

# Coaching with a Global Mindset

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## Abstract

This article reports on a study that assessed professional cross-cultural coaches' awareness and interpretation of 'global mindedness'. With focus group discussions as its main data collection method, the grounded-theory study identifies how the criticality of an experience can lead to a transformation of the self and the development of a global mindset, and presents a key developmental theme in cross-cultural coaches' interpretations of the construct. This article discusses the coaching implications of the findings and the need for the development of a more integrated, systemic, global approach to coaching to accommodate the challenges posed by a new global paradigm.

**Key Words:** Mindset, Global Mindedness, Globalization, Cross-cultural coaching, Global leaders

## Introduction

*To be viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations need to become more global in outlook and operations and more emphasis should also be placed on developing the human mind so that organisations can remain competitive in the face of globalization. (Rhinesmith, 1993, p.3).*

As the workforce across the world becomes more diverse, individuals at all levels are now faced with the challenges of dealing with cross-cultural differences (Arora *et al.*, 2004). Companies are being urged to nurture talent from across their organisations to create culturally diverse teams and, most importantly, to develop a "Global Mindset" (e.g. PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010, 2011, Ernst & Young, 2012). This call for the development of a new cognitive perspective or global mindset within organisations as a way of coping with the increased cultural diversity and business complexity that now exists in the global arena (Cohen, 2010), is also a timely call to the coaching profession. From a coaching perspective the work of the cross-cultural coach has been seen as a niche area of expertise, but as frontiers dissolve and companies rethink their employment strategies, this is no longer the case.

The purpose of the interpretive grounded theory study on which this article reports was to investigate how an understanding of the nature and processes of 'global mindedness' might be helpful to the coach in supporting the client. From the perspective of the coaching profession, this proposed shift change in organisational and management development could lead to an increased demand for *all* coaches to take a more integrated and 'global' approach to their practices. Increasingly coaches may find themselves engaging with individuals from different cultural backgrounds whose identities will have been derived from different environments (Thomas (2008). The coach will need to have a better understanding of how cultural and intercultural communication issues might impact on the coaching process and will require a global mindset themselves to help navigate the client through the complexity of our rapidly globalizing world.

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As a qualified coach I was interested in exploring the concept of global mindedness from the perspective of the coaching profession, to test the temperature of coaching and to assess cross-cultural coaches' current level of awareness and interpretation of the construct. I also wanted to explore their thinking with regard to the global challenges that organisations now face as they prepare for an increasingly globalized and highly competitive future, and to establish whether or not coaches believe this shift change in organisational and management development to be relevant to their coaching practice.

My keen interest in cross-cultural coaching and intercultural communication issues is the result of my own experience of frequent moves, transitions and cross-cultural adaptation. This experience has opened a window through which to re-examine my own worldview from a more global perspective and has also facilitated my desire, in research as well as in coaching practice, to support other globally mobile individuals in managing uncertainty and change.

I include this relevant biographical information because the mindset of the researcher is critical in understanding the research findings of studies that are situated within a constructivist interpretive paradigm, where the impact of the researcher's own background and experiences is accepted and recognized.

Global mindedness is a theoretical construct and as such is an abstract concept. Nevertheless the term is now frequently used within business and management circles to imply some sort of preferred state of mind, yet it is often referred to and described as being some sort of an entity, an asset, something which one needs to acquire, to have, to be in possession of. This warrants a deeper exploration of the concept and how it is being perceived.

**Table 1: six definitions of global mindedness**

1) A <i>global mindset</i> is a mix of individual attributes that enable an individual to successfully influence those who are different from him or her. (Javidan <i>et al</i> , 2011, p. 5).
2) <i>Geocentrism (global mindedness)</i> is a global approach to decision-making where headquarters and subsidiaries see themselves as parts of an organic worldwide entity. Superiority is not equated with nationality. Good ideas come from any country and go to any country within the firm. (Perlmutter, 1969, p. 13).
3) A <i>global mindset</i> is one that combines an openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and markets with a propensity and ability to synthesize across this diversity. (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002, p.117).
4) A <i>global mindset</i> is a predisposition to see the world in a particular way, to set boundaries, question the rationale behind things that are happening around us, and establish guidelines to show how we should behave. (Rhinesmith, 1992, p. 63).
5) <i>Global mindedness</i> is a worldview in which one sees oneself as connected to the world community and feels a sense of responsibility to its members. This commitment is reflected in the individuals' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. (Hett, 1993, p. 143).
6) <i>Global mindedness</i> is having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, and leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one's environment. (Hunter <i>et al</i> , 2006, p. 277).

It is important to clarify at the outset that I use the terms 'global mindedness' and 'global mindset' interchangeably throughout this article. This is intentional and shows that I perceive both as having the same meaning, which I interpret as 'a way of thinking'. This terminology is also used

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interchangeably throughout the literature as the six definitions of global mindedness show (see Table 1). They are drawn from academic research literature from within the field of Leadership Development (No.1), global business and management development (No's 2, 3 & 4) and International Education (No's 5 & 6) and highlight a preference for using the term 'global mindset' within business and management literature:

This article provides a brief overview of the study including existing definitions of the global mindedness concept and a review of the methodology. This is followed by a presentation of the key constructed themes and a discussion on the implication of the findings for the coaching profession.

## **The Research Approach**

Whilst there are many academic contributors to this topic from disciplines as diverse as international education (e.g. Hett, 1993; Douglas & Jones-Ridders, 2001; Olsen & Croger, 2001; Hunter *et al.*, 2006), study abroad programmes (e.g. Wright & Clarke, 2010), international relocation and expatriation (e.g. Javidan *et al.*, 2011), global business management and development (e.g. Bartlett & Goshal, 1989; Kefalas, 1998; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002; Levy *et al.*, 2007), cross-cultural coaching (e.g. Abbott & Rosinski, 2007), and leadership development (e.g. Rhinesmith, 1993; Decker *et al.*, 2005), a gulf in perception exists across the disciplines with regard to what it actually means to be globally minded.

