Future Trends in Leadership Development Practices and the Crucial Leadership Skills

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Leadership, in today's rapidly changing and unstable business environment, becomes critically important. However, leadership development practices have not proven adequate to meet the challenges of the new era. The present cross-cultural research aims to examine the crucial leadership skills for the 21st-century leaders, especially in times of crisis, and identify similarities and differences between five European countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Cyprus) and the U.S. In addition, the role of a leader in the 21st century and the leadership development methods needed for future leaders were investigated. The sample consisted of 65 leadership experts. The results revealed some similarities, but, also, specific differences between the five European countries and the U.S. in the essential leadership skills and the ones needed in times of crisis. A gap was also identified between the required and the observed leadership skills in the workplace in both European countries, and the U.S., implying the need for a paradigm shift in leadership development methods to prepare future leaders capable of navigating in an uncertain and complex world.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership development, in today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world becomes an urgent and challenging issue. Organizations globally are striving to identify and develop outstanding leaders who will be able to face the new challenges, embrace change, deal with crises, solve real-life problems and have an impact not only on their organizations but on society at large.

However, leadership development practices have not proven adequate to meet the challenges of the new era. A survey conducted by Deloitte (2016) showed the need for improving, strengthening and reengineering organizational leadership. According to the results, the traditional pyramid-shaped leadership development model is not producing leaders fast enough to keep up with the demands of business and the pace of change.

A similar finding was revealed in a survey conducted by the Centre for Creative Leadership, pointing out that "the nature of the challenges that managers were facing was rapidly changing; however, the methods that we were using to develop them were staying the same" (Petrie, 2014, p. 5).

New ways of conceptualizing leadership and developing future leaders are needed as we enter to an unfolding future. Global research conducted by Hay Group (2011) identified six megatrends for the future which will affect leadership. These are accelerating globalization ("globalization 2.0"), climate change, scarcity of resources, demographic change, individualization and values pluralism, increasingly digital lifestyles and technology convergence. To successfully deal with them, leaders should abandon much of

the thinking and behaviors that propelled them to the top of their organizations in the first place and adopt a post-heroic leadership style. According to the results, the leaders of the future will need to be adaptable, flexible, multilingual, and internationally mobile, to have deep integrity and strong conceptual and strategic thinking skills. But, most crucially, they must be highly collaborative since they will be leading increasingly diverse and independent teams over which they may not always have direct authority (Hay Group, 2011)

Similarly, many studies have attempted to identify the leadership skills and competencies of the effective future leaders. Rosen (2010) found that the 21st-century leadership landscape requires two new leadership skills, the ability to create and communicate a strategic plan to employees in a way that everyone is aware of the organization's priorities, and the ability to inspire employees to perform at the highest level.

Other studies have shown that there is a set of skills which is critical to managers and executives at every level of an organization, such as inspiring and motivating others, showing integrity, solving problems, driving for results, communicating powerfully and collaborating and promoting teamwork (Zenger and Folkman, 2014) as well as innovative and adaptive thinking, virtual collaboration and social intelligence, ability to work across disciplines, literacy in different types of media and computational thinking and analytics (Lee, 2017).

In a Deloitte survey (2015), millennials identified the following competencies for true leaders: strategic thinking, being inspirational, strong interpersonal skills, vision, passion, and decisiveness.

According to a research addressed to 20,000 professionals in 176 countries, the six skills that a contemporary leader should develop are: anticipation (the ability to look further and be prepared for change), challenge (the capability to challenge and disrupt their industry and commonly accepted business assumptions), interpretation (the skill to understand and interpret a wide array of data), decision making (with the flexibility to explore multiple options instead of making rigid binary choices narrowly framed as yes/no dilemmas), alignment in the context of gaining buy-in from different people with divergent agendas in order to achieve a common goal (this requires open dialogue, as well as trust, in order to surface potential areas of misalignment) and learning (by experimenting and reframing mistakes as a source of learning innovations) (Schoemaker and Cecchini, 2015)

Giles (2016), in a study of 195 leaders in 15 countries over 30 global organizations, investigated the most important leadership competencies. The results showed that most leaders rated strong ethics and safety, as the most critical leadership quality. As she pointed out "From a neuroscience perspective, making sure that people feel safe on a deep level should be job #1 for leaders". The other clusters of competencies which were found to be significant are self-organizing, efficient learning, nurturing growth, connecting and belonging.

