The purpose of this study was to identify the leadership competencies most required for leaders operating in Korean organizations and to examine the characteristics of leadership development practices used for developing those competencies. The Delphi method was used to obtain the consensus of a group of leadership development experts in Korea and, ultimately, to identify and prioritize issues relevant to this study. The findings revealed that some universal leadership competencies commonly identified in the global leadership literature are important for contemporary leaders in Korea; at the same time, there are idiosyncratic competencies required that reflect the characteristics of Korean society. In addition, Korean organizations have adopted many leadership development methods developed in western countries, and the relatively new methods such as coaching and 360-degree feedback are considered to be more effective than the traditional methods. Finally, strong support from the CEO and top management is the most critical factor affecting the success of leadership development practices in Korea.

**Keywords:** the Delphi method, leadership competency, leadership development

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**Key points**

1. The leadership competencies most valued and the way organizations develop those competencies in Korea reflect the characteristics of Korean society.
2. The critical factors affecting the success of leadership development programs are related to the organizational culture in Korea.

It is widely acknowledged that in most countries the demand for high-quality leaders exceeds the supply (Chambers et al. 1998). In response to this issue, researchers and practitioners in the leadership field have proposed ways to grow individual leaders and develop leadership in organizations. Many of them have been interested in the leadership competencies leaders need to possess and demonstrate in order to tackle the pressing issues...
organizations are facing these days. In particular, much attention has been paid to universal or global leadership competency models that specify a core set of universal qualities effective leaders need to have regardless of the context in which they work. Also, leadership professionals have proposed general suggestions for developing leaders including methods for leadership development and the conditions for its success (e.g. Black, Morrison and Gregersen 1999; Gregersen, Morrison and Black 1998; Jokinen 2005; Morrison 2000).

The problem is that attempts to examine the topics in relation to the particular characteristics of a given society are rare, whereas studies on the universal qualities of effective leaders and general suggestions for leadership development practices are relatively abundant (Morrison 2000). Even though some leadership competencies are generalizable across countries, certain competencies remain culturally specific (Black, Morrison and Gregersen 1999; Gregersen, Morrison and Black 1998; Javidan et al. 2006; Yeung and Ready 1995). Also culturally specific are the characteristics of leadership development practices (Schneider and Barsoux 2003). That is, depending on the cultural context and characteristics of organizations in a society, the leadership competencies most valued and the way organizations develop those competencies are likely to be different.

Many leadership studies have been conducted in western countries. As is widely acknowledged, the findings from individualistic societies may not be applicable to collectivist societies such as Korea (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). In addition to being a representative collectivist society (Javidan and Dastmalchian 2009), Korea warrants particular attention from leadership researchers in that its economy has grown at an astounding rate, and its competitiveness has often been associated with its emphasis on developing people’s talents (Bae and Rowley 2001; Kim and Kim 2003). Some commonly identified universal leadership competencies are likely to be important for leaders in Korea; at the same time, there must be idiosyncratic competencies required that reflect the characteristics of Korean society (Dorfman et al. 1997; Javidan et al. 2006; Yeung and Ready 1995). Likewise, given the relationship between organizational culture and human resource (HR) practices (Schneider and Barsoux 2003), leadership development practices in a society also may have distinctive features.

The purpose of this study is to identify the leadership competencies most required for leaders operating in Korean organizations, including both executive-level leaders and middle-level leaders, and to examine the characteristics of leadership development practices used for developing those competencies. Specifically, the research questions of this study are:

1. What are the leadership competencies required for corporate leaders in Korea?
2. What are the most effective methods for developing these leadership competencies in Korea?
3. What are the factors affecting the success of leadership development practices in Korea?

To examine these research questions, we employed the Delphi method and collected data from a group of leadership development experts working for major Korean companies. We related the findings to the characteristics of organizational culture and recent external
changes affecting HR practices in Korea. By examining these issues, this study can shed light on the applicability to collectivist and non-western countries of the global leadership competency models and the general suggestions for developing leaders proposed mostly in western countries.