Studies tend to be conceptualized within two dimensions of the global environment – the cultural perspective, which focuses on cultural diversity and managing across cultural boundaries, and the strategic perspective which focuses on the strategic complexity that stems from globalization. A third multidimensional perspective also conceptualizes global mindset using both cultural and strategic terms (Levy *et al.*, 2007). Within these dimensions the core properties of global mindedness are described as 'cognitive' (using terms such as knowledge structure, cognitive structure, conceptualization and contextualization abilities); 'existentialist' (using terms such as state of mind, awareness and openness) or 'behavioural' (using competency related terms such as ability to adapt, curiosity, etc.).

Within the global leadership literature the most recent extensive study of global mindedness as an expatriate success strategy ( Javidan *et al.*,2011) also attempts to group together the core properties of global mindedness. It similarly concludes that a global mindset consists of three major components, referred to as intellectual capital, psychological capital and social capital. Intellectual capital relates to knowledge skills, understanding and cognitive complexity which correlates with the Levy *et al.* (2007) 'cognitive' construct. Psychological capital relates to cultural sensitivity and psychological fortitude – adaptability, self-confidence, optimism, resiliency, flexibility, and openness to cultural diversity, which map on to both the Levy *et al.* (2007) 'existentialist' and 'behavioural' construct. The third component of a global mindset, described as social capital, relates to trust, building trusting relationships and collaborativeness.

However it would appear that there is no integrative overarching descriptive model to facilitate the study of specific domains of related global mindedness characteristics and there is a fundamental inconsistency in the current literature concerning the properties of global mindedness. This causes confusion and a lack of clarity leading to conceptual ambiguities and contradictory findings.

According to Gallie (1956), certain concepts such as art, social justice or democracy can have no fixed and final definition. He argues that a final definition for such terms is impossible because whoever is party to the definitional process can only approach that process with their own

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philosophical values or a programmatic agenda in mind. This could also apply to the concept of global mindedness because many attempts to define the concept across a range of disciplines have led to a wide variety of different definitions. However, according to Levy *et al.* (2007), this could also be the mark of relatively young field.

The origin of the mindset concept has a basis in cognitive psychology and stems from acculturation and expatriate adjustment theories (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002). Only more recently has it related to organization management theory (Dekker *et al.*, 2005) where a growing number of research streams are focused on addressing the significance of managerial cognition within multi-national companies. So we have a series of attempts to define the construct solely within the confines of business management and development literature alone but a continuing lack of studies across other disciplines for other alternative or integrative perspectives.

Levy *et al.* (2007) call for further theory building and empirical work on the global mindset construct to be conducted in more diverse settings, drawing on broader theoretical perspectives beyond its current basis in international management. Evidence-based coaching offers an appropriate setting in which to examine the global mindedness construct because it draws on many theoretical perspectives including adult learning theories that are recognized and utilized within the coaching process. The concept of global mindedness is also addressed in cross-cultural coaching literature (Abbott & Rosinski, 2007) and advocates a global approach to coaching in applying sound models from coaching and acculturation to operate interactively across the affective, cognitive and behavioural domains.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the few studies that take a qualitative, interpretative approach, using extensive semi-structured interviews in the field (Arora *et al.*, 2004; Javidan *et al.*, 2011) by taking an interpretive, constructive grounded theory approach to researching the concept of global mindedness from within the field of cross-cultural coaching using semi-structured, recorded focus group interviews. The purpose is to construct a holistic synthesis of findings from several different groups of coaches regarding the individual meanings they attach to the concept of global mindedness and its relevance to coaching practice.

## **Methodology**

A grounded theory methodology seeks to inductively distil issues of importance for specific groups of people, creating meaning about those issues through analysis and the modeling of theory (Mills *et al.*, 2006). It is also an appropriate methodology to use when a theory is not available to explain a process (Creswell, 2007). The social constructivist perspective of Charmaz (2006) emphasizes “diverse local worlds, multiple realities and the complexities of particular worlds, views and actions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 65) and also recognizes that “the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). This more flexible approach, which recognises that interaction between the researcher and the participants is necessary in order to understand the meaning of the experiences shared during the research process (Charmaz, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was best suited to my research question which explored the complexities of cross-cultural issues, the abstract nature of the global mindedness concept and the meanings the participants assigned to these issues which are framed within the context of their own lives.

Because a large number of like-minded individuals (cross-cultural coaches, trainers, educators and relocation professionals) were gathered together there, I chose to conduct field research at two international conferences. The flexibility of the grounded theory method allows the researcher to be led by the data. I was able to gather data from a large number of participants engaged in one area of

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coaching practice (cross-cultural coaches) and immersed in one particular field setting (the conference events) and then, depending on where the data led, I was able to engage in subsequent sampling across different areas of coaching practice or other related professions, either within the same or in other field settings, in order to approach theoretical saturation.

### ***The Sample***

The study sample consisted of five focus group interviews of between 5 and 8 coaches each, conducted in North America, Europe and the UK, plus eight individual interviews. Four focus groups specialized in cross-cultural coaching and/or training and global relocation and one specialized in UK based executive coaching. Collectively 35 professional individuals were interviewed (30 women and 5 men). The age range was observed as being approximately between the ages of 35 and 60 years and a total of 10 nationalities were represented.