A branch of research has investigated the crucial leadership skills for entrepreneurial leaders. Iordanoglou, Ioannidis, Tsakarestou, and Tsene, (2016) have found that successful startup founders and co-founders exhibit greater personal and interpersonal skills, such as vision, passion for the idea, self-confidence, extroversion, persistence, risk-taking, team building, communication and willingness to receive feedback.

Similarly, other researchers have proposed passion, vision, the ability to inspire and influence, capability of sustaining innovation, adaptation in high velocity and uncertain environments, opportunity focus, creativity, flexibility, high tolerance to ambiguity, pro-activeness, innovation and risk-taking (Bagheri and Pihie, 2011; Surie and Ashley, 2008 in Renko, Tarabishy, Carsrud, and Brännback, 2015; Thornberry, 2006).

Some authors suggest that different skills are required at different stages of the business development (Lidow, 2014), because, as the business grows, entrepreneurial leaders should move away from details and day-to-day operational decisions and place emphasis on the big picture and strategic, constitutive decisions (Freeman and Siegfried, 2015).

Other studies have attempted to investigate the crucial leadership skills needed in turbulent times. Cox et al., (2010) found that innovation and creativity, impact and influence on others, working with partners, managing conflict and motivating others were among the most essential leadership skills needed

in times of crisis. As the authors stated, although most leadership and management skills are not new and, in fact, are similar in most economic circumstances, there is a difference in the emphasis placed on them in different times.

Similar research, conducted in five European countries, investigated the crucial leadership skills in times of crisis. The results revealed ten leadership skills that young leaders need to develop. These were organized in three categories, self-management skills (self-confidence, optimism, trustworthiness), business management skills (analytical decision making, strategic thinking and planning, creative problem solving) and people management skills (collaboration, interpersonal communication, network building, motivating others) (Iordanoglou, Tsakarestou, Tsene, Ioannidis, Leandros, 2014).

The present cross-cultural research aims to extend in the U.S. the research mentioned above, concerning the crucial leadership skills for future leaders. Since the U.S. is the pioneer country in leadership development, it seemed interesting to identify future trends and challenges in leadership development practices there and identify the most critical skills for future leaders. Setting them as the benchmark and comparing them with the ones revealed in European countries which were (and, some of them, still are) under economic crisis, can transform leadership development practices in these countries in a way that can help young employees to develop and update their employability skills and deal more efficiently with the long-lasting consequences of an economic crisis.

Through the comparative analysis, the following questions will be addressed:
- Are there any differences in opinion between the U.S. and the European sample regarding the critical leadership skills for future leaders?
- Is the economic crisis, which most of the studied European countries faced, affecting the leadership skills needed in Europe as compared to the U.S.?
- Which leadership skills have the most considerable discrepancy between required and observed behaviors in young professionals in the workplace in Europe and the U.S.?
- Which are the future trends in leadership development practices in the U.S. that can be followed by these European countries to reduce unemployment rates?

METHODS

Measures

A mixed research methodology was employed with sequential exploratory design (Creswell, 2003). In the qualitative stage, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were used, necessary to acquire elaborated and detailed responses (Gillham, 2000).

The discussion guide for the interviews was divided into five main thematic areas:
- The role of a business leader in the 21st century
- Important leadership skills for future leaders.
- Crucial leadership skills during times of crisis.
- Leadership skills observed in young professionals in the workplace
- Leadership development methods and practices for the 21st century leaders.

In addition, a quantitative questionnaire with scaling questions was constructed which included forty-one leadership skills, identified by the literature review as the most important (Cox et al., 2010; Perth Leadership Institute, 2008; Schoemaker and Cecchini, 2015; Whetten and Cameron, 2007), classified in three main categories, self-management skills, business management skills and people management skills.

