



Leadership practices for corporate global responsibility

Leadership
practices

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225

Abstract

Purpose – The move of organizations towards corporate global responsibility (CGR) is often a major change process that requires leadership throughout the organization. Despite an array of studies on managerial competencies in this area, previous research on leadership for CGR has not studied the actual leadership practices that are employed in a company's journey to CGR. The paper aims to fill this gap and to show how leadership for CGR is enacted by individuals and organizations that are highly successful CGR leaders.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper uses a comparative case-study approach of five multinational companies that are recognized as industry leaders for CGR. A total of 54 semi-structured interviews with senior managers were complemented by ten focus groups and an examination of company reports, value charters and mission statements. Interviews as the main source of information were double-coded in a three-step process with the goal of knowledge development.

Findings – The paper identifies eight interrelated categories of leadership practices for global responsibility: developing CGR vision, strategy, and goals; integrating CGR into business decisions and operations; top management role modeling of CGR; engaging across boundaries; employee development and empowerment; systematic communication about CGR; developing accountability for CGR; and visible integrity in management behavior and decision making.

Practical implications – The findings suggest that focusing on these leadership practices helps organizations build a strong leadership culture that is supportive of CGR.

Originality/value – The examination of actual leadership practices on multiple levels complements the existing knowledge on individual management competencies that are useful for driving CGR in organizations.

Keywords Leadership, Corporate responsibility, Sustainable development, Multinational companies

Paper type Research paper



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1. Introduction

Recent's organizations are being called to operate from a paradigm of global responsibility. Moving far beyond the foundational concepts of philanthropy or conservation, a responsibility agenda addresses issues of poverty, human rights, international relations, institutional capacity building, globalization, fair trade practices, and eco-effectiveness. To excel in global responsibility, companies often pursue the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997), where the focus is on achieving positive financial results while ensuring environmental and social sustainability. This requires an organizational culture that aligns globally responsible values, mission and operations, and organizational leadership with clear direction, alignment of systems and resources and actions, as well as the continuous commitment of all employees to the responsibility objectives.

For global responsibility to be successfully embedded in an organization, significant attention and efforts must be paid to leadership as one factor to change the system (Osborn *et al.*, 2002; Wood *et al.*, 2004). However, progress in understanding how to develop responsible leadership has been slow. Blowfield and Googins (2006) suggest corporate global responsibility (CGR) represents challenges that business schools do not prepare next generations of leaders to manage. Navarro (2008) illustrates this with empirical data: curricula, even top-ranking business schools fail to take aspects of CGR into account. Moreover, there is little empirical research available to inform globally responsible leadership development or to even to inform about best practice in this area. In the research arena, Gladwin and Kennelly (1995, p. 887) advocate CGR as one of the most important aims of management research: "transforming management theory and practice so they positively contribute to sustainable development is, in our view, the greatest challenge facing the Academy of Management." Introducing global responsibility into an organization is about introducing change (new mindsets and new practices), and change requires effective leadership (Wood *et al.*, 2004; Doppelt, 2003). Thus, leadership stands out as the predominant factor driving companies forward on the journey to global responsibility (Googins *et al.*, 2007; Anderson, 1999; Dolan, 2003; Holliday *et al.*, 2002). Yet, there is little empirical research available on how leaders integrate sustainability into an organization or build a globally responsible leadership culture.

The paper addresses this need by identifying the leadership practices that help global business organizations achieve globally responsible operations. It extends current research, as it does not limit its focus to competencies needed by individual leaders, but identifies leadership practices enacted by leaders as individuals or as a collective. Using the results of interviews conducted in five corporations recognized as highly successful in their journey towards a sustainable and globally responsible business, we make a systematic inventory of what leadership actions individual leaders and organizations as a whole actually engage into foster CGR.

Current research on leadership for global responsibility

The critical role of leadership in an organization's shift from a single, profit-based bottom line towards a triple bottom line that includes financial, ecological, and social criteria is undisputed. Shrivastava (1995), Googins *et al.* (2007), and Swanson (1995) all argue that a traditional business focus can impede the journey towards sustainability. Similarly, Laszlo (2008) contends that the conventional approach to leadership is

grossly inadequate to achieve the necessary change for global responsibility. Avery (2005) provides many examples that illustrate how a different leadership style has resulted in a competitive advantage for companies in Germanic Europe, compared to those in North America and the UK, when it comes to sustainability. Scholars in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Basu and Palazzo, 2008; Epstein, 2008; Gardberg and Fombrun, 2006) have voiced the need to focus less on conceptual definitions of leadership for CSR and debates about who is responsible or capable of such leadership and focus more on the questions of how organizations achieve globally responsible leadership.

Looking at actual leadership practices is a novel approach to CGR. Practice frameworks relate to what individuals and collectives actually do. Leadership practices can be seen as routinized types of behavior displayed by individuals or collectives with the goal of producing leadership, and in the present case, leadership for CGR (Reckwitz, 2002). Leadership practices are the observable shared behaviors that shape and ultimately define the leadership culture (Pasmore *et al.*, 2009). In theory, an individual or an organization may be good at a leadership practice or not – yet mastery of a leadership practice should certainly be a goal if maximum value is to be obtained. To date, research has mostly focused on identifying individual leader competencies required to lead organizations in their change efforts towards global responsibility (Ferdig, 2007). In this research stream, a whole array of individual level competencies has been suggested, which partially overlap but, so far, have not been integrated. Specifically, Hind *et al.* (2009) identified systemic thinking, embracing diversity, managing risk, balancing global and local perspectives, meaningful dialogue, and emotional awareness as necessary. McGaw (2005) suggests that leaders must be able to span boundaries, listen to diverse constituencies, make tough decisions, deal with complexity, and see the firm in a larger context. Quinn and Dalton (2009) emphasize communication styles, strategic integration, and stakeholder engagement; Frankel (1998) views whole-systems thinking as the key competency, while Jackson and Nelson (2004) and Roome (1994) identify networking, collaboration, and bridge building as key competencies for sustainability leaders. Elkington (2001) contributes to the list with aspects such as strong vision, stamina, appreciation of diversity, readiness to walk the talk, desire to learn, learning from failures, and a healthy sense of humor. Waddock (2007) suggests natural intelligence, network analysis, holistic systems thinking, cross-cultural understanding, power-sharing, and reflection are necessary skills for leadership for global responsibility.