Of the four cross-cultural focus groups, two were conducted during the first data collection stage at the 2011 *Families in Global Transition* (FIGT) conference in Washington DC, and two focus groups plus six individual interviews were conducted during the second data collection stage at the 2011 *European Relocation Association* (EuRA) conference in Palma, Majorca. Both events annually bring together a large cross-section of professionals in one place, drawing a collective interest in global mobility, intercultural and transition issues, development of best practice, training and research. The conference setting not only provided a large potential data sample directly related to the research topic, but was also an appropriate environment for the researcher to engage in the flexible process of theoretical sampling in order to develop any emerging initial concepts.

A third and final data collection stage for theoretical sampling was subsequently undertaken in the UK and included one focus group and two individual telephone interviews. This group was accessed through purposive sampling via my own personal coaching contacts and participants included experienced UK based executive coaches who did not engage specifically in cross-cultural coaching issues or global mobility.

A purposive sampling method was implemented to recruit focus-group volunteers. The target population included individuals who were engaged in the coaching profession as either executive or cross-cultural coaches. If they were not coaches by profession then a prerequisite was for them to have an appreciation and understanding of the purpose and function of coaching within their own particular professions.

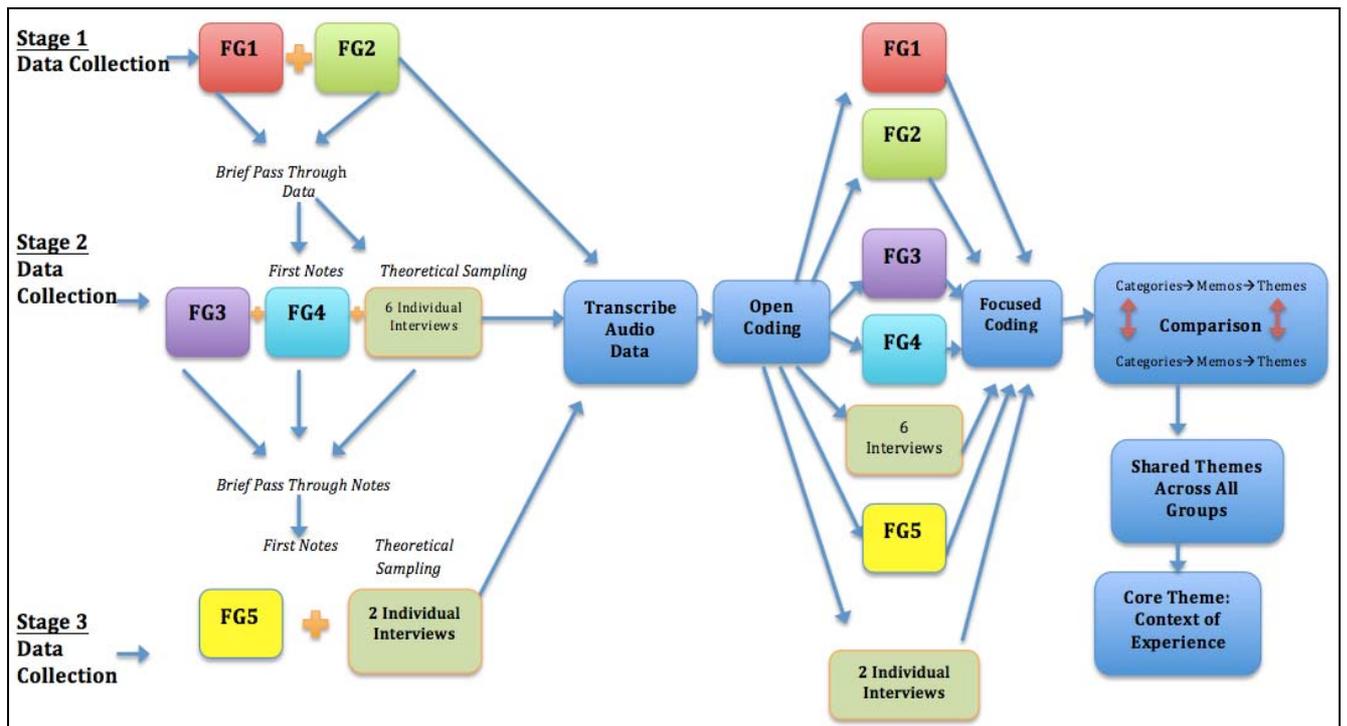
### ***Data collection and analysis***

Grounded theory methodology advocates remaining open to all possible theoretical understandings by developing tentative interpretations about the data through the process of coding and the development of nascent categories. The process involves returning to the field to gather more data to check and refine major categories (Charmaz & Henwood, 2007) and returning to the literature to link existing research and theory with the concepts, constructs and properties of the new theory (Hutchison, 1993).

The focus group discussions and individual interviews were audio taped and personally transcribed and the transcriptions were a verbatim account of the discussions. I followed Charmaz's (2006) constructive grounded theory guidelines for working with the data which advocates an eight stage process of initial coding, focused coding, early memo writing using focused codes, advanced memo writing, theoretical sampling, saturation and ordering memos for the discovering of the argument.

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**Figure 1: main procedural steps**



Through line by line and focus coding the most frequent and significant codes were selected and raised to tentative categories, providing the focus for further data collection in the form of theoretical sampling that continued until all the properties of the categories were saturated.

To explore other influences that might impact on the development of global mindedness, in Grounded Theory referred to as theoretical sampling, I conducted individual interviews with global business auditors, change management consultants, cross-cultural trainers, international educators, leadership consultants and global business management consultants.