Each participant had to rate these skills in a 10-point Likert scale regarding their importance in future leaders' development and the degree in which they are observed in young graduates/employees. This approach allowed us to quantify the significance of each leadership skill and cross-validate qualitative results.

Sample and Procedure

The sample consisted of 65 leadership experts, namely HR managers, leadership and neuro-leadership academics/researchers, company owners/ directors and leadership and organizational development consultants and startup founders and cofounders. The study was conducted in two stages. The first stage took place in five European countries (N=43), namely Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Latvia, and Lithuania. The second one was conducted in the U.S. (N=22).

An effort was made to include a similar number of male and female participants. Finally, the sample consisted of 55% male and 45% female leadership experts.

The participants were selected by their expertise in leadership and were contacted through an e-mail explaining the purpose of the study and the procedure.

An 85% of the persons contacted had a positive response and interviews were conducted in person, via Skype or telephone call. The duration of the interviews ranged from 35-60 minutes.

RESULTS

Qualitative Results
The Role of a Business Leader in the 21st Century

This research topic was included only in the U.S. study, so the results presented below were obtained from U.S. leadership experts.

Most of them believe that the role of a leader does not change dramatically over time and the fundamentals of leadership remain the same.

"Leadership is very natural in humanity. In history, there have always been great leaders without holding MBAs."

"The most important role of a leader is to communicate and to share through behavior a set of values. Values are always the starting point. And this has not changed throughout the years."

"If you go on the fundamental level there is not so much difference. Lead means to guide. The leader comes out of the ancient Greek word "archon" who was one of the nine magistrates of the ancient Athens. The word "architect" is the master builder. The confluence of these two words, to guide and to architect, is what leaders should do."

"What it takes to be an effective leader is the same throughout the years. It is more marketing to talk about new leadership skills than the reality. The problem is that most of the leaders are ineffective. 70-80% are not effective leaders; they are not adding value."

However, since we are entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution (World Economic Forum, 2016) with significant technological advancements, leaders should be able to understand and utilize technology for sustainable growth, as it was pointed out by some U.S. experts. Similarly, most of the participants have stressed the importance of faster decision making and systems thinking, since the environment changes rapidly and leaders need to address the current needs faster, taking into consideration all stakeholders (clients, shareholders, employees, society).

"Future leaders should be capable of a fast decision making. We have not the luxury of overanalyzing data."

"Leadership is a balancing act between attaining the needs of different stakeholders."

"The twenty-first century will be dominated by technology. Only countries and organizations that understand, promote and develop the technology will do well. Any leadership position, in a corporation or public domain, needs to possess the skill of understanding the potential of innovation and how it can help an organization to succeed".

Additionally, some of the leadership experts stressed the fact that today's problems are far too complex to be solved by an individual and pointed out the need for the democratization of leadership and the importance of moving from a heroic to a collective leadership style.

"Leadership today is different in some ways than it was a few decades ago. Most organizations are not as hierarchical as they used to be and that means that leaders should figure out a way to be less authoritarian and more participative to get people more engaged."

"Leadership to me is to exemplify and be a role model for others who can then be leaders in what they do."

Leadership Development Methods and Practices for the 21st-Century Leaders
This research topic was included only in the U.S. study, so the results presented below were obtained from U.S. leadership experts.

The findings revealed differences in participants' responses based on the different contexts in which they operate. More specifically, the reactions were classified into three categories, namely leadership development practices used by the universities, leadership development practices used by the organizations and leadership development practices promoted by neuro-leadership research.

i.   Leadership Development Practices Used by the Universities

Most of the U.S. leadership academics referred to the typical leadership development practices taking place in the universities, such as traditional lectures, case studies, internships, real-life projects, experiential activities, lectures by successful leaders and entrepreneurs, etc. In addition, online leadership development and training courses have been advanced during the past years, and long day trips to other countries have also been included, for students to be exposed to different cultures and gain new experiences.

