Article

Identifying conceptual incongruences within global leadership competency models

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Abstract
Despite decades of research on global leadership competencies, there is a continued unresolved debate among scholars around an integrative Global Leadership Competency model (GLC model), as none of the models proposed has been widely used in literature. Attempts to replicate and operationalize existing models are scarce, and scholars tend to recreate GLC models instead of building on existing ones. Instead of proposing yet another GLC model, this paper aims to identify factors that explain the unresolved debate around an integrative Global Leadership Competency model to be used in academic and managerial settings. To do so, we conducted a conceptual analysis based on an integrative literature review, where a sample of exemplar GLC models was surveyed and assessed. This analysis resulted in the identification of three conceptual incongruences, namely 1) varying assumptions regarding the meaning of competency; 2) divergent model structuring; and 3) varying delimitation, resulting in varied sets of competencies. These incongruences relate to diverse assumptions, perspectives and interpretations that are inherent to the development of GLC models, but often not explicitly acknowledged and addressed by studies. We argue that these incongruences hinder scholars' and practitioners' capacity to evaluate, compare and contrast different models, and may therefore explain the unresolved debate around an integrative GLC model. While grounded in global leadership theory, this article also contributes to cross-cultural leadership and management scholarship by providing a critical discussion about the competencies required by leaders to operate effectively in a global environment, where they are required to manage across different cultures and socio-economic contexts.

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Introduction

Several studies have recognized that leaders who operate in a global environment must mobilize a set of competencies that may be different to the ones required to succeed in local markets (Gregersen et al., 1998; Pless et al., 2011). Models that compile the set of competencies, traits or skills needed for effective leadership are known as leadership frameworks (Bolden et al., 2003). In the context of the development of global human resources management, many attempts have been made to create models that compile the competencies required for effective global leadership (Bird and Mendenhall, 2016). Such proposals are referred to as Global Leadership Competency models (GLC models) and have been receiving attention from several scholars in business literature (Morrison, 2000; Bird et al., 2010; Chandwani et al., 2016; Dickmann et al., 2018).

Despite over two decades of global leadership competencies research, there is still a continued unresolved debate among scholars around an integrative Global Leadership Competency model (Kim and McLean, 2015; Herd et al., 2016). Notwithstanding the several models proposed by scholars, none of them has been widely accepted and adopted in theoretical works and empirical investigations. Attempts to reproduce, develop and operationalize existing models are scarce, as scholars tend to create new GLC models instead of building on existing ones. In this study, we explore possible reasons for this unresolved debate. We do so by identifying what we name *conceptual incongruences* that permeate this literature. Our argument is that, by understanding and addressing these incongruences, scholars and practitioners will more easily be able to develop on and apply existing models. In this sense, this article applies to global leadership theory the recent calls from scholars of cross-cultural studies for conceptual articles that discuss the theoretical foundations of the discipline (Ermasova, 2021).

Comprehensive literature reviews on GLC models were already conducted by other studies to find commonalities within the literature and to propose new GLC models based on them (Bird, 2013; Kim and McLean, 2015). However, while acknowledging that the literature is already permeated with an excessive number of GLC models, these studies' findings propose yet new models that add to this number. The literature review conducted in this paper has a different scope in relation to the ones already conducted – one that is somewhat less ambitious, although needed. Instead of proposing a solution to the debate and yet another unifying GLC model, our purpose is to better understand the debate itself, and the reasons why none of the existing GLC models has been widely accepted and adopted in empirical investigations.

This article is organized into six sections, in addition to this introduction. The first section clarifies the theoretical grounds on which this research is situated. Section 2 explains the method used in the study. Section 3 presents the objective results of the integrative review, while Secs. 4 and 5 present discussions around findings, recommendations and contributions of the research. Section 6 contains the final conclusions and considerations.

Theoretical background

According to Bird and Mendenhall (2016), who provide what is arguably the most comprehensive review of the evolution of global leadership as a field of study, global leadership emerged in the 1990s, having its origins in the field of cross-cultural management. While cross-cultural management was concerned with the performance and management between two or more national cultures, often using comparative approaches, global leadership implies a more dynamic situation where leaders are required to navigate various national cultures and contexts (Bird and Mendenhall, 2016). The study published by Adler and Bartholomew in the Academy of Management

Perspectives (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992) is often cited as a seminal work in the field of global leadership development. In this study, written in the context of the Post-Cold War and accelerating globalization, the authors claimed that companies' operations were internationalizing much faster than individual managers and executives, and that 'human systems are […] one of the major constraints in implementing global strategies' (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992: p. 52). By global strategies, Adler and Bartholomew were referring to the stages of internationalization that companies progress through: domestic, international, multinational, and transnational. They suggested that changes at individual and systemic levels were needed in Human Resources Management to respond to the new global realities, as transnational firms require transnational human resource management systems: 'as firms progress towards global strategies, the portfolio of skills required of managers undergoes a parallel shift' (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992: p. 54).