### ***Constructing the Data***

Constructing the data and writing up findings was an ambiguous process, which introduced doubts sometimes over the direction and value of data construction. At times this was frustrating but throughout the process I chose to follow the advice of Charmaz (2006) and learnt to tolerate ambiguity, to trust the grounded theory analytical process and to surrender to the process.

During the three-stage process of data collection, analysis and theoretical sampling, I obtained further data from which to explicate all the emerging categories. I continuously engaged with the data in looking for connections between the categories across all the transcripts within each data collection stage to uncover any emerging core categories. In doing so I was able to influence the direction of the theoretical sampling and I developed a bank of titled advanced memos to record my thoughts and ideas regarding related categories, relationships as well as both expected and unexpected findings.

This advanced memo stage yielded a condensed list of key categories that consistently appeared in the data, all of which revolved around one overarching core category “*The Critical Experience*”. This was the one fundamental core contextual theme that consistently appeared across *all* the data.

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This 'Critical Experience' theme is significant because it relates to whether the context of one's individual experience might influence the development of global mindedness and how the 'criticality' of the experience itself, (including its variety, intensity or duration), might determine how accelerated the learning process is and how embedded the learning becomes. This dominant theme constructed from the data positions global mindedness as an experiential concept, and one that will have meaning and relevance for people in different ways, depending on their individual critical lived experiences.

Interestingly, the data gathered from the focus group discussions and subsequent theoretical sampling procedures also highlighted a significant gap in understanding, in the coaches' perception and comprehension of the global mindedness construct. This mirrors the gulf in perception also present in the literature across all the disciplines with regard to what it actually means to be globally minded.

### **Constructed Themes**

The voices of the participants illustrate the key constructed themes of how the coaches' perception of the global mindedness construct led to the construction of the overarching theme of "The Critical Experience", which in turn led to the considered developmental aspect of the global mindedness construct.

#### ***Theme 1: Different Perspectives on Global Mindedness***

The cross-cultural coach focus groups showed an overwhelming preference for conceptualizing the global mindedness construct within the cultural perspective of the global environment as highlighted by Levy *et al.* (2007) who state that the underlying dimension of the cultural perspective is "Cosmopolitanism". This is described as "a willingness to engage with the Other and an openness toward divergent cultural experiences" (Hannerz 1996 p. 102, & p. 163). Many of those interviewed at both conferences demonstrated a clear understanding of these two key characteristics that, according to Levy *et al.* (2007), underpin the cultural approach to the global mindedness concept in the literature. One participant aptly described the characteristics of Cosmopolitanism as:

*... the ability to both perceive the world as well as interact with other people's countries and cultures in a way in which you put each other on an equal footing. You are open to each other's differences and also very aware of your own perceptions and views of the world... you are trying to connect with the person, to meet them where they're at and connect with them on that level...*

Very few cross-cultural coaches viewed the global mindset concept according to Levy *et al.*'s (2007) second dimension of the global environment – the strategic perspective. This advocates the development of a complex managerial mindset (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989) requiring high levels of cognitive abilities and information processing capabilities to enable managers to conceptualize complex global dynamics (Murtha *et al.*, 1998).

Those individuals who did gravitate towards this perspective were amongst those specifically targeted for theoretical sampling purposes including the majority of participants of the UK executive coaching focus group. Their preference was to relate the concept of global mindedness to the context of global business and leadership development. This perspective acknowledges that the complexity of globalization is blurring cultural boundaries creating the need to find a way to work together with one mindset to successfully influence others to help overcome the boundaries of different cultural values.

One participant articulated this vision as:

*... coming together and speaking one language... it is about having the same vision, the same purpose and the same goal. So Japanese people or Asian people will have very different values than someone in the Western world or someone from UAE but if you come together and decide you want the same and you all want it then you are ready to change...*

### **Theme 2: The Critical Experience**

*Global mindedness from a cultural perspective:*

Significantly, those focus group participants who preferred to view the concept of global mindedness from a cultural perspective also perceived it as being relevant to their own individual lived experience, which many described as *a critical experience*. For the majority of the cross-cultural coaches, this lived experience is one of extensive global mobility with cross-cultural immersion giving the concept of global mindedness an ‘experiential’ context.

*...if you have a significant experience, which means that you have to accelerate your learning to think differently, you are changed by that learning in that you develop heightened cognitive skills, which you can use in different ways. Crossing cultures is one such significant accelerated learning experience...*

This consensus directly links the development of a global mindset to global mobility; exposure to cross-cultural immersion and the transformative nature of the experience itself and several FIGT and EuRA focus group participants strongly emphasized this point of view:

*... global mindedness is experiential, to my mind it can only be obtained or you can only go through that process if you are experiencing it there and then in the situation that you are in...*

*...if you have not lived or experienced being outside of your own culture you can't know what impact the exposure to the experience of difference or being the Other will have on you. You have to have exposure to difference in order to experience the impact it has on you. Exposure to difference forces you to step into another's shoes – helps you to develop a different perspective – to see things from another angle...*

Some participants also readily identify global mindedness as intrinsic to one's DNA or personality, as well as the exclusive product of exposure to a critical experience:

*...some people have 'globalness' in them – in their DNA, part of their identity or personality make up.*

*...you have global mindedness within you and it is developed with experience – it is already part of your identity and can be enhanced by relevant experiences in your lived world...*

Yet this begs the question - how can global mindedness be part of you yet also be something that you can only gain with experience?