While these competencies are doubtlessly useful contributors to leadership for global responsibility, the approach of leadership competencies can be criticized on at least two fronts. The first is methodological. Much of the current research on CGR leadership competencies is based on asking what managers or human resources (HR) professionals believe are important CGR leadership skills and abilities, rather than focusing on what individuals or organizations actually do when they are successful in developing and executing CGR strategy. Thus, the competencies gathered from such research are not validated by actual, practical actions – they are merely likely predecessors to such action. The second critique is theoretical: competencies are conceptualized on an individual level only. Thus, competency-based leadership models are prone to a limited view of leadership, that is, one residing entirely within the individual leader (Carroll *et al.*, 2008; Meindl *et al.*, 1985). Not only will successes be

attributed to individual leaders rather than the organizational collective; the search for the most important competencies also abets the conclusion that, once leaders with such competencies have been identified and put in place, the organization will have the ability to implement and sustain globally responsible business operations, and action will follow suit. However, competencies, *per se*, are no guarantee for individual or organizational actions, or for successful organizational outcomes.

That said, leadership competencies and leadership practices, taken together, are different and both important. Competencies and practices are not contradictory, but focus on different aspects of leadership. While competency frameworks emphasize a potential for behavior (based on ability and motivational structure of an actor), the practice perspective emphasizes the individual and collective behaviors that are evident and operational within an organizational system.

Organizational leadership – which is required for organization-level change processes – exceeds the boundaries of individual leadership, placing leadership at the level of an interrelated system of individuals. Leadership is not only something that can be enacted, but it emerges from actions and interactions of individuals within the organization (Osborn *et al.*, 2002). This view of leadership has three main implications:

- (1) people lead others even if they do not have formal leadership responsibilities (Mehra *et al.*, 2006);
- (2) leadership needs to be regarded as a multilevel phenomenon comprising individual, group and organizations (Pearce and Sims, 2000); and
- (3) the study of individual competencies for leadership is less important than the study of actual leadership practices, i.e. how leadership is enacted among the members of a collective (McCauley *et al.*, 2008).

As globally responsible behavior requires leadership at all levels and in all parts of the organization, rather than simply at the top (Waddock, 2007; Googins *et al.*, 2007), a practice perspective seems particularly useful to answer the questions of the how and what in leadership for global responsibility. In this paper, we thus focus on the third implication – the importance of leadership practices.

Research question

Our study focuses on developing a leadership framework that identifies the practices that are important for global responsibility (successfully implementing a strategy integrating social, environmental, and financial goals) in for-profit companies. Following Chia and Holt (2006), the purpose of our research is to understand what practices or combinations of practices, enacted by individuals and organizational collectives (e.g. teams, business units, organizations as a whole), produce globally responsible leadership. Rather than exploring company-specific practices that have proven useful in one specific organizational context, we use a multiple case-study approach of organizations regarded as “best in class” in global responsibility, and we identify specific leadership practices they use. These practices are then grouped into broader thematic categories. Thus, the central research question addressed in this paper is:

- RQ1.* What are the leadership practices (individual or organizational) that help companies successfully implement CSR in their business operations worldwide?

In the next sections, we discuss the methodology we used to address *RQ1*, and describe the leadership practices we identified. We group these practices into eight categories and provide definition as well as detailed examples of specific practices for each category. Finally, we discuss the results in light of their implications for future research and for practice.

2. Methodology

The paper utilizes a qualitative methodology, with the underlying philosophy of knowledge development (Elliot *et al.*, 1999). This is appropriate for three reasons:

- (1) the field of global responsibility does not have a single, rigid methodology, and the use of qualitative and interpretive methods is still welcomed (Carroll, 1994);
- (2) a qualitative approach enables a deeper understanding of the interactive and complex nature of leadership (Bryman and Stephens, 1996; Conger, 1998); and
- (3) the field of leadership for global responsibility is still in an exploratory phase, with little known about the phenomenon, making the qualitative perspective even more suitable (Conger, 1998).

We followed a comparative case-study approach (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) to address the *RQ1* outlined above.

Case selection

We approached the theme of leadership for global responsibility by sampling multiple exemplars (Denzin, 1989). We selected multinational organizations whose public agenda for global responsibility showed a high degree of commitment as well as success related to global responsibility measures, such as being recognized in the Dow Jones sustainability index and winning national and international awards for their CGR efforts. We looked at company reports to verify that CGR was indeed integrated in the organization before including the company in our sample. On their web sites, four of the five companies selected had published sustainability reports, and all of them emphasized values that were in line with a strong CGR orientation and stressed that the practical application of these values related to global responsibility is paramount. Example values that company employees were expected to demonstrate in their day-to-day work were: care for our fellow human beings, openness, innovation, diversity as a source of wealth, change as opportunity, giving back to the community, and a sense of personal responsibility. In company reports, senior executive support was shown by passionate statements from the Chairman of the Board, chief executive officer (CEO), and/or chief operating officer. The reports often contained not only analyses of success in reducing pollution, conserving resources, and/or serving the community, but also detailed areas for improvement and plans for addressing goal shortfalls. Reports covered environmental goals, social/community projects (planned and completed), employee relations issues, and financial transparency, as well as addressing stakeholder concerns on a variety of issues. For the most part, reports were written and published in a way that made them accessible and even attractive to a general audience, with more extensive reports available online or through an archive.

In our case selection, we were actively striving for diversity in industry and geography, as we were interested in identifying practices that were applied in multiple organizations and in a variety of cultural contexts. In total, our sample comprised a food

production company in Poland, a materials company headquartered in Belgium, a logistics company headquartered in Spain, a maritime services company based in Norway, and a pharmaceutical company from India. Owing to their size and global reach, we believed these companies had the most complex set of challenges in activating and maintaining a culture of responsible business, and would therefore provide the most useful insights into which leadership practices would work, and which ones would not (Table I).