Concurrently, human resources literature developed the notion of individual *competency* as a tool to enhance the effectiveness of recruitment, training and personnel planning (Hoffmann, 1999; Fleury and Fleury, 2001). The concept of individual competency has been defined in two different ways (Dutra, 2008). The first approach defines competency as the *inputs*, that is, underlying attributes (e.g. traits, knowledge, skills) required to achieve competent performance. The second approach adopted an *output* perspective, where competency is defined as observable performance and results of training (Hoffmann, 1999). Regardless of the approach, this body of literature was concerned with developing models that compiled the set of competencies, traits or skills needed for effective leadership in different contexts (Bolden et al., 2003).

The notion of *Global Leadership Competency models* (GLC models) rests on the intersection of these two bodies of theory. These models, which were created both by organizations and academics (Morrison, 2000), attempt to identify and compile the individual competencies that leaders require for effective global leadership.

Over the past 25 years, several authors developed and proposed GLC models using various methods (Bird and Mendenhall, 2016). Nevertheless, none of the models proposed has been widely accepted by scholars of the field, and the literature is currently flooded with a vast number of redundant GLC models that affects both the development of the field and transferability to managerial settings (Kim and McLean, 2015). The challenge that a vast number of overlapping theories brings to leadership studies is a known and explored phenomenon (Hernandez et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2014; Banks et al., 2016), and this article engages with this discussion in the context of global leadership.

Method

The exploratory study conducted used an integrative literature review approach. According to Torraco (2005, p. 356), an integrative literature review 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'. Traditionally, integrative literature reviews are conducted to find commonalities among different findings. In this study, however, our analysis focused on the conceptual incongruences and inconsistencies that permeate the various studies on the topic. This comparative approach to literature review has been adopted by several researchers to examine and contrast theoretical perspectives (Silver, 1995; Walter et al., 2009; Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum, 2017). When placed within the miner-prospector continuum metaphor proposed by Breslin and Gatrell (2020), this study sits at the miner-orientation end, being concerned with scrutinizing the literature to identify and expose contradictions.
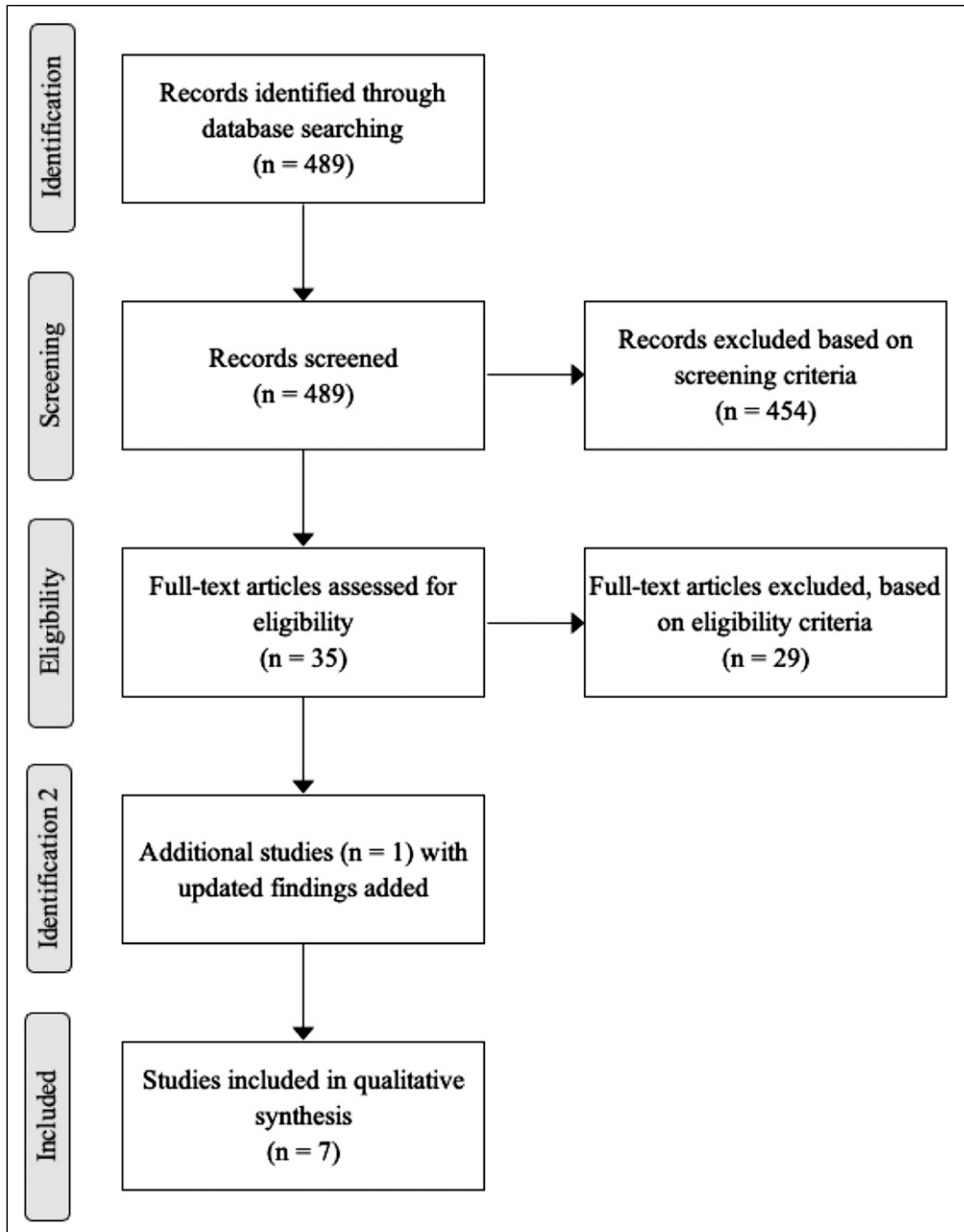
Figure 1. Flow diagram of sample selection. This figure was elaborated by the authors, based on and adapted from the review phases described by the PRISMA method (Moher et al., 2009).