Moreover, some leadership academics mentioned the importance of taking into consideration students' differences in learning styles but, also, in their dreams and visions and adapt leadership development practices accordingly.

"Learning should be the leader in leadership development practices. We need to move from the "what" of leadership to the "how.""

"Dream - not goals - is the most powerful neurological and hormonal stimuli for a person to keep up the effort of change. We have 39 longitudinal studies showing that dream creates thirty times more improvement in emotional and social competencies than the best MBA programs. But it is not the only thing. The person also needs close and caring relationships."

ii.   Leadership development practices used by the organizations

The leadership development practices that organizations use, are mainly based on competency models that each organization has created to describe the desired leadership behaviors. The methodology of a 360-feedback assessment remains popular. Also, on the job training, seminars, teambuilding sessions, and online courses are still utilized. Informal mentoring between experienced and newcomers is also taking place in many organizations. Coaching is becoming one of the most popular leadership development practices used by many organizations, implemented by external or internally developed coaches. Moreover, peer to peer coaching, as a scalable solution, has been tested in some organizations, yielding encouraging results.

"The missing element in leadership development practices in organizations is to develop a personality which can be critical when all the givens stop to be givens."

"The key to leadership development is coaching, but coaching with compassion not coaching for compliance. As soon somebody tries to help somebody fix something, the person goes into a stress reaction and closes down emotionally and cognitively which does not help change."

iii.   Leadership development practices promoted by neuroleadership research

Neuroleadership research has shown that a leadership development transformation is needed, since little change has been achieved for a long time and, moreover, digital learning disruptions have occurred (Rock, 2017). A complete rethink about how to define leadership, how to develop leadership skills and how to maintain behavior change should happen, taking into consideration the way our brain works.

A paradigm shift from complex competency models to simple recallable chunks of information, where every part fits together and every recall re-embeds the whole map, seems essential. We need to move from an extensive menu of options with high autonomy to coherence and layering.

"What we need to do is to teach people a lot more how to pursue balance. The dominant neurological networks that affect us are the default mode network and the task-positive network. We need the task-positive to solve problems and make decisions, but we also need the default network to be open to new ideas and being moral and fair. Sadly, a lot of our educational programs in schools and universities activate only one part of the brain, so they suppress the other."

The science of learning should also be taken into consideration with the use of the four main components of learning as described in the AGES model, namely, Attention, Generation, Emotions, and Space (Davachi, Kiefer, Rock, and Rock, 2010).

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

European Sample
Important Leadership Skills for Future Leaders

Leadership experts from the five European countries (Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Cyprus, Bulgaria) rated trustworthiness, and collaboration and teamwork as the most important skills for future leaders' development, followed by inspiring others, strategic thinking and planning, adaptability and flexibility. Creative problem solving, self-confidence, setting specific goals and targets and conflict management were also among the top ten skills to develop in future leaders (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
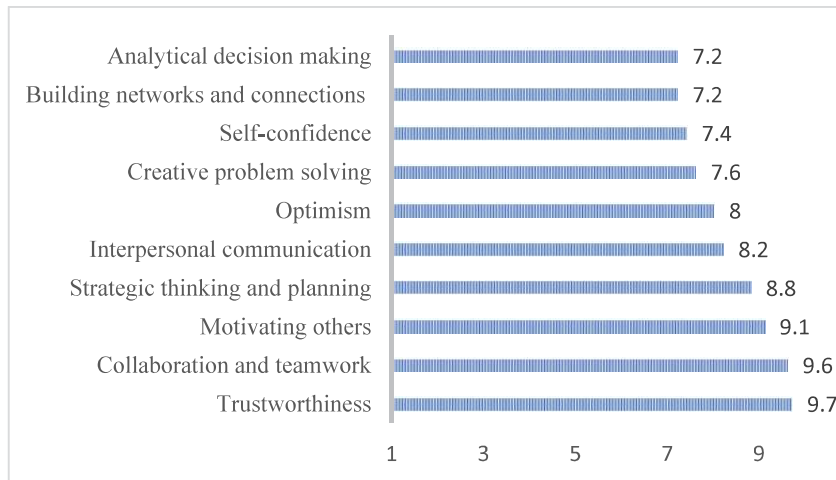**IMPORTANT LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR FUTURE LEADERS – EUROPEAN SAMPLE**

Crucial Leadership Skills During Times of Crisis

As can be seen in Table 2, the same two leadership skills namely, trustworthiness, and collaboration and teamwork were rated by European leadership experts as the most important even in times of crisis.