Other alternative perspectives emerged during the discussions with some participants conceding that the experience of global mobility and extensive cross-cultural immersion does *not* necessarily lead to the development of a global mindset:

*... just because they've had lots of global experience doesn't necessarily make them globally*

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*minded...*

*...you can have people who have lived overseas, grown up overseas but still have a very ethnocentric mindset...*

At the same time there was also consideration of the fact that one can develop a global mindset *without* ever having had the experience of cross-cultural immersion:

*... my husband didn't go overseas until he was 28 years old and to be honest he's one of the most globally minded people I know... it's like it's in his DNA somehow. I would take it back to personality, having an intense curiosity, love and desire for the world and the world's people...*

This raises another question – if the consensus is that global mindedness can only be developed as a result of extensive cross-cultural immersion then how is it possible that one can have such a critical experience and not develop a global mindset or conversely that one might never have had such an experience and yet be globally minded?

#### *The Paradox*

A pattern began to emerge of apparent tensions and contradictions between different statements. Abbott, (2010, p.338) reminds us that the “successful managing of differences that often occur in cross-cultural contexts lies in the managing of paradox”. The participants’ apparent contradictions highlight an important paradox – because the majority of the focus group participants (the cross-cultural coaches) preferred to see the concept of global mindedness as being relevant to their own individual lived experience of global mobility and extensive cross-cultural immersion, they were therefore strongly influenced to conceptualize it from their own perspective, from within their own experience of global mobility.

As a result they may have become bounded by their own perceptions and are less likely to reflect on whether anything other than the experience of global mobility and extensive cross-cultural immersion is relevant to the development of a global mindset. These apparently contradictory statements imply that other influencing factors might also need to be considered but for many, this appeared to be outside of their awareness and was therefore not explored during the focus group discussions.

Coaching from a cultural position requires a willingness to explore outside one’s own perspective and to look at how others see the world (Rosinski & Abbott, 2006, p. 256) yet these participants, many of whom were also experienced cross-cultural coaches or trainers, could be construed as taking an ethnocentric approach to the concept of global mindedness (Bennett, 1993). They appeared to be locked into their own cultural perspective, believing that those without any experience of extensive cross-cultural immersion through global mobility cannot be globally minded as is expressed in this quote:

*... you cannot be a global coach if you have not had global experience – either international business experience or having been an expat and having lived in another country. If you have not had this type of critical experience you are not able to see things that someone else could see...*

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*Global mindedness from a strategic perspective:*

This strong preference of cross-cultural coaches to view the concept of global mindedness from a cultural perspective, contrasted sharply with those participants who were executive coaches, whose preference was to view the concept from a more strategic perspective. The executive coaches tended towards a much more detached, analytical, almost ambivalent approach to contextualizing the construct. Its relevance was associated with the need to address the tensions inherent in a rapidly globalizing world and the development of new ways of communicating and working with difference. They were able to highlight the problem:

*...the need now is to learn to speak a new global language, to put our own cultural identities to one side, to adapt and find a new language to communicate...*

However an answer appeared to elude them. Although this preference to adopt a more strategic approach considers the construct from other perspectives, it does also acknowledge the influence of a critical experience in leading to accelerated learning:

*...we will become exposed to global issues in other ways other than from the critical experience of having lived or worked in another culture...working with multicultural teams, experiencing the frustration of managing language and communication differences, not being able to engage with body behaviours and non-verbal's due to the increase in telephone conferences...more and more these sort of critical experiences will become a feature of how we work. It's going to be part of business as usual and in this way we will become exposed to global issues by being exposed to accelerated learning and a critical learning experience...*

This viewpoint, expressed from within the theoretical sample of executive coaches, contrasts sharply to that held by the cross-cultural coach focus group participants whose preference was to see the development of a global mindset as *only* being directly related to the experience of cross-cultural immersion and adaptation. This is important as it mirrors the findings by Levy *et al.* (2007) in the literature in showing that within the coaching profession there are also two very different mindsets that approach the concept of global mindedness from two positions – the cultural or strategic perspective. However this left a gap in the middle where many of the coaches were either unable or not ready to meet to consider alternative perspectives.

*The Gap In Understanding*

This gap in understanding can be visualized as a metaphorical bridge of global mindedness that separates those coaches who view the construct from a cultural perspective, from those who take a more strategic approach to the construct. There was a sense of complacency at each end of the bridge with both groups preferring to stay contained on their own side and therefore within a mindset that only sees the global mindedness construct from their own perspective. This creates an 'us/them' and 'either/or' bounded thinking process with regard to the construct, and an unwillingness or even inability to navigate the territory of the bridge itself and meet in the middle to consider alternative perspectives. This complacency, of course, has a paralyzing effect, banishing as it does a more inclusive 'both/and' way of thinking.

I also observed that this apparent gap in understanding and reluctance or perhaps inability to view the concept from an alternative perspective created a tension in the focus group discussions, particularly when the group discussions also included both cross-cultural and executive coaches as this post-focus group reflective comment shows:

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*...I felt a bit of a 'lone wolf' in the group. Reflecting on the way home, I realised that our focus group discussion typically focused on organisation cultures and national cultures. For me, a large part of my global mindset (whatever 'it' is) comes from my personal life because I am married inter-culturally and have raised a bi-cultural child, who attends a multi-cultural school. Therefore, this mindset is embedded into every aspect of my life (part of family's DNA if you will) - in addition to my work life... this orientation is so engrained that it's become a way of being...*

The tension created due to the inability of some participants to be able to meet in the middle to share the space and consider alternative perspectives, was unexpected. The gap in understanding itself could also perhaps relate to the coaches' lack of 'knowing' with regard to the nature of the transformative experience of becoming globally minded. Although one of the emerging categories in the data relates to a scale of global mindedness and highlights it as being both experiential and developmental:

*...different levels of experience can impact on ones development of a global perspective – it's a scale – at one end you could have a transformative experience of having relocated overseas for many years, at the other end you may never have had contact with people who are different to you. In the middle is a spectrum of different levels of experience which inform your levels of global mindedness depending on how critical the incident is and how embedded the learning is. As a coach I think you need to have an awareness of where you are on this scale...*

I was curious to know why, if participants were able to articulate this, they were subsequently unwilling or unable to engage fully in considering this experiential/developmental connection to the construct. What might be holding them back – what was their lack of knowing?