Organizational culture and HR practices in Korea

While globalization creates pressures for common HR practices around the world, some nationally distinctive features still play key roles in determining the effectiveness of those practices (Bae and Lawler 2000; Bae and Rowley 2001; Schneider and Barsoux 2003). In this regard, it is important to review the cultural characteristics of organizations in Korea and their potential effects on the leadership development practices.

National culture has been deeply ingrained in people and, therefore, is reflected in organizational culture (Hofstede 2001; Naor, Linderman and Schroeder 2010; van Oudenhoven 2001; Schneider 1989). Thus, we can understand organizational culture in Korea by reviewing its national culture. In general, Korean culture is characterized by the heavy influence of Confucianism (Hofstede 1980; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Despite recent changes, the Confucian code of ethical behavior, which includes maintenance of harmony and trust as the basis of social interaction (Alston 1989), still exerts a huge influence on people. Specifically, in global culture studies, Korea is often ranked as one of the most collectivist countries where group harmony based on social contracts, company loyalty, and commitment is highly valued (Bae and Lawler 2000), and collective, rather than individual, achievement is emphasized (Hofstede 1980; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005).

While harmony is desirable, it is based on inequality among those of differing rank, power, and prestige in Korea (Alston 1989). Influenced by the Confucian ideal that a person owes respect and loyalty to parents and authority figures, an individual is expected to offer loyalty to hierarchical rankings in the organization. Subordinates owe their leaders the same loyalty they owe their parents and family elders, and leaders, in turn, assume responsibility for the well-being and future of their subordinates. Authoritarian and paternalistic leadership, hierarchical structure, a bureaucratic managerial style, and a high-power distance culture are traditional features of Korean corporate culture (Chung, Lee and Jung 1999; Hofstede 2001; House et al. 2004; Steers, Shin and Ungson 1989). Also, a tendency to accept unequal distributions of power and the cultural emphasis on respect and obedience to seniors make a top-down decision-making style typical in organizations in Korea. In fact, the Korean economy has been heavily dependent on chaebols, which are large diversified companies, primarily owned and managed by founders and their family members (Alston 1989; Kim and Kim 2003). This form of organization is characterized by a tall hierarchical organizational structure with a concentration of authority, with the decision-making power centralized at the top levels of management (Steers, Shin and Ungson 1989; Yang and Kelly 2009).

Organizational culture is strongly interconnected with HR practices (Kirkbride, Tang and Chaw 1989; Schneider 1989; Wong, Tjosvold and Lu 2010). Traditionally, HR practices in Korean organizations were characterized by seniority-based appraisal and reward
systems, intensive on-the-job training, and long-term employment principles (Bae and Rowley 2001; Chung, Lee and Jung 1999). Once hired, employees usually would complete their careers at the same company. Consequently, traditional HR practices in Korea, including leadership development practices, have aimed to cultivate loyalty and commitment of employees (Kim and Kim 2003).

However, recent studies indicate that Korean organizations have become increasingly market and performance oriented (Froese, Pak and Chong 2008; House et al. 2004). Consequently, compared to the traditional practices, contemporary HR practices in Korea tend to emphasize short-term efficiency and performance. Furthermore, as researchers have noted, the financial crisis in the 1990s in Korea strongly influenced HR practices and accelerated pre-existing movements toward American-style practices (Ba e and Lawler 2000; Bae and Rowley 2001; Kim and Kim 2003). For example, in the late 1990s, 360-degree appraisal was introduced in an increasing number of firms for the purpose of evaluation as well as development. In addition, as the principles underlying employment arrangements have changed from long-term to flexibility contracts in Korea, HR practices have come to focus more on developing professionals rather than generalists (Bae and Rowley 2001), and technical knowledge and skills rather than on loyalty and commitment to the company (Kim and Kim 2003). Furthermore, while the seniority-based appraisal and reward systems are still dominant principles in Korea (Yang and Kelly 2009), HR practices emphasizing individual ability and performance have gained in popularity in recent years (Kim and Kim 2003).