Data collection

Data were collected at headquarter sites mentioned above as well as international subsidiary sites. We conducted 54 semi-structured interviews (Zikmund, 2006) of approximately one hour in length with managers of different levels (CEO, top management, and managers with formal responsibility for CGR) in each organization. Interviewees' involvement with global responsibility was either direct (e.g. those with a job title like "CSR manager") or indirect through general management responsibility or functional linkages to the topic (e.g. finance, HR). The interview questions targeted the areas of defining global responsibility, leadership strategies and practices, and individual and organizational development experiences that shaped the organization's approach towards global responsibility. Example questions are: "How did sustainability get started in this organization?"; "What role did you play in developing your organization's sustainability strategies? What did you do?"; "What role did you play in developing your organization's responsibility practices? What did you do?"; and "What specific practices are in place that help your organization's sustainability efforts? What gets in the way?" More background information on global responsibility vision and actions was collected before, during, or after the interviews through reviews of internal as well as publicly available material.

Additionally, we conducted ten focus groups (one to three in each company) with a cross-section of employees with no formal responsibility for CSR. Most of these employees were professionals and specialists, with very little managerial experience. The focus groups were conducted to cross-validate the practices mentioned by interviewees, and to help us judge the relevance and impact of the mentioned practices. Sample focus group questions include: "What is your reaction to how CSR or sustainability (term depended on language used in firm) strategy is being executed in your organization?"; "What specific practices are in place that help your organization's efforts? Any that get in the way?"; and "Who do you consider to be 'sustainability' leaders in this organization? Why?".

Data analysis

Interviews were coded by the research team with help of Atlas-Ti. We employed an iterative process that could be described in three broad steps:

- (1) In a first step, companies' approaches to leadership for CGR were summarized, evaluated, and reflected on in a confidential company report. To ensure respondent validity, these company reports were discussed with representatives of the five case companies. In this first step, we analyzed each case in its entirety according to all the aspects that our sampling had comprised. However, no categorization of data beyond the thematic areas covered in the interview was undertaken.

Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E
<p>A global maritime industry group headquartered in Scandinavia with global representations. Founded before the twentieth century, this company has developed from a traditional shipping business into a global services supplier. The company is especially renowned for their maritime expertise and high innovation focus</p>	<p>Company B is an Eastern European country subsidiary of a global leader in food. Established after the opening of Eastern European markets for Western companies, it is now the market leader for the type of food they produce. Part of a food provider based in Eastern Europe. The company's vision is to be the most trusted, responsible and life-enhancing brand in the country, chosen by consumers every day</p>	<p>Company C is a materials technology company headquartered in Western Europe. With a longstanding history reaching back to traditional mining, this company's overriding goal of value creation today is based on the ambition to develop, produce and recycle materials in a more sustainable way. The company has industrial operations on all continents and serves a global customer base</p>	<p>Company D is an international package delivery service headquartered in Latin Europe. Founded not more than 30 years ago and set up as a franchise system, it has grown to become the market leader in special deliveries in Latin Europe and South America. Company D bases its success on the strategic recruitment of specially-abled employees and family-friendly work policies</p>	<p>Company E is a global pharmaceutical company headquartered in Asia and with a presence in more than 100 countries. Its aim is to help people lead healthier lives through two parallel objectives: delivering affordable and accessible medication to all parts of the world and discovering, developing and commercializing innovative medicines that satisfy unmet medical needs</p>

Table I.
Profile of the participating companies: a snapshot

- (2) The second step was a cross-case analysis, extracting specific leadership practices that were seen as helping/hindering the journey towards global responsibility. Individually, all five research team members applied preliminary labels to all coded units. The intention behind this procedure was to elicit the emergence of leadership practices from the interviews, rather than categorizing the data into a pre-determined category system. The unit of analysis was the semantic unit. Thus, a coded piece of data could vary in length between words and paragraphs.
- (3) In a third step, we collected and compared all codes that had been assigned. In a week-long retreat, these labels were discussed and integrated. With the help of mindmapping, we proceeded from unrelated codes to a nomological network to a hierarchical framework with superordinate and subordinate codes. Mindmaps were refined until saturation was reached and all research team members agreed that the hierarchical framework was sensible and exhausted the data. Finally, once this hierarchical framework was established, we went back to the data to re-ground and define (i.e. write definitions for) our categories. Figure 1 shows our final mindmap for the eight categories of leadership practices.

Focus group data were not used as primary data to generate leadership practices, but to validate the relevance and impact of the practices mentioned by interviewees. Thus, they served as cross-referencing information to weave leadership practices and sustainability practices. An example: an interviewee reported getting up at four in the morning to distribute a CGR brochure to the early shift factory workers. The impact of this action was recounted by employees in the focus group, who said that this leadership practice ensured buy-in for CGR even on the lowest levels.

Quality criteria

In cross-case analysis, the goal is to reach generalizability of the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Further, the process of creating theory from cases puts reflective awareness and consistency as two criteria of high relevance (Howe and Eisenhart, 1990). Below, we discuss the steps we took to deal with these criteria throughout our analysis:

- *Perspective awareness.* The research team for this paper was strategically diverse in professional background and gender. Dominant cultural influences in the team stemmed from Germany, Italy, Spain, the USA, and Venezuela. This variety in backgrounds led to a high diversity in perspectives and reduced the cultural bias risk. Thus, regular team meetings focused on the joint establishment of meaning of the data and the exploration of the interpretative connotations of the words we used to describe our data, before we actually engaged in coding the data. A commonality in perspectives emerged through the team's familiarity with previous research on leadership as well as global responsibility. In sum, our interpretative framework was grounded in the data, and subsequently we went back to previous theory and theoretical model to assess the results of our research.
- *Double coding.* To ensure that no single perspective of the research team dominated in the process of interpreting and categorizing the data, each interview was independently coded by a rotating subset of two of the five members in the research team.

