel around the globe.

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