#### *Bridging The Gap In Understanding*

Constructive development theories focus on one single aspect of the human experience, 'perspective taking' and how we as individuals "create our world by living it and how that construction changes over time to become more complex and multi-faceted" (Berger, 2006, p. 78). The constructive-developmental approach of Kegan (1994) builds on the many theories of adult and life course development that have evolved from Piaget's work (1954) and suggests that the way we think, "our way of knowing", actively gives shape and coherence to our experience, making it part of our system (Pinkavova, 2010). Our way of knowing develops over time progressing in sequence through a series of five hierarchical stages which Kegan (1994, p. 34) calls "orders of consciousness". He proposes that "people are the active organisers of their experience" and that our way of knowing is about "the organizing principle we bring to our thinking and our feelings and our relating to others and our relating to parts of ourselves" (Kegan, 1994, p. 29). Over time we can change our organizing principle and this can free us from a particular way of being. This movement or growth is transformative as it helps us to acknowledge more complexity in the world (Berger, 2006).

#### ***Theme 3: A Developmental Perspective on Global Mindedness***

This considered developmental aspect to the global mindset construct highlights how a critical experience can move an individual across evolving development stages (Kegan advocates there are 5 developmental stages or orders of consciousness) and that the shift to each developing level of consciousness is in itself a transformative process, eventually leading to the development of a globally minded 'systems' way of thinking. The speed of this journey is determined by the nature of the experience and the transition from one development stage to the next can often be turbulent (Derry, 2006).

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Kegan's Subject-Object Interview instrument is an advance coaching tool that coaches can be trained to use to analyse a coaching conversation to measure the current developmental level of an individual by searching not for *what* someone believes about the world but for *how* someone believes about the world, the degree to which they are able to objectivise their experiences. From a constructive developmental perspective, most adults operate at Kegan's Third order of Consciousness. They are able to take multiple perspectives whilst maintaining their own and they use the views and opinions of others to strengthen their own set of principles. To be considered globally minded would therefore require a shift to Kegan's Fourth order of consciousness, which sees and understands the perspectives of others and uses those perspectives to continuously transform their own systems (Kegan, 1994).

It is important to clarify that developmental theory is complex and difficult to measure. In depth training and practice is required to learn how to effectively administer and score Kegan's subject-object diagnostic tool including a 60-90 minute interview that has to be transcribed and scored. At the time of conducting this study I was not qualified in this area and therefore any links made between constructive development theory and my own findings are explorative and remain somewhat tentative.

Nevertheless, in familiarizing myself with Kegan's constructive developmental approach some patterns began to emerge which enabled me to see the data in front of me with fresh eyes. I reviewed the data once again to see *how* each participant talked about the concept of global mindedness in order to establish where they might be on Kegan's constructive development scale. I recognized that the gap in thinking in the focus groups could perhaps relate to the participants' stage of development. This provides some explanation for the participants' conflicting statements about whether global mindedness can be part of you and yet also something that you can only get with experience.

In returning to the data to review the key emerging themes from Kegan's constructive developmental perspective, I construed that perhaps many coaches in this study were neither ready nor able to discard their bounded ways of thinking in favour of a more inclusive and integrated 'systems' approach to the concept of global mindedness. From a constructive developmental perspective, many coaches in this study demonstrated Kegan's third order of consciousness in being able to take multiple perspectives whilst maintaining their own and they use the views and opinions of others to strengthen their own set of principals (Kegan, 1994; Berger, 2006, p. 81). They were confidently able to express the importance of knowing yourself and your own culture in order to know the Other and they advocated the development of cultural self-awareness as a pre-requisite to the development of a global mindset:

*... global mindedness is not simply about being aware that the globe is different or that people in different cultures are different. I think it actually requires a level of self-awareness that allows people to be both authentic and flexible at the same time which comes down to having an understanding about what is cultural in their own makeup and in their own drivers...*

One interesting comment also demonstrated that although this participant could be at Kegan's Third order of consciousness (1994) he/she may possibly be in transition to the Fourth order:

*...having moved around all over the place I can see things differently now than I ever could before I went away, to the point where I probably feel at home no-where but I can live anywhere. So for me it's that lived and felt experience and that has given me a global perspective that I wouldn't have had before I went...It [the experience] allows me to understand what others are going through in the same position, it allows me to help them...it is a detachment from my own culture which I didn't have before I went away...*

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Whilst this participant was able to 'objectively' describe and reflect upon the traits she has developed as a result of both raising children in a bi-cultural marriage and being globally mobile for many years, she was much more 'subjective' in the way she tried to articulate where she has ended up as a result of her experience.

*...the impact of culture moves you beyond awareness and empathy into some kind of a different space but I don't know what that's called... I know when I'm in this kind of space. I can't describe what it is but it's where I know things are not really what they seem to be...*

This indicates that she still identifies with, and is embedded in, the transformative experience itself. She struggles to define and objectivise what this different 'space' is and what being in this difference space means to her, because this space is still part of her.