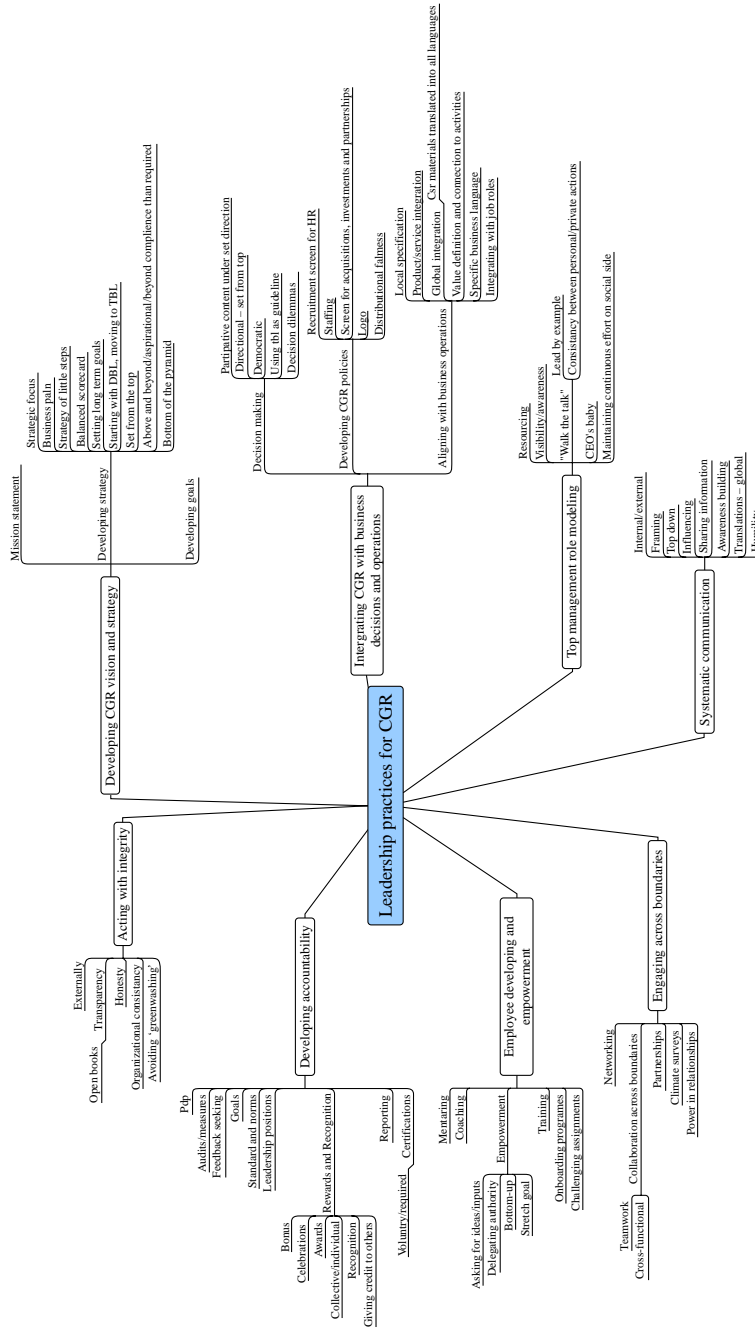


Figure 1. Mindmap of leadership practice categories

- *Inter-coder consensus.* After the two coders had independently worked on their data, their coding notes for each interview were integrated. The coders met by phone or in person to discuss all of their codes and find consensus how a specific piece of data should be coded. In cases where no consensus could be achieved, a third person acted as a tie-breaker.

Altogether, our coding procedure was characterized by a high degree of inter-subjectivity and consistency. By re-grounding our hierarchical framework in interviews from all organizational cases, we ensured that our interpretations were generalizable. Furthermore, our goal was not to compare the organizations with regard to leadership practices for global responsibility, but on the contrary to identify the common variables towards an overarching structure of leadership practice, using company leaders in the field who offer a valuable benchmark for their sectors.

3. Findings

Our three-step coding process produced eight categories of leadership practices that emerged as powerful facilitators for global responsibility. In Table II, we include statements from participants across companies highlighting the respective leadership practices. In the following paragraphs, numbers in parentheses refer to the corresponding quotes in the following sections.

Developing CGR vision, strategy, and goals

One category of practices that emerged from the data analysis of our qualitative study had to do with the design and development of a vision, strategy, and goals related to CGR. In general, the practice of creating a CSR vision and strategy helped order and prioritize the many potential activities a company might undertake – on a strategic as well as operational level.

Interviewees stated that incorporating a CGR vision in the company's mission statement had helped in communicating intent and commitment to all stakeholder groups. They emphasized that a successful vision feels authentic – it is rooted in the background and history of the company and takes into account its unique strengths. Sometimes, the vision was developed alone by someone very committed to the cause and usually at the top of the organization; sometimes, it was the result of a purposeful collective effort. Executives also talked about having developed a clear strategy and specific goals that inspire, involve, and motivate employees. While our case companies differed in the nature of strategies that they had used successfully for implementing CGR, in general, global responsibility strategies were set from the top of the organization, went above and beyond compliance or what was required by law, and included multiple long-term goals. Frequently, these goals were very company-specific, even defining the company's uniqueness and its strategy (1,2). The strategies considered most effective for global responsibility helped fulfill the company's vision in more than one aspect – financial, social, and environmental. Addressing the needs of the "bottom of the pyramid" is one example that created social benefit as well as new market opportunities (3).

In our case companies, the development of CGR vision and strategy often required a whole array of new or revised new operations policies that reflected an increased understanding of the company as a dynamic system, in which internal processes and

Developing CGR vision, strategy, and goals

- (1) "We are a company that has a very long history – the roots of the company go back to 1805. The activities of these times are still at the origin of some of our operations today. This creates a heritage, a legacy – issues which we are committed to dealing with and about which we have already done a great deal. We will conclude the remediation of virtually all of our environmental liability by 2009." (CEO, Company C)
- (2) "What this company is after, this company is not a non-profit organisation, it's a company that first of all needs to make a profit, to obtain results, simply and clearly, it is after results. Social responsibility forms a part of the company strategy." (Quality Manager, Company D)
- (3) "Our mission is to be a market leader to supply healthy food for consumers everywhere in the world – yes, that's the mission of (company). A healthy product for people for high income markets – and nutrition for people who have little money" (Manager, Company B)
- (4) "All plants, each site has to deliver according to the goal they set for themselves. For example, for the area of training [...] we want to have their action plan – and a documentation of the training sessions for the people that were actually held." (HR Manager, Company C)
- (5) "There was a necessity to make a link between our company statement, the code of conduct, and some key performance indicators which are really showing with numbers that we are doing what we have written on nice paper. So I had meetings with all the HR managers all around the world and we came out with forty-five key performance indicators, which we then reduced to five for the current reporting cycle. Each of the five is in the report to ensure we are really doing this." (VP, Company C)