Some new skills were also entered the top ten list, such as motivating others, interpersonal communication, optimism, building networks and connections, and analytical decision making.
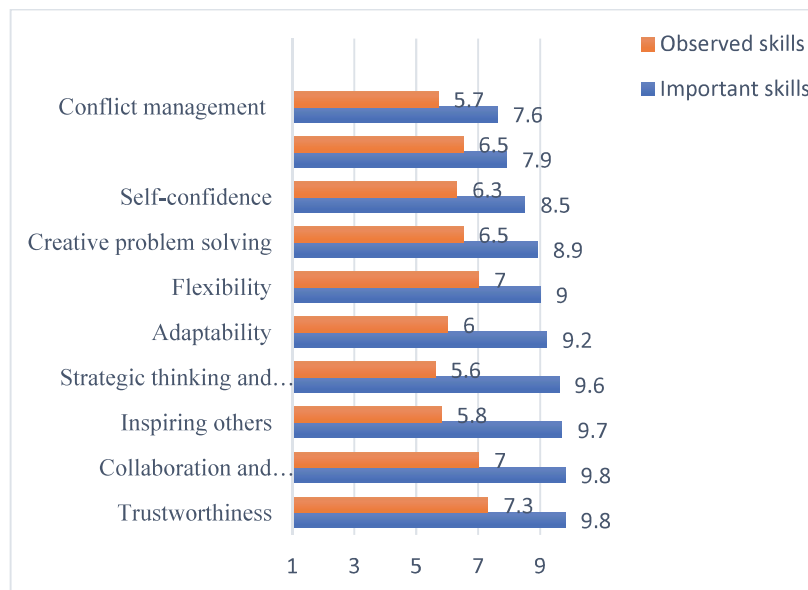
TABLE 2
CRUCIAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS DURING TIMES OF CRISIS – EUROPEAN SAMPLE

Leadership Skills Observed in Young Professionals in the Workplace

Comparison between the important leadership skills and the ones observed in young professionals in the workplace revealed a significant gap. The greatest discrepancies were found in strategic thinking and planning, and inspiring others, as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN IMPORTANT AND OBSERVED LEADERSHIP SKILLS IN YOUNG PROFESSIONALS - EUROPEAN SAMPLE
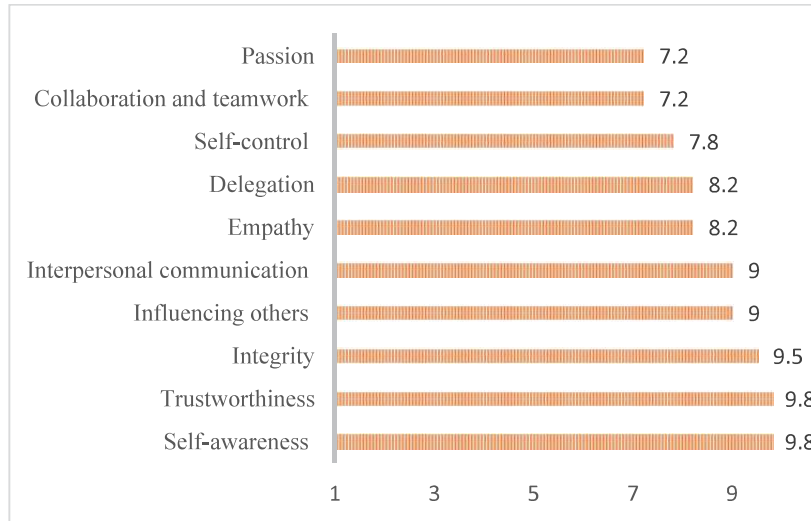