Being mindful of calls for rigor, transparency and replicability in literature reviews (Aguinis et al., 2020), in this study, we used a structured approach to select the sample of GLC models for comparison: the review phases proposed by Moher et al. (2009). It is important to note that the use of a systematic procedure to select the sample of the literature analyzed does not characterize the study conducted as a systematic review. Figure 1 summarizes the application of this method and the quantitative results of each phase.

The *identification* included studies published in journals in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French languages, within the fields of business, management, organizational studies and related areas available in the database Web of Science Social Sciences Citation Index (WoS SSCI). The search algorithm included terms that dealt simultaneously with the themes of a) global leadership; b) competencies; and c) development. In this sense, it included two terms referring to the notion of global leadership (i.e. competency and capability), two terms referring to the notion of global leadership (i.e. global leader and global manager), and three terms referring to the notion of development (i.e. development, complexity and production). Even though there are conceptual differences between the terms 'leader' and 'manager' (Kniffin et al., 2020), we understand that there are substantial overlaps between them, particularly in the early literature, and therefore decided to include both in the search algorithm. The search allowed variation of the key terms and initially retrieved 489 articles. It is worth mentioning that even though our search encompassed articles in four different languages, the literature retrieved was predominantly written in English and primarily from an anglo-centric, Western lens. The 'Englishization' of scholarship has already been identified and debated by cross-cultural management scholars (Primecz et al., 2016; Jackson and Primecz, 2019). This preliminary result indicates that the same issue exists within global leadership, presenting a potential limitation/bias for this field.

In the *screening* phase, the abstracts of these articles were analyzed and those considered suitable were maintained in the selection for complete review. The *screening criteria* for inclusion were a) having a holistic approach to global leadership aspect as a central focus; b) making reference to competencies (skills, traits, outputs, etc.) relevant to global leadership; c) focusing on individual competencies of people; and d) having full text available, as presented in Table 1.

Based on the criteria above, 35 studies were selected for full-text review (see Table 2). These studies were assessed based on the *eligibility criterion* for inclusion: having the proposition of an

Table 1. Inclusion criteria applied in the screening phase of sample selection.

Screening criteria	Example of exclusions
a) Having a holistic approach to global leadership aspect as a central focus	Kayworth and Leidner (2002): This study focuses on competencies needed for leading virtual teams
b) Making reference to competencies (skills, traits, outputs, etc.) relevant to global leadership	Barlett and Ghoshal (2003): This study refers to global leadership more broadly, without listing the set of skills, traits and outputs that constitute it
c) Focusing on individual competencies of people	Teece (2007): This study focuses on organizational competencies, not individual competencies
	Hall et al. (2011): This study focuses on global leading countries, not on people
d) Having full text available	Pless and Maak (2010): This study was retrieved by the database search, but we were unable to locate/access the full text through our institutional accesses

Note: table elaborated by the authors, based on and inspired by the PRISMA method (Moher et al., 2009).

Table 2. Studies selected for eligibility assessment.

Entry	Study included for analysis
1	3M's leadership competency model: An internally developed solution (Alldredge and Nilan, 2000)
2	What is a global manager (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2003)
3	Defining the content domain of intercultural competence for global leaders (Bird et al., 2010)
4	Dynamic cross-cultural competencies and global leadership effectiveness (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012)
5	Mindfulness: Nurturing global mind-set and leadership (Chandwani et al., 2016)
6	The career competencies of self-initiated and assigned expatriates: Assessing the development of career capital over time (Dickmann et al., 2018)
7	Developing leaders' strategic thinking through global work experience: The moderating role of cultural distance (Dragoni et al., 2014)
8	Developing leaders for the global frontier (Gregersen et al., 1998)
9	Global managers' perceptions of cultural competence (Grosse, 2011)
10	Managerial self-concept in a global context: An integral component of cross-cultural competencies (Harvey et al., 2012)
11	Assessing global leadership competencies: The critical role of assessment centre methodology (Herd et al., 2016)
12	Understanding the professional project manager: Cosmopolitans, locals and identity work (Hodgson and Paton, 2016)
13	Creating the asset of foreignness: Schrodinger's cat and lessons from the nissan revival (Ikegami et al., 2017)
14	In the eye of the beholder: Cross cultural lessons in leadership from project GLOBE (Javidan et al., 2006)
15	'Am I still one of them?': Bicultural immigrant managers navigating social identity threats when spanning global boundaries (Kane and Levina, 2017)
16	Transforming business education to produce global managers (Kedia and Englis, 2011)
17	An integrative framework for global leadership competency: Levels and dimensions (Kim and McLean, 2015)
18	Developing global leaders through international assignments - an identity construction perspective (Kohonen, 2005)
19	When do global leaders learn best to develop cultural intelligence? An investigation of the moderating role of experiential learning style (Li et al., 2013)
20	Regional headquarters in China: Role in MNE knowledge transfer (Lunnan and Zhao, 2014)
21	Developing cross-cultural competencies in management education via cognitive-behavior therapy (Mendenhall et al., 2013)
22	Defining the "global" in global leadership (Mendenhall et al., 2012)
23	Measuring existent intercultural effectiveness in global teams (Messner, 2015)
24	Developing a global leadership model (Morrison, 2000)
25	From experience to experiential learning: Cultural intelligence as a learning capability for global leader development (Ng et al., 2009)
26	Developing responsible global leaders through international service-learning programs: The ulysses experience (Pless et al., 2011)
27	Emergence of cultural intelligence and global mindset capital: A multilevel model (Ramsey et al., 2016)
28	Developing global business capabilities in MBA students (Randolph, 2011)
29	Development of cross-cultural psychological capital and its relationship with cultural intelligence and ethnocentrism (Reichard et al., 2014)
30	Developing globally literate leaders (Rosen and Digh, 2001)