In sum, HR practices in Korean organizations, including leadership development practices, are in transition. Some features of new practices originating in western countries, which will be discussed below, are well-suited to Korean corporate culture. On the other hand, other features may not compatible with cultural values in Korea (Bae and Rowley 2001). Furthermore, the unique characteristics of Korean corporate culture may work as enablers or inhibitors in successful leadership development practices. Based on these ideas, the leadership competencies most required for leaders operating in Korean organizations and the characteristics of leadership development practices used for developing those competencies are examined in the following sections.

Methods

As noted, the research questions of this study were to identify the leadership competencies required for corporate leaders in Korea and the most effective methods for developing these leadership competencies. This study also sought to identify the factors affecting the success of leadership development practices in Korea. To address these research questions, we employed the Delphi method, which requires the involvement of a panel of qualified experts and several iterations of a questionnaire to collect data (Dalkey 1969).

Delphi method

The Delphi method was originally developed and conducted at the Rand Corporation in the 1950s (Dalkey and Helmer 1963). The primary purpose of the Delphi method is 'to
obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts’ by ‘a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback’ (Dalkey and Helmer 1963, 458). By obtaining the consensus of a group of experts through the process, researchers can identify and prioritize issues and develop a framework to understand them (Greatorex and Dexter 2000; Okoli and Pawlowski 2004). Although there have been numerous modified approaches after the early period of development of the Delphi method (Okoli and Pawlowski 2004), there are some common characteristics that still remain the same. As described by Linstone and Turoff (1975, 3):

Delphi may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem. To accomplish this ‘structured communication’ there is provided: some feedback of individual contributions of information and knowledge; some assessment of the group judgment or view; some opportunity for individuals to revise views; and some degree of anonymity for the individual responses.

The Delphi method has been somewhat underutilized as compared to traditional quantitative or qualitative research methods (Czinkota and Ronkainen 1997). Yet, this method is especially useful when researchers need to aggregate ideas from dispersed experts on a specific topic and establish agreement (Bass 1983; Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson 1975) in order to explore the underlying assumptions or perspectives among the experts (Turoff 1970). By validating the panel’s expertise, the Delphi method enables researchers to understand the comprehensive and integrative aspects of the research topic (Westbrook 1997).

Panel sampling
We obtained the list of the largest Korean companies from the Korea Fair Trade Commission and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry. First, the companies which have their own leadership development centers were identified. Among those, 50 major companies were contacted by email, and 15 of them indicated an intention to participate in the Delphi process with a response rate of 30 percent. Each participating organization selected one of their leadership development experts as the representative of the organization.

In sum, the participants of this study were composed of a panel of 15 experienced leadership development practitioners from 15 major Korean companies. The 15 companies included six Fortune Global 500 companies and nine representative Korean for-profit organizations in a variety of industries, including automotive, electronics, insurance, chemicals, and telecommunications. There is no fixed criterion regarding the adequate sample size of the Delphi panel (Fischer 1978; Williams and Webb 1994). While some Delphi studies included fewer than 10 participants in their panels (e.g. Malone et al. 2005; Strasser, London and Kortenbout 2005), other studies included more than 100 participants (e.g. Kelly and Porock 2005; Meadows et al. 2005). However, as Ludwig (1997, 2) discussed, ‘the majority of Delphi studies have used between 15 and 20 respondents’, and in this regard, we concluded that the size of the panel for this study was acceptable.
Data collection and analysis
To collect and analyze data, we adopted Schmidt et al.’s (2001) three-round ranking-type Delphi method and carefully followed the essential features of the Delphi method: anonymous response, iteration and controlled feedback, and statistical group response (Dalkey 1969). A two-week period was assigned to each of the three rounds, and reminders were sent after the first week.