From a constructive developmental perspective only a handful of participants in this study actually fell into the category of being globally minded and this concurs with Kegan's view that only a very small percentage of individuals reach the Fourth order of Consciousness and that the majority are at the Third order and are moving towards the Fourth order (Kegan, 1994). However their profiles were notable. They were either adult third culture kids (adults who as children spent their formative developmental years living outside of their passport country) (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) or they were from an immigrant or bi-cultural family background. Of all the participants these individuals were the most clearly able to objectively, as in looking at themselves as objects, articulate how their personal experience of transformative change as a result of their critical experience of prolonged cross-cultural immersion has enabled them to change their way of knowing and develop a global mindset:

*...I think it's a key trait actually that we have this systems ability because many people don't have that ability – we take it for granted that we are actually able to see the big picture and I don't mean just an aerial view of life or how someone fits in to something but the interconnectedness of it, the web of it, is much more quickly grasped by someone with a global mindset than someone without it...*

They were also able to describe how they bring a globally minded approach to their coaching:

*...I know for a fact that my global mindedness helps me see an individual in their framework but also in the possibilities of where they could exist...it's about focusing on details as well as having a big picture and this is the key to my success as a coach...*

They demonstrate Kegan's Fourth order of consciousness, which sees and understands the perspectives of others and uses those perspectives to continuously transform their own systems (Kegan, 1994, Berger, 2006, p. 81). These participants were able to take an objective meta-view of the global mindset construct. From their perspective global mindedness is therefore not just about having awareness of the world and how people in different cultures are different, but as one participant stated:

*...it is about having a level of self-awareness that allows people to be both authentic and flexible at the same time, to have an understanding about what is cultural in your own makeup and what your own drivers are...*

From a cross-cultural coaching perspective this journey towards managing one's identity has to begin with self-awareness, with being aware of what your culture is in order to be able to cope with diversity and difference as articulated by this participant:

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*...knowing who you are and where you belong is your identity and when you understand where you come from then you can choose what to keep and what to leave behind...*

These participants describe this as a process of “reinventing” oneself and believe that the lived experience leads to different ways of seeing the world and ascribing meaning to it. The management of one’s identity can also lead to the need to defend who you are (your identity) in order to have your experiences acknowledged. This is an emotional response to the need to belong and to know who you are in a complex environment. You fortify your sense of self rather than letting go of it. This need to defend one’s identity was clearly articulated by one participant:

*...everybody is looking to construct some kind of identity, which they can hold on to. If you are removed from a familiar environment that is part of your identity then you develop a new identity that becomes that of the globally mobile person. You will then have the need to hold on to this identity because if you lose it then you lose everything – you have to know where you belong. So you create something that goes beyond those two identities – a third way that goes beyond those two cultures...*

In describing her own lived experience this participant was able to take a meta-perspective. After many years of cross-cultural immersion she has been able to reinvent herself and is content in the new place that she has found for herself. She was clearly able to objectively articulate her journey and its outcome in describing the various acculturation development levels that she personally experienced. Her journey now complete, she has reinvented herself and in doing so she is transformed to the 4<sup>th</sup> order of consciousness level (Kegan, 1994). She has developed a global mindset.

## **Discussion**

These findings show that it is their own level of development that defines the cross-cultural coaches’ perspective on the global mindedness concept. Many coaches in this study were not ready to discard their bounded ways of thinking in favour of a more inclusive and integrated systems approach. Only a handful of participants actually fell into the developmental category of being globally minded and this concurs with Kegan’s constructive developmental perspective that a very small percentage of individuals reach the 4<sup>th</sup> order of consciousness and that the majority are at the 3<sup>rd</sup> order and are moving towards the 4<sup>th</sup> order (Kegan, 1994).

The findings also draw our attention to the fact that although many coaches with international experience may have developed the necessary vocabulary to discuss cross-cultural issues, this doesn’t necessarily mean that they are all operating at a 4<sup>th</sup> order of consciousness of being globally minded. Whilst acknowledging that some core competencies such as openness, curiosity and self-awareness could indeed be an innate part of one’s personality predisposing one to develop a global mindset, (Joniken, 2005; John *et al.*, 2008; Javidan *et al.*, 2011), the findings also show that it is both the nature, and extent of the experience itself – the ‘criticality’ of the experience - that determine such a development, which can either evolve during formative years or as the result of a critical life experience. This is important because to my knowledge this experiential and developmental dimension of the construct is overlooked by the current literature on the global mindedness concept.

### ***Implications for coaching practice***

These findings provide valuable information for cross-cultural coaches working in the global arena as well as an opportunity for *all* coaches to perhaps pause and reflect on their own individual ways of knowing and whether their own critical life experiences might also influence the way they

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make meaning of their environment, and to consider where they might be on their own developmental journeys.

*A developmental approach:*

I agree with Berger (2006, p. 93) that developmental theories ‘help us understand ourselves better, which is key if we are to get out of the way during the coaching process and not project ourselves on our clients’. Knowing yourself and your own culture first in order to know the Other is a key theme that underpins cross-cultural coaching practice. An understanding of constructive developmental theories and of how our view of the world and our way of knowing develop over time, will enable the coach to better recognize gaps in their clients’ thinking and to gauge where they might be on a development scale as a result of their critical life experiences. But to do this, coaches must first have an awareness and understanding of their own developmental level and be able to engage in ongoing questioning of assumptions (Mezirow, 1998) regarding their own bounded ways of thinking in order to be able to see themselves more objectively. It is through reflecting on our own assumptions that we are able to effect a change in our established frames of reference resulting in significant personal and social transformations. This engagement in critical reflection will enable coaches to navigate the bridge from bounded ways of thinking and to develop more integrated ways of thinking and coaching in complex and constantly changing environments.