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Entry	Study included for analysis
31	Developing the global manager using a capability framework (Townsend and Cairns, 2003)
32	The relationship between positive psychological capital and global mindset in the context of global leadership (Vogelgesang et al., 2014)
33	Western views and Chinese whispers: Re-thinking global leadership competency in multi-national corporations (Wang et al., 2014)
34	Developing cross-cultural managerial skills through social media (Wankel, 2016)
35	Developing global leaders through building cultural self-awareness (Wernsing and Clapp-Smith, 2013)

Note: elaborated by the authors, based on the results of identification and screening phases of sample selection.

original GLC model as the main outcome of the study. Articles that did not have as a main objective the development of an original model or that used pre-existing models to support their findings were excluded from the selection.

We acknowledge that the criteria applied, such as the selection of the database and the availability of full text, may have left GLC models out of the sample. However, it is not the purpose of this study to conduct a systematic review of all models created to the moment. The sample provides sufficient diversity for the identification of conceptual incongruences, consistent with integrative literature review protocols (Torraco, 2005).

Results

After the application of the *eligibility criteria* for inclusion, six original GLC models from six different studies (Gregersen et al., 1998; Morrison, 2000; Javidan et al., 2006; Bird et al., 2010; Pless et al., 2011; Kim and McLean, 2015) were selected. One additional study (Bird, 2013) was added to the selection for being an update to one of the studies retrieved.

In the earliest study selected, Gregersen et al. (1998) argue that leadership models of the past, centered on national values and traditions, would not work in what they call 'a global future'. Based on extensive 3-year fieldwork interviews with 130 executives in North America, Europe and Asia, and a survey of 108 human resource managers of major US companies, the researchers propose that global leaders require a set of context-specific characteristics and a set of general characteristics, that are independent on the context, industry, corporate culture or country where the leader acts. The authors identify the competencies for global leaders' success: unbridled inquisitiveness, which relates to the curious mindset that leaders must have to explore other cultures and countries; personal character, which includes two components (emotional connection and integrity); duality, which encompasses the capacity to manage uncertainties and ability to balance tensions; and savvy, which combines business and organizational savvy. These findings are followed by discussions on how organizations can identify and develop global leaders.

Published 2 years later in Human Resources Management, the study titled Developing a Global Leadership Model, by Morrison (2000), proposes a framework for developing competency models for global leadership. The author argues that there are two approaches to the construction of GLC models: Company-Specific Global Leadership Models, which are developed by Human Resources departments based on the specific needs of the organization, and Academic Global Leadership Models, that aim at the development of generalizable competency models. In this study, written as a theoretical essay, Morrison proposes a structure for the construction of GLC models, based on

characteristics and competencies. The author reinforces the need to create models that include both idiosyncratic competencies, the ones that relate specifically to the context in which the leader operates, and generalizable ones, the ones that are not context-dependent. Even though it lists several competencies and traits relevant to global leadership, it does not present a definitive set as a finding – rather, it provides recommendations for future studies to develop global leadership models.

In a study published in the Academy of Management, Javidan et al. (2006) used data from the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Project to discuss the challenges facing global executives and their development. The authors noticed differences between what they call cultural universals and cultural specifics, which reinforces the need to consider context-dependent and context-independent variables in the definition of a Global Leadership Competency model. Through the use of surveys across several countries, the authors identified 21 primary attributes of leadership distributed in six dimensions: (being) charismatic/value-based; team-oriented; participative; humane-oriented; autonomous; and self-protective. This study innovates once it identifies attributes that are contributors and inhibitors of outstanding leadership and concludes that these attributes vary depending on the national culture in question. While being charismatic and value-based, team-oriented, participative and human-oriented generally contributes to effective leadership, being self-protective is generally seen as an inhibitor of it. Likewise, being human-oriented can be either a contributor or an inhibitor of leadership, depending on the national culture in question.