U.S. Sample
Important Leadership Skills for Future Leaders

Table 4 presents the findings for the essential leadership skills for future leaders, as classified by the U.S. leadership experts. Self-awareness, as expressed by its two facets (being aware of own emotions and being aware of how others see you) was considered the most critical skill, followed by trustworthiness

and integrity. The next most important leadership skills were influencing others, interpersonal communication, and empathy. Finally, delegation, self-control, collaboration and teamwork, and passion completed the top ten list.
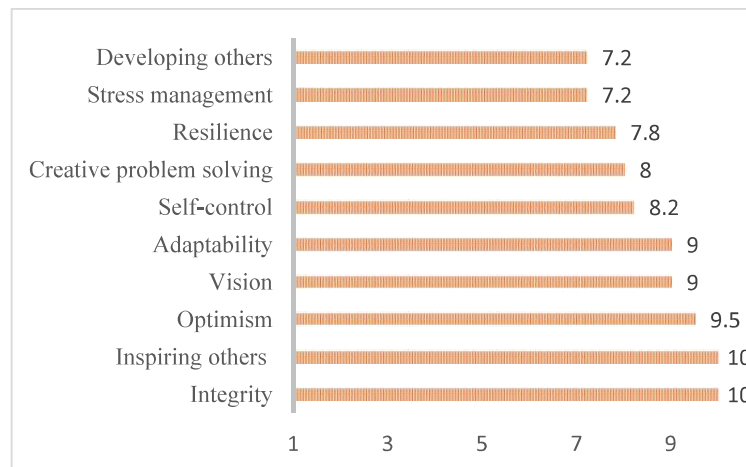
TABLE 4
IMPORTANT LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR FUTURE LEADERS –U.S. SAMPLE

Skill	Score
Passion	7.2
Collaboration and teamwork	7.2
Self-control	7.8
Delegation	8.2
Empathy	8.2
Interpersonal communication	9
Influencing others	9
Integrity	9.5
Trustworthiness	9.8
Self-awareness	9.8

Crucial Leadership Skills During Times of Crisis

In times of crisis - when there is a need to do more with less -, the most essential leadership skills seem to be changing, according to the U.S. leadership experts. The only two skills which remain in the top ten list are integrity, which moved to the first place and self-control. All the other skills are new ones, namely inspiring others, optimism, vision, adaptability, creative problem solving, resilience, stress management and developing others (See Table 5).

TABLE 5
CRUCIAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS DURING TIMES OF CRISIS – U.S. SAMPLE

Skill	Score
Developing others	7.2
Stress management	7.2
Resilience	7.8
Creative problem solving	8
Self-control	8.2
Adaptability	9
Vision	9
Optimism	9.5
Inspiring others	10
Integrity	10

The same significant gap between the important leadership skills and the ones observed in young professionals was also found in the U.S. sample. In specific, the greatest discrepancies were found in self-awareness, influencing others, and delegation (See Table 6).

TABLE 6
DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN IMPORTANT AND OBSERVED LEADERSHIP SKILLS IN YOUNG PROFESSIONALS - U.S. SAMPLE
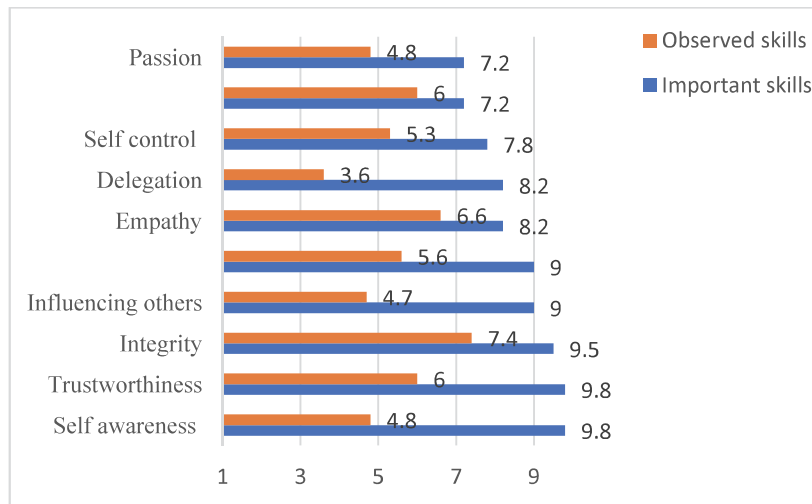
DISCUSSION