*Increased Self-Awareness:*

The issue this study has raised with regard to how the global mindedness construct is contextualized by coaches from either a cultural or strategic perspective is the lack of a common language and this is crucial to the coach because it can lead to confusion and misunderstandings about the needs of the coachee. This is particularly relevant for those coaches who are engaged to develop employees for global leadership roles, as it requires an awareness of how they themselves tend to perceive the construct and whether their perception might differ from, or even contradict that of their client.

Understanding how the concept of global mindedness is contextualized is also important from the organizational perspective. If a coach tends towards a cultural approach to the construct then there is a danger that the needs of an organisation for a more strategic coaching approach to developing their employees for global leadership roles might not be met. Conversely, if the coach adopts a strategic approach to the construct then there is a danger that the needs of the individual might not be recognized or met. It is vital therefore that the coach is aware and understands both perspectives and how they are contextualized to meet the needs of all the stakeholders in the coaching relationship.

Increased self-awareness will enable the coach to have far more dynamic and effective interactions with their clients by helping them to embrace and manage core paradoxes that have the capacity to derail positive change and growth (Moral & Abbott, 2009). This will require the coach to be more resourceful and innovative, to be able to think outside the box and to be more resilient; to ‘lean into the spikes’ (Abbott, 2012) and engage with their clients at a much deeper level by engaging them in high impact ‘difficult’ conversations because these types of coaching conversations can transform apparent points of difference into points of synergy. This means taking the coaching conversation to a more purposeful and transformative level (Shaw, 2002) by asking more powerful questions (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2009). It also requires the coach to develop better, deeper third level listening skills to be able to really hear *how* their clients make meaning of their world.

*An Integrated Coaching Approach:*

From a cross-cultural coaching perspective, a rapidly globalizing world requires us to be more integrated in our thinking and to view cross-cultural adaptation as a universal phenomenon (Kim,

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2001). Cross-cultural coaches cannot afford to be complacent in this regard as they have an important role to play in this evolving global reality to meet the challenging complexities of today's globally interconnected world. Coaching practice will need to keep pace with the rapid evolution of the more complex global business cultures that are leading to an increased complexity in psychological, developmental and intercultural dilemmas faced by coaching clients.

These research findings demonstrate the need for *all* coaches to develop a more inclusive and integrated global approach to coaching that transcends culture and provides support for the client in a modern world. A developmental coaching approach can help the client to understand the transformative nature of their critical experience and in doing so clients will change their way of knowing and move to a more integrated 'systems' way of thinking.

Rosinski (2010) addresses this issue in advocating for an inclusive 'global' coaching approach that includes the spiritual, cultural, psychological, managerial and physical dimensions into the coaching process to embrace diversity, bridge cultural gaps and overcome discourse.

The integration of multiple perspectives within the coaching process is important because as the developmental literature shows, individuals develop differently and react to difference, to critical experiences, to stress and to change in a variety of ways and also resist, accept and adapt to difference to varying degrees in different settings (Shaules, 2007). It must also be appreciated that the nature and intensity of an experience has the ability to destabilize your sense of who you are, your identity and where and how you exist. This threat to one's identity needs to be managed and coaching can provide this support.

## **Conclusion**

According to Kegan (1994), in today's rapidly globalizing world many of us may be 'in over our heads' as increasingly we are all expected to operate at the fourth order of consciousness. I have argued that the development of a global mindset is a transformative and developmental experience that individuals, organizations and coaches will increasingly need to understand and tackle in order to manage the increasing complexities of a globally interconnected world.

Although a small, qualitative investigation into the concept of global mindedness from the perspective of the coaching profession, it has provided a window into the mindset of coaches who are presenting as skilled in working in complex global business environments and it highlights that within the coaching profession itself there is a divide in the perception and comprehension of the global mindedness concept. In addition, the constructed themes have also uncovered a considered developmental aspect to the global mindedness construct in showing how a critical experience can move an individual across evolving development stages, eventually leading to the development of a globally minded 'systems' way of thinking.

This study has only skimmed the surface of a complex issue, but its constructive grounded theory approach and its identification of conflicting contexts relating to the concept of global mindedness do underline the inherent complexity of the construct and show that there is learning to be done for the coaching profession in the domain of the human development process.

Adult learning theory underpins all coaching practice (Griffiths, 2005) and so an understanding of adult development theories is essential for the coach to support the client through change. Kegan's Orders of Consciousness theory (1994) provides a useful way of looking at the developmental aspect of the global mindset construct. However, from a coaching perspective it is important not just to view

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the construct solely from a developmental perspective but to meet the client where they are, to always look at all aspects of the individual and adopt a diverse approach to coaching in complex environments.

The primary samples in the focus groups were cross-cultural coaches and professionals working directly with globally mobile populations. Executive coaches were interviewed for theoretical sampling purposes only. I suggest that this study be repeated using the same methodology but on two different primary samples - executive coaches and organizational executives. This would establish whether the findings are consistent across all three groups.

It is worth noting that although this research study was conducted in globally diverse settings, it contains a 'Western' epistemology to exploring the global mindset construct and coaches were predominantly from Western countries (United States and Europe). A more holistic perspective can only be established by interviewing coaches from emerging economies such as India, China, Brazil and others to find out what meanings they attach to the concept of global mindedness.

Nevertheless, by looking at the global mindedness construct from a Western coaching perspective, this study has provided insight into the research question and I hope will open up a dialogue. It offers a snapshot of where the coaching industry is today, one that contains a certain resistance to the challenges posed by a new global paradigm. It shows the need for more inclusive and integrated ways of thinking and the need for a more global perspective to coaching. Now is not the time for complacency but for coaches to recognize the coming changes in this global paradigm and adapt clients and companies appropriately to tackle them. The big picture is that change on an unprecedented scale is already underway - and the big picture is the one that as coaches we must now embrace and endeavor to accommodate.

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