The model proposed by Bird et al. (2010), published in the Journal of Managerial Psychology, centers on what constitutes the content domain of intercultural competence in the context of global leadership, which the authors define broadly as "the ability to function effectively in another culture" (Bird et al., 2010: p. 811). The scope of this model is therefore narrower than the others analyzed, which attempted to map all domains of global leadership. Based on literature review, the authors offer three dimensions that create the domain of intercultural competence in the context of global leadership: perception management, relationship management and self-management. These three dimensions are associated with 17 facets of cultural competence: nonjudgmentalness, inquisitiveness, tolerance of ambiguity, cosmopolitanism, category inclusiveness, relationship interest, interpersonal engagement, emotional sensitivity, self-awareness, social flexibility, optimism, self-confidence, self-identity, emotional resilience, non-stress tendency, stress management and interest flexibility.

The study authored by Pless et al. (2011) and published in the Academy of Management Learning & Education aimed to understand how responsible global business leaders are developed. The authors interviewed and surveyed participants of a cross-national project to identify learning areas and narratives. As part of the key findings of content analysis, the authors identify six learning outcomes associated with global leadership competencies: knowledge about other cultures, cultural-specific knowledge, cultural sensitivity and empathy, being non-judgmental, cosmopolitan thinking and grasping and managing complexity. The authors grouped these competencies into two categories, namely intercultural competencies and global business competencies.

Bird (2013) was not initially retrieved by the database search, but was included in this analysis for being an update of another study selected (Bird et al., 2010). In what is arguably the most comprehensive literature review conducted, the author suggests a set of 160 competencies associated with global leadership. The author recognizes that GLC is a multifaceted construct and, in order to organize the content, defines three main categories: organizational and business knowledge, people and relationships management, and self-management. After an analysis of overlapping

concepts, he identified five constructs of competencies within each of the three categories and several dimensions within each construct.

The most recent model included in this review was proposed by Kim and McLean (2015) in a study published in the Human Resource Development International. The authors used literature review in an attempt to compile results from previous research and elaborate on a unifying model of global leadership competencies. They examined 26 studies on competency theory and global leadership to propose a theory-based integrative framework, which is presented as a matrix that includes four dimensions: intercultural, interpersonal, global business and global organizational; and three levels: core traits, personal character and ability.

Out of the seven models analyzed, only three of them were developed through primary research. While Javidan et al. (2006) used quantitative methodology and a large-scale survey to identify the set of competencies, Pless et al. (2011) used interviews, and Gregersen et al. (1998) adopted a combination of interviews and surveys. Morrison (2000) and Bird et al. (2010) utilized conventional unstructured literature review, while Bird (2013) and Kim and McLean (2015) conducted systematic reviews of the literature to generate the findings. Table 3 presents a comparison of the different models analyzed, in terms of content and competency levels (dimensions and sub-dimensions of the construct analyzed).

Conceptual incongruences among GLC models

In the process of analyzing the GLC models selected, we identified the existence of *conceptual incongruences* that permeate the development of GLC models in the literature. What we name conceptual incongruences are varying assumptions, perspectives and interpretations that are inherent to the development of GLC models. Because studies often do not address these incongruences explicitly, scholars' and practitioners' capacity to evaluate, compare, juxtapose and contrast different models proposed by the literature is hindered, which may help to explain the continued debate identified. Our argument is that, by understanding and addressing these incongruences, scholars and practitioners will more easily be able to refine, develop on and apply existing models. In this study, we identified three conceptual incongruences, which does not mean these are the only existing ones. These incongruences are unpacked below. The findings, discussions and recommendations presented in this section have a subjective perspective, in the sense that they are a product of researchers' reflections and hermeneutics (Schutz, 1994). The conceptual incongruences identified are not an objective finding of the integrative literature review, but rather a product of the authors' reflection (Garcia and Quek, 1997).

Varying assumptions regarding the meaning of competency

The first conceptual incongruence identified when comparing different Global Leadership Competency models is regarding the notion of competencies used by authors. The scholarship on competency development offers two approaches to the idea of individual competency. One refers to competency as the outputs: the results and competent performance. The other definition refers to the inputs, or underlying attributes, required to achieve competent performance (Hoffmann, 1999). The GLC models analyzed do not engage in this debate. Existing GLC literature uses the term 'competency' referring both to the attributes necessary for an effective global leadership performance (the input approach) and to the performance that is achieved when mobilizing these attributes (the output approach). There is an absence of a unified perspective on the idea of global leadership competencies as inputs or outputs in existing models. While the models proposed by Bird

Table 3. Sets of competencies identified by existing GLC models.