Integrating CGR into business decisions and operations

Top management role modeling for CGR

- (6) "This self conviction [...] our General Manager has always had it inside him. And as an example [...] When we opened the Valencia branch, the first thing he did was to go to an association of people with disabilities to look for personnel." (VP, Company D)
- (7) "I think my role is to be a strong mentor of it, to walk the talk, and to push actions forward which help to show to the company that we are trying to walk our talk [...] For me personally, how I conduct myself is to be a person who is not centered around himself but centered around the environment he's working in. Thus, he's responsible for the environment, environment in terms of people, in terms of family, in terms of friends but also environment in terms of employees you're working with and are responsible for." (General Manager, Company B)
- (8) "You need that kind of impetus from the top, otherwise nothing changes or nothing changes very fast. But he (our CEO) has been quite top down, we will do this." (Director, Company C, Germany)

(continued)

Table II. Participant quotes

Table II.

<p>Engaging across boundaries</p> <p>(9) “[...] (in this project) we have four partners working together. The one is producing, the other is developing it, the third one is distributing it, the fourth one has the whole idea, that’s us. And we have an open book policy so everyone knows the profit and loss statement of this product. We have one profit and loss statement and each partner is taking a certain fair share to cover its costs for its activity.” (General Manager, Company B)</p> <p>(10) “We coordinate, we talk with people from different departments which are responsible for the small stages of the production. And we sit together and talk about possibilities, how to lower the costs and how to distribute this product to the other organizations. It’s difficult because we have such a law and we try to find some kind of way to get around it without breaking the law.” (Marketing Specialist, Company B)</p> <p>(11) “We can’t be concentrating in just one place now because the market is very global. So what we are trying to explain to people is to show them the big picture, so if every chemist in the lab knows the ultimate goal of the company, so he or she can link it completely. We had a big communication session Friday, and for every single operation we tried to link, saying this is our final goals and what you’re doing is essentially related to this.” (Vice President (VP), Company E)</p> <p>(12) “We had some NGO’s, we had some other companies coming in and some SRJ investors, etc. looking at the issue from different sides and interacting with our top management. So I think that was an educational experience at that level.” (CEO, Company C)</p> <p>(13) “So the aim is to ensure that this policy, that has the full support of management, flows through all the communication channels right to the last employee and that it doesn’t remain stationary in one specific place.” (Process Manager, Company D)</p> <p>(14) “We have training – three trainings in a month where I spend one hour explaining sustainability to them [...] so in the next three months I can be sure that every guy in this unit will know what sustainability is and how his way of working will impact people and the planet.” (Director, Company E)</p> <p>(15) “Everybody looks upward and it is much safer to be a follower than a leader. So you have to give the steering wheel to the person who you know doesn’t know how to drive [...] And that is the hardest part. You know you are giving the steering of your car to your son and saying there goes my car and my life! But you know if you have faith in people, they will never let you down. So by far the hardest part is to convince people that ‘you know, you can do it. You can think. You can be your own leader. And you don’t need to look at somebody to give you the solution. The solution is going to come from here (pointing to his head) and here (pointing to his heart). And the best resources you are looking for. God has already given you when you were born.’ Have faith in them, believe in them, and they will believe in themselves.” (Director, Company E)</p>	<p>Systematic communication about CGR</p> <p>Employee empowerment and development</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(continued)</i></p>
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- (16) "If someone presents a project now and we cannot prove that this new process can be built in a closed loop approach where there's no waste, then I can block it. I can push the people to think further and say okay come back and go back to the drawing table and come back with something which is completely closed loop." (Technology Manager, Company C)
- (17) "The company involves people on all levels in social responsibility. For example, the family responsibility committee. It's a committee inside the company that comes up with ideas and tries to improve on what we already have, which is difficult, and then proposes things to Management." (Manager, Company D)
- (18) "One thing which is common [...] is continuous improvement. We have to improve our figures continuously, we have to improve our safety, our environmental figures continuously and we also have to improve our social performance continuously. We have to stay on the ball; we have to keep getting better." (Process Manager, Company C, Germany)
- (19) "We choose external auditing because it's more challenging. I think this is a far more ambitious way to audit. For sure a tougher way for us because there is no mercy. Internally you can say okay we have this difficulty and these priorities, but with an outside firm they are paid for that, they have their own reputation and there is no way for them to be gentle. They can see it like it is." (VP, Company C)
- (20) "Indeed people get the tap on the shoulder saying wow you're doing a good job. You are rewarded because the objectives that you're supposed to meet are just not financial objectives but they also have to do with openness and transparency and living up to the values of our company." (Production Manager, Company C)
- (21) "When you're in the day-to-day business, especially on these things where you're dealing with ethics with suppliers, you need to have some ways to push an organization so that people don't just glide in their daily life without questioning all the time what they are doing." (VP, Company E)
- (22) "You can do a lot of these things but you don't want to brag about them. If you do, it could easily create bad sentiments." (VP, Company A)
- (23) "Our General Manager has always been very clear about one thing and that is that we must fulfil what we are promising, and publicity is an extra." (Employee, Company D)

Developing accountability for CGR

Visible integrity in management behavior and decision-making

Table II.

external influences interact. As this change of both mindset and practice was a significant one for most companies, many of our participants emphasized that their organizations purposefully employs a process of small but steady steps towards the achievement of key goals. Tools such as the balanced scorecard were often adapted and used to facilitate cross-organization goal setting in a way that was aligned with CGR strategy.

Interestingly, the creation of a formal vision in the mission statement did not always precede globally responsible actions and projects in our case companies. In some cases, social responsibility was implicitly built into the organizational culture from the start, although formal goals and strategies had not been set. These companies developed a formal strategy only after becoming familiar with the language of global responsibility, connecting well-developed practices with a theoretical and strategic underpinning. As a side effect, members of these companies found it somewhat easier to make the changes necessary to formalize the organization's commitment to CGR.

