Leadership Development in Korea: A Literature Review

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It is no exaggeration to say that an organization’s ability to cultivate leaders is vital to its long-term success. As researchers have theoretically elaborated and empirically demonstrated, through a process of social influence leaders guide and inspire followers toward desired outcomes (e.g., Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002; Hui, Law, Hackett, Duanxu, & Zhen Xiong, 2005; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Rich, 2001). The problem is that, in most countries the demand for high quality leaders exceeds the supply (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels, 1998; Spreitzer, 2006). In addition to the changes in workforce demographics, there are some trends that make the shortage of leaders more serious: a more complex economy demands more sophisticated talents with global acumen, multicultural fluency, technological literacy, entrepreneurial skill, and the ability to manage increasingly delayered, disaggregated organizations; small and medium-sized firm are increasingly targeting the same people sought by large companies, thus making war for talent more competitive; and job mobility is increasing (Chambers et al., 1998; Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001).

As a response to this issue, a lot of researchers in the leadership field have proposed ways to grow leaders and develop leadership in organizations. For example, researchers suggested that developing leaders calls for assessing leadership competencies based on observable indicators of 

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success to identify strengths and performance gaps; offering developmental challenges to close
the gaps; and providing support to nurture leaders to grow (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison,
1988; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2003). In addition, researchers also reported global trends that
characterize contemporary leadership development. For example, Hernez-Broome and Hughes
(2004) summarized the trends in leadership development, which included the following: the
proliferation of new leadership development methods; a growing recognition of the importance
of a leader’s emotional resonance with others; a greater focus on the context in which leadership
is developed; thoughtful consideration about how to best use leadership competencies; and
work/life balance issues.

However, even though the phenomenon of leadership is widely considered to be
universal across cultures, the way it is operationalized is usually viewed as culturally specific
(Dorfman et al., 1997). Likewise, despite the value of identifying general trends across countries
and giving universal recommendations for developing leaders, there is also a need for leadership
development to be relevant to the characteristics of any given society or cultural entity.
Therefore, depending on the cultural context and on the pressing issues organizations are facing,
the way organizations develop and cultivate leadership can be different. The problem is that even
though general suggestions for leadership development and its global trends are relatively
abundant, attempts to conceptualize the trends with regard to the issues organizations are facing
are rare. For example, while Keys and Wolfe (1988) and Day (2000) proposed typologies of
practices related to management and leadership development, they didn’t review the trends in
practices in relation to the issues and challenges organizations in a society were facing.

We assume that the profound changes shaping the environments surrounding
organizations in Korea are also affecting how organizations prepare their people for present and
future challenges. Based on this assumption, we developed the following three research questions: (1) what are the issues Korean organizations are facing these days?; (2) what are the leadership competencies required for Korean leaders with regard to these issues?; (3) how do organizations and individuals cope with these issues through leadership development practices? To answer to these questions, we reviewed literature on the general issues organizations in Korea are facing these days as well as that on the contemporary leadership development practices in Korea. In this respect, this article is an integrative literature review which is “a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). An integrative literature review is appropriate for this article as it can result in fresh, new understandings and, in most cases, significant reconceptualizations of mature topics like leadership development.

By reviewing the literature, we identified five issues or challenges which organizations in Korea are facing. They included the following: (1) increasing pressure for change, (2) intensifying global competition, (3) growing importance of creativity, (4) growing value of humility, and (5) growing contributions of women in business.

As these five issues are profound changes shaping the environments surrounding organizations in Korea, we assume that they are also affecting the ways organizations prepare their people and develop leadership. Therefore, we identified five topics/areas of leadership that organizations are expected to emphasize through various leadership development practices in order to effectively address the aforementioned issues. They included (1) developing strategic leadership, (2) developing global leadership, (3) developing creative leadership, (4) developing servant leadership, and (5) developing women in top leadership positions.
Lastly, we examined how the contemporary leadership development practices in Korea are addressing developing leadership in the five areas. By reviewing newspaper articles, Korean HRM and HRD journals, and other reliable sources related to leadership development in Korea, we found that organizations in Korea are developing leadership in the five areas through various practices such as coaching, leadership/managerial training programs, and action-learning programs, to name a few.

By exploring the issues for which leadership development interventions are required and by connecting the issues with the ways organizations are developing leaders and leadership, this article reveals the issues which the current leadership development practices have successfully addressed as well as the issues that they have failed to deal with. We hope that the findings of this literature review can contribute to expanding and diversifying the knowledge base of leadership development practices. In addition, the findings are also expected to serve as starting points to improve the leadership development practices.

References


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