Model	Construct	Dimensions	Sub-dimensions
Gregersen et al. (1998)	Global leadership competencies	Unbridled inquisitiveness	—
		Personal character	Emotional connection
			Integrity
		Duality	Capacity for managing uncertainty
			Unique ability to balance tensions
		Savvy	Business savvy
			Organizational savvy
Javidan et al. (2006)	Global leadership attributes	Charismatic/Value-based	21 primary attributes, not specified
		Team-oriented	
		Participative	
		Humane-oriented	
		Autonomous	
		Self-protective	
Bird et al. (2010)	Intercultural competence for global leadership	Perception management	Nonjudgmentalness
			Inquisitiveness
			Tolerance of ambiguity
			Cosmopolitanism
			Category inclusiveness
		Relationship management	Relationship interest
			Interpersonal engagement
			Emotional sensitivity
			Self-awareness
			Social flexibility
		Self-management	Optimism
			Self-confidence
			Self-identity
			Emotional resilience
			Non-stress tendency
			Stress management
			Interest flexibility
Pless et al. (2011)	Global leadership competencies	Cultural intelligence	Knowledge about other cultures
			Culture-specific knowledge
			Cultural sensitivity and empathy
			Being non-judgmental
		Global mind-set	Cosmopolitan thinking
			Grasping and managing complexity
Bird (2013)	Global leadership competencies	Competencies of business and organizational acumen	Vision and strategic thinking
			Business savvy
			Managing communities
			Organizational savvy
			Leading change
		Competencies of managing people and relationships	Cross-cultural communication
			Interpersonal skills
			Valuing people
			Empowering others
			Teaming skills
		Competencies of managing self	Resilience
			Character
			Inquisitiveness
			Flexibility
			Global mindset

Table 3. (continued)

Model	Construct	Dimensions	Sub-dimensions
Kim and McLean (2015)	Global leadership competency	Intercultural dimension Interpersonal dimension Global business dimension Global organizational dimension	Three levels (core traits, personal character and abilities) for each dimension, not specified

Note: table elaborated by the authors, based on the findings of the research. The model proposed by Morrison (2000) does not mention the name of specific competencies, traits or attributes, and, for this reason, was not included in the table.

et al. (2010) and Javidan et al. (2006) seem to use the input approach (although this decision is not made explicitly), the other models mix the two perspectives and combine the different approaches when identifying the competencies. As a consequence, these underlying assumptions hinder scholars and practitioners' capacity to compare and juxtapose the different models proposed by literature.

Divergent model structuring

The second conceptual incongruence relates to the way in which different authors operationalize the structure of their GLC models. Several models (see Table 4) use a *construct-variables* approach to global leadership competencies, which follows a hierarchical structure based on levels. This approach assumes that a more abstract construct (in this case, global leadership) can be operationalized and understood as a set of more observable dimensions and variables. Figure 2 illustrates this hierarchical approach to GLC models. For example, the model proposed by Bird (2013) explains the construct Global Leadership Competencies (Level A) as a set of three groups of competencies (Level B). Each of these groups is a combination of several composite competencies (Level C), and each composite competency is a combination of several skills, abilities, knowledge bases or orientations (Level D).

This way of structuring models is arguably grounded in positivist research traditions, once the *construct-variables* is traditionally used in quantitative research (Kasim and Antwi, 2015; Park et al., 2020). While several GLC models use this approach, scholars do not agree on the number of levels nor on the terminology used to refer to each level of their models. Based on the levels from Figure 2, Table 4 presents the terminology used by different authors to refer to each level of the model. As a consequence of this divergent terminology, it becomes challenging to compare the different models proposed, which may contribute to explaining the unresolved debate and limited reproduction of findings in academic and managerial settings.

At the same time, the *construct-variables* approach is not the only way of structuring competency models. Kim and McLean (2015), for example, propose an alternative *matrixial structure* in their model, where global leadership competency is understood as the relationship between levels of competency (core traits, personal character, and ability) and dimensions of competency (intercultural, interpersonal, global business and global organizational). This type of model structuring does not engage in the discussion around hierarchies of competencies and variables, and therefore presents a different way to understand Global Leadership Competencies. Matrixial structures have also been used by the broader field of competencies development research. The Brazilian scholarship on competencies management and development, for example, has developed several matrixial competency models to illustrate different levels of complexity of individual competencies (Dutra, 2008; Fernandes, 2013; Fernandes et al., 2014). In these models' structure, each competency

Table 4. Terminology used to refer to the models' levels.

Model	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D
Gregersen et al. (1998)	Global leadership competencies	Global leadership characteristics	Components	—
Morrison (2000)	Global leadership	Characteristics	Competencies	—
Javidan et al. (2006)	Global leadership attributes	Global leadership dimensions	Primary (attributes)	Behavioral attribute descriptors
Bird et al. (2010)	Intercultural competence (for global leadership)	Broad dimensions/ factor	Intercultural competency dimensions/facets	—
Pless et al. (2011)	Global leadership competency area	Categories	Capabilities	—
Bird (2013)	Global leadership competencies	Groups	(Composite) competencies	Capabilities, skills, abilities, knowledge bases or orientations

Note: table elaborated by the authors, based on the findings of the research.
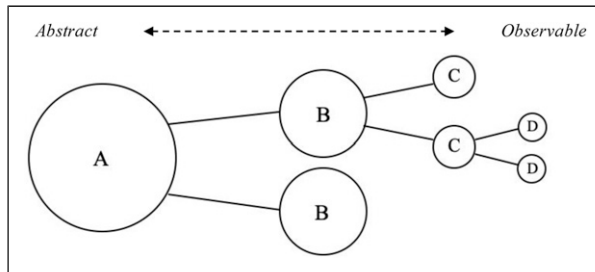
Figure 2. GLC models' structuring based on hierarchical levels – the *construct-variables* approach. This figure was elaborated by the authors, based on the findings of the research.

contains several descriptors that relate to different levels of complexity in which it is manifested (Fernandes, 2013). Figure 3 illustrates the matrixial structure approach to competency models, emphasising the two variations described above.