Integrating CGR into business decisions and operations

Leadership practices in this category were seen by interviewees as helping to align and integrate CGR goals and strategies into the company's culture and into the everyday work of all employees, as well as throughout the value chain. Many people we interviewed stressed the importance of implementing the company's global responsibility practices in all areas of business. Initiating the development of specific policies that operationalize CGR was one aspect of leadership practice in this area, for example, by starting a CGR screening of all suppliers. Leading CGR integration also included making the CGR strategy tangible and understandable to all employees –, e.g. by using specific business language, specifying local issues and including regional examples, as well as by translating materials into local languages. Leadership practices in this area also pertained to diversification of efforts: specifying policy or setting specific direction on a local level (rather than dictating a uniform plan from headquarters) facilitated the understanding of global responsibility principles as well as the application of such actions (4). Participants recognized that the challenges they faced in different locations and business lines were too diverse to be addressed with the same tools or actions, yet in order to have company-wide impact, what was required was a means of high-level integration to ensure that CGR strategy was appropriately enacted throughout the organization (5). Some participants also mentioned the integration of CGR goals with specific employees' job roles and descriptions so as to provide a clear link from more abstract vision and strategy to the day to day work of every employee.

Top management role modeling of CGR

In our interviews, top management role modeling emerged as a vital ingredient in helping a company make real progress towards global responsibility. This role modeling needed to be highly visible and purposefully displayed. Effective role modeling was aligned with the company's culture and expressed the company's approach to CGR. Top management role models were described as "walking the talk," "leading CGR by example," and showing consistency between one's actions in business and in private. As described earlier, top management often took responsibility for creating documents that give direction for global responsibility actions and implementation. To employees, this signified sincerity about CGR and elevated their motivation to become engaged (6).

Top management role modeling was used to create visibility and awareness of global responsibility both inside and outside the company, e.g. by showing continuous

organizational engagement with CGR through regular CEO briefings, and executive speeches. Having a CEO or other senior executive participating in global responsibility initiatives, such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) or the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, or acting as a public spokesperson around the issue communicates sincerity of engagement and positions the CEO as an impressive role model to other employees and to other organizations worldwide.

However, it was evident in our interviews that consistency is the most important element of top management support. Our participants stated that consistent support made the difference between global responsibility as being seen as “the flavor of the day” or as a real commitment. Continuous commitment proved particularly relevant when challenges arose, for example when major changes needed to be implemented, difficulties arose with sustained stakeholder engagement, economic conditions made people question the viability of CGR goals, or in situations of difficulty with gaining client acceptance of a responsibility orientation. This was stipulated by top managers themselves (7) as well as by others (8).

Engaging across boundaries

The leadership practices in this category are concerned with the engagement of stakeholders, internal as well as external, to create effective partnerships and networks. In our case companies, engaging across boundaries required working across:

- internal boundaries of level and function; and
- structural boundaries of organization, country, or region.

Quite often, boundary-spanning partnerships created tangible business benefits over and above their original purpose (9).

Leadership practices that fostered engagement across boundaries included the intentional creation of cross-level and boundary-spanning partnerships, projects and activities focused on environmental and/or social improvement. Partnership examples included managers working with direct reports, cross-functional action teams working together, partnerships of employees with customers and suppliers, and organization-level collaboration with competitors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The paper included highlighting the value and results of boundary-spanning action, showing that this way of working is often superior to traditional approaches. It also required collaborating partners to create a shared understanding of the task or problem at hand (10), a challenge that often led to significant organizational learning.

In sum, leadership practices fostering engagement across boundaries lowered the perceived or real barriers for collaboration, emphasized the value of such a way of working, highlighted the results, facilitated interaction and learning, and established boundary-spanning work as an integral part of the company’s CGR best practice.

Systematic communication about CGR

The aspect of communication was emphasized often by participants in all case companies. Leaders were expected to be CGR role models, but also to communicate their dedication and action to others – on an individual as well as collective level. Effective communication about CGR was initiated by leaders throughout the organization and directed towards various stakeholder groups. In many organizations, it took some learning to find the most effective ways for communicating towards different

stakeholder groups. Our interviewees emphasized that communication on global responsibility should be systematic and portray CGR as highly meaningful and strategically important to the organization.

Systematic communication was emphasized as more important than frequent, but uncoordinated, communication. Systematic communication included both informal and formal communication activities, verbal and written, that were adapted to fit the local context of the audience (11) and rolled out organization-wide on a timely (and yet still frequent) basis.

Some participants stated that their firms had implemented a real two-way communication process, both among people inside and with those outside the organization. These dialogues not only created a deeply shared sense of alignment between stakeholders, but also informed the company's direction for global responsibility and were perceived as a good learning opportunity (12). In all companies, participants stipulated that authenticity and honesty in communication around global responsibility was a key factor for the message to be credible. Honest communication to external audiences often was seen as even more critical than internal transparency.

The leadership practices for communication can be differentiated into internally and externally focused practices. Internally focused leadership practices seen as important included honest reporting about progress on environmental or social goals, or problems encountered in implementing those. Leaders emphasized that communication needed to be aligned with the company's culture and commensurate with the significance of the actions. In this line, interviewees in some companies felt that organizational or cultural norms would prescribe humility about one's efforts in CGR, rather than advertising them. They emphasized communication about CGR as needing to be consistent and as ethical not only in its content, but also in its format and style. Articulating how global responsibility "translates" into the day-to-day work of each and every employee was another practice seen as critical for aligning people's thoughts and actions and maintaining their commitment to implement CGR in their sphere of influence (13).

Employee empowerment and development for CGR

The leadership practices in this category were focused on developing individual and organizational understanding and skills for responsibility-related activities and enhancing people's sense of authority to properly promote CGR and to take effective local action with respect to global responsibility.

Development is seen as a key tool in creating a sense of empowerment in both managers and other employees. These organizations ensured the CGR training is available to each and every manager, and they most often personally participated in educating others (14). Senior executives also actively sought out development themselves. This showed others that top management regarded CGR as important enough to spend personal time and money on, as well as establishing a context for company support of the development of CGR high potentials, for example, sending promising young managers to the WBCSD Future Leaders Team. Leaders also engaged in informal development practices like mentoring, coaching, and providing challenging assignments that linked business activities with the triple bottom line. Establishing empowerment was seen as crucial for mainstreaming CGR into people's everyday jobs, and leaders saw themselves as personally responsible for this (15).