The results of the present study revealed some similarities, but, also, specific differences between the five European countries and the U.S. leadership experts in the essential leadership skills and the ones needed in times of crisis. More specifically, both U.S. and European leadership experts agree that trustworthiness, and collaboration and teamwork are the most critical skills for future leaders. People management skills such as influencing and inspiring others were also considered significant by leadership experts in both Europe and the U.S.

These findings are consistent with previous results (Giles, 2016; Hay Group, 2011; Rosen, 2010; Zenger and Folkman, 2014) suggesting that there is a broad consensus about the leadership skills needed for the future.

On the other hand, there were some differences between European and U.S. leadership experts concerning the critical leadership skills. A closer look at these, revealed an emphasis on self-management and people management skills by the U.S. experts whereas European experts focused mainly on business management skills, such as strategic thinking and planning, creative problem solving, and setting specific goals and targets. It may be that these skills are needed more in European organizations than in U.S. ones, since there were no business management skills in the U.S. top ten list.

When the filter of "economic crisis" entered the picture, similarities between the U.S and European experts were found in skills such as optimism and creative problem-solving. Interestingly, an emphasis on self-management skills, such as integrity, optimism, adaptability, self-control, resilience, and stress management along with the articulation of an energizing vision was evident in the U.S. experts, implying that, during times of crisis, the leader should possess and exhibit personal qualities. On the other hand, an emphasis on people management skills, such as collaboration and teamwork, motivating others, interpersonal communication, and building networks and connections were found in the European experts'

opinions, a difference that can probably be attributed to a more individualistic culture prominent in the U.S.

Furthermore, we should "mind the gap" between the required and the observed leadership skills in the workplace, which was found in both European countries and the U.S. This finding could be explained by the lack of experience or by the inappropriate education young graduates have received in the universities, revealing another gap that exists between the skills and competencies developed in universities and those required by the industry today. To bridge this gap, the dialogue among academics, researchers, firm owners/ managers, young people and other interested stakeholders should be enhanced through the creation of innovative networks and partnerships.

In any case, a need for a more intense and effective leadership development education is apparent, focusing not only on the essential skills and competencies needed for the leaders of the 21st century but taking, also, into account the findings from neuroscience about the way human brain functions and learns. In addition, as neuroscience research has shown, leadership training should start earlier (Ochsner, 2015) and involve more people at every level of an organization.

Furthermore, as the results from the qualitative stage of this study have shown, future leadership development should start with personal dream and vision, involve peer to peer coaching and coaching with compassion, and establish close and caring relationships, for a person to feel secure and sustain efforts for change.

The need for transferring greater developmental ownership to the individual was also identified by the Centre for Creative Leadership. In addition, a greater focus on collective leadership and vertical rather than horizontal development were proposed (Petrie, 2014). Future leadership development programs should focus on conditions to increase vertical development (Cook-Greuter and Soulen, 2007), create new neural networks in the brain, and result in increasing cognitive, behavioral and affective capability of future leaders. Leaders should be exposed to transforming experiences which will change the way they perceive the world and promote vertical growth (Cannon, Morrow-Fox, and Metcalf, 2015).

The results of the present study can have theoretical and practical implications on the leadership development field. Specifically, they can enhance our understanding of the leadership skills needed for the 21st-century leaders and help organizations and universities worldwide develop more up-to-date and cross-culturally appropriate leadership training programs, enriched with neuroleadership findings to bridge the gap between required and observed leadership skills in the workplace.

The systematic cultivation of leaders with a global mindset, capable of meeting the challenges of an uncertain and complex world requires a paradigm shift and a focus on innovation in leadership development methods and practices for the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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