These different ways to structure GLC models are another factor that hinders scholars' capacity to compare different models, and therefore is another incongruence that may inhibit the development of an integrative model. While it is expected that different models will be structured in different ways, the issue is that the assumptions behind the models' structure are taken for granted and not clarified for the reader. With the exception of Kim and McLean (2015), none of the models engages with this discussion and explains the reason behind the structure proposed. Also, except for the model proposed by Javidan et al. (2006), the reason for grouping competencies and creating the different levels is based on the authors' perception, without a clear methodological approach.
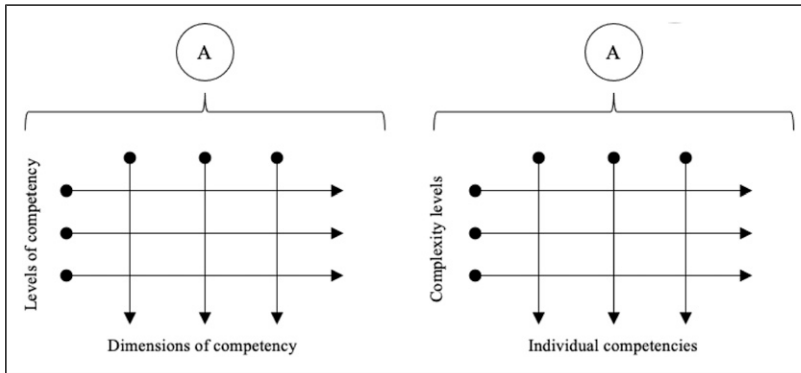
Figure 3. GLC models' structuring – the *matrixial structure* approach. This figure was elaborated by the authors, based on the findings of the research.

Varying delimitation, resulting in varied sets of competencies

The third conceptual incongruence refers to the varying delimitation used when creating the models, which results in models containing different sets of competencies. The models analyzed are inherently generated based on a set of assumptions and delimitations about what competencies will be identified and included, and these decisions are not explicitly provided by the authors. As a result, the models proposed are inconsistent among themselves in relation to the sets of competencies that they include, as illustrated in Table 3.

Concerning the sets of competencies included, two broad categories of GLC models were identified, namely *personality-based models* and *comprehensive models*. Personality-based models, such as the ones proposed by Bird et al. (2010) and Javidan et al. (2006), focus on personality traits and attitudes that enable global leadership, and do not include knowledge-related attributes. Comprehensive models, such as the ones proposed by Gregersen et al. (1998), Pless et al. (2011), Bird (2013) and Kim and McLean (2015) also include knowledge-related competencies (e.g. knowledge about other cultures, business and organizational). Explicit decisions about which types of competencies are included in the models are often absent in the studies, which hinders scholars' and practitioners' capacity to evaluate, compare, and build on existing models. An exception is the study by Javidan (2006), involving GLOBE Project, which is transparent regarding competencies included in the model and demonstrates how each competence considered depends on the culture investigated.

Another inherent decision that is made when deciding what sets of competencies are included in the models is in relation to *generalist* versus *idiosyncratic* relevance. Generalist versus idiosyncratic refers to the applicability of the models and sets of competency (Morrison, 2000; Javidan et al., 2006). Generalist competencies are the ones that are not context-dependent. They are transferrable traits, attitudes and knowledge that apply to all leaders, regardless of the organizations, cultures, etc. in question. Idiosyncratic competencies are context-dependent and not transferrable – they refer to specific requirements of an organization or culture. The models analyzed generally include both types of competencies. However, with one exception (Morrison, 2000), they do not explicitly state which competencies identified are generalists and which ones are idiosyncratic. This omission has several implications for the theoretical and practical transferability of the models. In applied settings, idiosyncratic competencies must be adapted to the practical environment in question for

operationalization. Culture-specific knowledge (Pless et al., 2011), for example, is an idiosyncratic competency that relates to a non-local culture in question. Cultural sensitivity and empathy (Pless et al., 2011), on the other hand, is a generalist competency that refers to adapting the way of conducting business with different national cultures based on the understanding of the notion of culture and the dimensions that define them, regardless of the context in which the business is undertaken. This is a generalist competency that does not need to be adapted for specific organizational requirements.

Towards an integrative glc model?

Although the main purpose of this article was to identify incongruences within the existing models, and not propose yet another model, it would be unreasonable not to include in this paper considerations towards the development of the field and on how this article contributes to resolving the continued debate presented earlier. Several scholars have theorized the notion of leadership as a social construct, something that is construed based on shared beliefs and thinking (Ogawa, 2005; Gemmill and Oakley, 2016; Marinho-Araujo and Almeida, 2016). Discussing the absence of a unified and agreed-upon definition for leadership, Ogawa raises the possibility that 'leadership defies definition not because of its conceptual complexity, but because it expresses a cultural ideal or aspiration' (Ogawa, 2005: p. 92).