Other practices used to support empowerment and development were the delegation of decision making to the lowest possible level (16), and the encouragement of bottom-up ideas for global responsibility (17). One of our case companies was based on a franchise model in which franchisees approve all budgets and give important input to implementation of globally responsible projects like any other projects. In the other companies, empowerment stretched to the collective level –, e.g. by empowering subsidiaries to be CGR innovation models for the whole organization.

Developing accountability for CGR

Frequently, participants mentioned the importance of accountability to ensure progress. Many mentioned the utility of establishing goals, standards, and norms that meet high standards of social and environmental responsibility at both individual and organizational levels, bringing up the old saying, “what gets measured gets done.” Accountability was seen as necessary to ensure that responsibility goals were not only set but enacted. Accountability at the individual level was ensured by incorporating responsibility targets in annual performance reviews, feedback sessions, regular reporting, professional development and certifications (voluntary and required), as well as rewards and recognitions. At the organizational level, external audits and regular reporting were actions that participants mentioned as helping ensure accountability (19).

Leadership practices related to performance accountability were often used to respond to the complexity of capturing performance in environmental and social areas. Various participants voiced the opinion that managing performance to enhance global responsibility implies a focus on continuous improvement rather than a sole aim of meeting or maintaining a certain standard. In other words, in these companies, measures were seen as tools for ongoing organization development, not as ends in themselves (18).

Another leadership practice related to accountability was publically recognizing the achievement of goals and rewarding outstanding CGR performance. Interestingly, the majority of our interviewees advocated not to reward CGR performance by an additional monetary bonus. They stated that reward systems work best when recognition for CGR is nonmonetary, or if CGR is simply one of many criteria to decide for a person’s overall annual bonus (20).

Visible integrity in management behavior and decision making

Displayed integrity on the part of managers sets an example inside and outside the company and indicates to employees and other stakeholders that global responsibility is taken seriously. Integrity was made visible in our cases through practicing consistency between actions and words, providing continuity in leaders’ commitment to CGR on a strategic and operational level, and through a general focus on behaving ethically at an individual and organizational level. Organizational integrity was displayed in how stakeholders were prioritized, and the way key stakeholders were treated and involved. Transparency, adherence to processes and participation, e.g. in decision making and accounting, were practices that symbolized consistency and honesty on a collective level (21). Visible integrity of CGR leaders helped build trust and confidence in the organizations’ commitments to CGR, which in turn sped up the integration of global responsibility into company operations. Visible ethical actions of managers were often formed into stories that became the fabric of the company culture.

These stories might be about unexpected fair treatment or values-based decision making in ethical dilemmas.

Many participants also mentioned that, as managers, they established organizational incentives for all employees to blend personal with professional responsibility, e.g. by volunteering in company-sponsored social and environmental activities in the community.

Finally, many participants actively distanced themselves and their companies from using accomplishments in global responsibility as a publicity tool (22). They stated that their companies avoided “greenwashing” (i.e. selling strategic decisions as motivated by CGR even if positive effects in these areas are just side effects), as well as over-committing to sustainability actions they were not able to follow up (23). Interviewees made the point that their company’s CGR efforts were motivated by ethical awareness and long-term strategy, rather than by marketing and reputation considerations. Overall, public communication around CGR was seen as effective if it was aligned with a company’s norms and values. In one company, ethical responsibility was so ingrained in the company’s self-definition, that some interviewees did not see much point in publicising their CGR practices at all – fearing it would be perceived as bragging and inappropriate.

4. Discussion

In this paper, we investigated the leadership practices conducive to enhance and establish global responsibility in organizations. Across five case studies in multinational organizations, we identified eight larger categories of leadership practices that were applied successfully in these organizations in order to become more globally responsible. Through the application of a descriptive framework of leadership, rather than a deontological or competency framework, our study deviates from and adds to mainstream leadership. In result, the practice categories identified in this paper are very comprehensive and defy being subsumed under one specific leadership style, type or approach.

We believe that the identification of leadership practices, both individual and collective, is useful to help organizations develop, implement, and celebrate a culture of global responsibility. While many of the practices identified here could be seen as the leadership practices that are generic to any kind of change process, what is unique about all these practices is the intentional application of these practices to enhance CGR. Knowing which practices are important, organizations can make efforts to apply these practices frequently and expertly in pursuit of a more responsible corporate culture. Our case companies have also shown that it is the interconnected and integrated use of such leadership practices that creates success in practice.

Unfortunately, there are few theory-based frameworks available that allow for such integration. Most leadership theories share the underlying assumption that leadership always involves leaders, followers, and shared goals. This has been called the “tripod” of leadership (Bennis, 2007, p. 3). Such traditional models do not allow for understanding leadership that emerges at a collective level, or how various leadership practices (or leadership competencies, for that matter) are integrated with each other to produce effective leadership. A notable exception is the framework of direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC, Drath *et al.*, 2008). The DAC model views leadership as a co-creative process based in a culture of leadership beliefs and practices.

Rather than concerning itself with individuals or groups as the source of leadership, it defines leadership based on its outcomes: as processes that provide direction, align action, and build or maintain commitment to collective ends. The practices we found being used in these highly successful, globally responsible organizations were practices seen in the behaviors of individuals (formal and informal “leaders”), and in the systems, processes, and collective routines at the team and organizational level. The DAC model sees leadership practices as key components of a leadership culture capable of producing direction for, alignment with, and commitment to globally responsible action in organizations. Depending on how a leadership practice is used, it is suited to achieve direction, alignment, or commitment – or a combination of all three. However, for a strong overall leadership to emerge, the total of all practices needs to be used such that all three leadership outcomes are addressed in a balanced way. These assumptions resonated perfectly with the way that our interviewees talked about leadership practices in their companies –, i.e. as concerted, integrated, and complex efforts that resulted in DAC related to CGR.