    We sympathize with this constructivist perspective, and this lens was used when framing this article's theoretical and methodological approaches. Leadership, and therefore global leadership, is an attribute that is created by social perception rather than physical reality. Its definition, components and attributes depend on the social, cultural and temporal context. The same is true for the notion of competence – studies have shown that the perception of behaviors as competent or not competent may vary depending on the cultural context (Matveev and Nelson, 2004). Viewed from this perspective, the models discussed in this paper are attempting to define the components and parts of something that is intrinsically subjective (even when using scientific and objective methods).

    In this article, we have outlined three incongruences among GLC models, which can be understood as ways in which the assumptions behind the outlining of the social construct global leadership competencies may differ. The first incongruence, namely varying assumptions regarding the meaning of competency, relates to different ways in which the notion of 'competencies', which is in itself another subjective term, can be conceptualized. The second assumption – divergent model structuring – refers to different ways through which authors operationalize the social construct through more observable elements, while the third incongruence relates to how authors define the comprehensiveness of this social construct, or what elements to include or not in its definition. Our perspective is that there is no right or wrong, but different assumptions – embedded in different paradigms – to address global leadership competencies. At the same time, we argue that these assumptions must be consciously understood and addressed by scholars, and this article aims to contribute in this direction.

    Bearing in mind the subjectivity of the term, one may also question whether the debate around a definitive set of global leadership competencies is solvable, and whether the exercise to try to create new models is fruitful or not. While we do not have an answer to that, it is not possible to ignore that the past 50 years have witnessed an extraordinary evolution in our awareness and understanding of global leadership (Bird and Mendenhall, 2016) and that a lot of this understanding comes from theoretical and conceptual exercises such as the one addressed in this article. In this sense, this study is not an attempt to develop the field in the direction of a unifying model of GLC, but a contribution

to the broader, more basic discussions around global leadership as a theoretical framework. Instead of providing a solution to the debate identified, we claim that it is important for practitioners and scholars to better understand the debate itself, once it is rooted in different assumptions and attempts to define something that is inherently subjective. Critical approaches that question assumptions of the field may provide novel frameworks of analysis and paradigms (Soderberg and Holden, 2002; Primecz et al., 2009; Romani and Claes, 2014), and this is the goal of this article.

Conclusions

Global Leadership Competencies is a multidisciplinary topic that involves concepts that transcend management studies. Such a complex subject brings several opportunities for the expansion of this field, but also many challenges. Scholars have been attempting to map the competencies that constitute a global leader since the 1990s. Despite over two decades of literature and the development of several GLC models, none of the models proposed has been widely accepted as an integrative model. Attempts to replicate and operationalize existing models are also scarce, both in academic and managerial settings.

Through integrative literature review, we have identified three conceptual incongruences that, we argue, should be considered in the development of GLC models, namely 1) varying assumptions regarding the meaning of competency; 2) divergent model structuring; and 3) varying delimitation, resulting in varied sets of competencies. The conceptual incongruences identified refer to varying assumptions, perspectives, interpretations, and limitations that are inherent to the development of GLC models, but not explicitly addressed by studies. Consequently, scholars' and practitioners' capacity to evaluate, compare, juxtapose and contrast different models proposed by the literature is hindered. In this sense, we argue that they help to explain the continued debate around an acceptable unifying GLC model.

This article is not an attempt to resolve the debate towards a unifying GLC model, but a discussion of broader ontological and epistemological assumptions around global leadership as a theoretical framework. We claim that it is important for practitioners and scholars to better understand and debate these assumptions, rather than taking them for granted when developing or using GLC models. We encourage future studies that propose integrative GLC models to refer to these incongruences and address them explicitly. They should demonstrate awareness of the different ways in which individual competencies can be framed, either as inputs or outputs, and clarify what perspective is being adopted. An integrative GLC model must also be upfront in relation to its delimitation and content. Due to the subjectivity involved in models' development, the process followed to identify the different sets of competencies must be transparent. The comprehensiveness of the models should also be decided: it must keep the main concepts behind the global leadership competencies, but also maintain a reduced size to be easily operationalized in both academic and managerial environments. Authors should be upfront about these decisions when proposing new GLC models, and scholars and practitioners who use existing models must be mindful of their delimitations. To ensure transferability, an integrative GLC model should also clearly state which competencies are generalist and which ones are idiosyncratic.

We acknowledge that the three conceptual incongruences identified are not the only existing ones, and this provides an opportunity for future studies to use a similar approach to identify additional incongruences that exist within the field. We also believe the field would benefit from future studies that use non-Western theories in relation to global leadership and competencies development. In this sense, GLC theory would benefit from engaging in the discussion of

'Englishization' (Jackson and Primecz, 2019) of its scholarship and from exploring alternative paradigms.

Whilst advancing the conceptual understanding of Global Leadership Competencies models, this article also contributes to cross-cultural management scholarship, due to the interconnected nature of both fields. By understanding the competencies an individual must develop to be an impactful global leader, as well as the limitations of the models that propose such competencies, organizations and practitioners will be better able to coordinate programs aimed at developing these factors.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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