We also see potential for integrating the leadership practices identified in this paper with competencies mentioned in previous literature. Leaders who possess the competencies identified as important for CGR will likely find it easier to introduce and foster specific leadership practices in their organizations. For example, competencies such as a cross-cultural understanding (Waddock, 2007), willingness to embrace diversity (Hind *et al.*, 2009; Elkington, 2001), being a good networker (Jackson and Nelson, 2004), and having the ability to engage stakeholders (Schouten and Romme, 2006; Doppelt, 2003) can help leaders to take on the practices we grouped under engaging across boundaries. Similarly, systems thinking (Frankel, 1998; Hind *et al.*, 2009) relates to the effective implementation of practices such as creating vision and strategy, and also operationalizing CGR.

Implications for research

Our study extends the research on leadership for global responsibility by focusing on leadership practices. We recognize that this study of leadership practices cannot stand alone. In order to create the change necessary to advance the responsibility of organizations today, companies need a leadership culture that supports this purpose. In the DAC framework, leadership culture is seen as consisting of practices as well as beliefs around leadership shared among the members of the organization. Thus, our description of leadership practices outlined here should be expanded to include a focus on individual and collective leadership beliefs: beliefs about how DAC towards global responsibility are best achieved. The DAC framework asserts that leadership beliefs are a predecessor for actual leadership practices (i.e. people act based on beliefs about what behaviors will produce desired results), thus the integration of both parts – practices and beliefs – would be most helpful to shed light on the emergence, expression, and impact of a leadership culture for global responsibility (D’Amato and Roome, 2009).

The contribution of our study to emerging theory in this area is not only to show that leadership is important for organizations who want to enhance their global responsibility, but to specify which practices are most conducive to actual progress on this journey. As this paper is exploratory in nature, it calls for empirical tests that examine the generalizability and utility of our leadership practices with quantitative techniques. Investigations of the financial, environmental, and social impact of

engaging in each of the practice categories would be most relevant. Moreover, the degree to which all of these practices are applied throughout the organization and on all hierarchical levels should be examined as a determinant of success and impact. In particular, using organizational configurations matching theory and methods, e.g. Boolean analysis (Fiss, 2007), would explain how leadership practices combine, rather than compete to produce CGR development and implementation within as well as beyond organizational boundaries.

Limitations and future research

Our study of leadership practices is exploratory and qualitative in nature and thus is subject to the usual criticisms against this type of research. Yet, the procedures applied in each step of identifying case organizations, conducting and coding the interviews, creating alignment between different coders, and making sense of the data suggest that our findings and our interpretation of them are made on an inter-subjective basis. The respect of methodological fit among elements of the research project – research questions, prior work, research design, and theoretical contribution – has been clearly reported in the article (Edmondson and McManus, 2007), thus providing evidence for generalization. The results of this paper show that leadership practices and leadership competencies from previous research are closely aligned and could indeed complement each other. A possible limitation of this paper lies in our sampling approach: due to language capabilities of the research team, we required participants to have a good grasp of English and be able to express their complex thoughts and ideas adequately in this language, even if it might not be their mother tongue. While we were careful to ensure mutual understanding and sometimes even included language experts to assist in the interview process, we cannot definitively exclude that language had an effect on participation, expression, and type of information provided.

Moreover, our analytic approach could be seen as another limitation in this study (Kalnins, 2007), as the information collected has been analyzed as a whole leading us to miss possibly relevant intra-organizational dependencies or contingencies. However, as we were interested in identifying practices that were applied across organizational settings, rather than comparing companies on their specific configuration of practices, we see such efforts as separate endeavors for the future. Indeed, future research to examine such configurations and provide empirical tests of the independent but interrelated practices could help build an overarching framework of globally responsible leadership.

Similarly, in order to understand the temporal development of leadership for global responsibility, the evolution of leadership practices over time needs to be examined. This could be done, for example, by collaborative research with firms that have declared the intent to become more globally responsible, yet are only beginning their journey in this area. Stage models of CGR in organizations (Mirvis and Googins, 2006; van Marrewijk and Were, 2003) hold promise for relating mastery and frequency of leadership practices to change in organizational cultures over time.

Furthermore, future studies should aim at integrating leadership practices for CGR not only with one another, but also with a company's general culture. In line with Avery' (2005) work, our results suggest that companies that are "best in class" for CGR are likely to share some cultural characteristics that differentiate them from other companies. These cultural characteristics, rooted in the fabric of each company as well

as in societal culture, are likely to be pillars on which sustainable leadership can be built (Drath *et al.*, 2008). Examining these core values and their relationships with sustainable leadership can help us understand even more how leadership for CGR can be developed in specific companies.

Implications for practice

The current configurational model of leadership practices for global responsibility allows identifying patterns of behavior conducive for the development and improvement of global responsibility. This has implications for leadership development on an individual and collective level. For individuals, development of leadership practices is based on the development of specific leadership behaviors, which can then be refined, integrated with others, and applied in a goal-oriented way. Such behaviors can easily be developed through continuous engagement in experiential learning – emphasizing active experimentation and reflective observation (Kolb, 1984). Thus, it can be integrated with efforts to develop specific leadership competencies; in fact, we would argue that developing practices can be done faster and yield results earlier than developing more abstract leadership competencies for global responsibility.

For the development of leadership on an organizational level, our study implies that the way single practices are interconnected should correspond with an organization's unique needs, challenges, and culture. Companies on the journey to global responsibility need to contextualize the actions they want to embark on. They cannot rely on copying successful practices from others – because responsibility practices are only successful if they resonate with a company's vision, mission, and culture (Heslin and Ochoa, 2008).

Outlook

In this paper, we have uncovered an array of leadership practices that have helped companies that are high performers in CGR to get to their current level of relative excellence. While each of the practices identified will likely help an organization's journey to global responsibility, practices need to be applied concurrently, be connected in a meaningful way. If leadership practices are disconnected and individualized, with no integrative systems and the creation of unambiguous processes, the company as a whole will likely not be effective in creating the necessary change. Through their unique combination of practices, companies have developed responses to the specific leadership challenges and problems they are faced with – yet over time, these challenges and problems are likely to change. We recognize that global responsibility is a process rather than an outcome and therefore requires continuous adaptation and re-contextualization of leadership practices to meet these challenges.

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