In the first round, which is a brainstorming stage (Schmidt et al. 2001), an invitation email was sent to each of the 15 participants with the consent form explaining anonymity and confidentiality issues as well as the procedures of the study. Three research questions were provided with the online Delphi instrument. Open-ended questions were used at this stage to let participants express themselves in their own words and capture data not explicitly asked for in the questionnaire (Custer, Scarella and Stewart 1990). All 15 participants provided answers to the three research questions, and we extracted key themes from their answers.

In the second round, which is a narrowing down stage (Schmidt et al. 2001), participants were asked to rate the items (themes) extracted from the responses gathered in the first round. Specifically, they indicated how important they considered each item to be based on the seven-point Likert scale. After the second round, we calculated the relative importance of each item and selected the ten most significant items for each question as the basis for the third round.

The third round is a ranking stage (Schmidt et al. 2001). In this round, participants were asked to rank the selected top ten items for the first and third research questions in order of importance. For the second research question, we asked the participants to choose a most effective leadership development method for each leadership competency. After the third round, the final results were summarized. Kendall’s coefficient of concordance (Kendall’s $W$), a consensus criterion showing the level of consensus among the participants (Nevo and Chan 2007; Schmidt 1997; Siegel and Castellan 1998), was calculated along with the mean rank and standard deviation. Kendall’s coefficient of concordance ranges from 0 to 1, indicating the degree of consensus reached by the panel (strong consensus for $W > 0.7$; moderate consensus for $W = 0.5$; and weak consensus for $W < 0.3$) (Schmidt et al. 2001).

Findings
Leadership competencies
The first research question is concerned with the key leadership competencies considered most important by the participants. Table 1 presents the top ten most important leadership competencies for executive-level leaders, with the mean rank and standard deviation assigned to each competency. Results from Table 1 show that identifying and articulating a vision was rated the most important competency for executive-level leaders, followed by leading change and innovation, business insight, decision-making skills, and understanding and sharing a vision. As evidenced by Kendall’s coefficient of concordance, weak agreement was found across the panel members ($W = 0.356$) for the ranking of leadership competencies for executive-level leaders.
Table 1  Key leadership competencies of executive-level leaders in Korea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Leadership competencies</th>
<th>Mean rank (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identifying and articulating a vision</td>
<td>1.60 (1.68)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leading change and innovation</td>
<td>3.87 (2.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Business insight</td>
<td>4.07 (2.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Decision-making skills</td>
<td>5.53 (2.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Understanding and sharing a vision</td>
<td>6.07 (3.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ethics and integrity</td>
<td>6.27 (2.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Communicating effectively</td>
<td>6.33 (2.26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>6.73 (2.81)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Motivating followers</td>
<td>7.07 (1.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Enhancing creativity and autonomy</td>
<td>7.47 (1.96)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Kendall’s $W = 0.356, \chi^2 [9] = 48.08, p < 0.001.$

Table 2  Key leadership competencies of middle-level leaders in Korea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Leadership competencies</th>
<th>Mean rank (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Managing performance</td>
<td>2.20 (1.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Demonstrating enthusiasm for achieving business goals</td>
<td>4.40 (3.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Communicating effectively</td>
<td>4.87 (2.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Coaching followers</td>
<td>5.07 (2.49)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Building teamwork</td>
<td>5.53 (2.61)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Motivating followers</td>
<td>5.73 (2.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Providing a role model to follow</td>
<td>6.20 (2.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Managing projects</td>
<td>6.33 (2.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Demonstrating responsibility</td>
<td>6.73 (2.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Developing one’s own career</td>
<td>7.93 (2.63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kendall’s $W = 0.259, \chi^2 [9] = 34.97, p < 0.001.$

Table 2 presents the top ten most important competencies for middle-level leaders identified by the participants. As it shows, the key competencies of effective middle-level leaders include managing performance, demonstrating enthusiasm for achieving business goals, communicating effectively, coaching followers, and building teamwork. Eight out of the ten competencies desired for middle-level leaders are different from the competencies for executive-level leaders; only two competencies – communicating effectively and motivating followers – were identified as critical competencies both for executive- and middle-level leaders. The Kendall’s $W$ indicated weak agreement among the panel members ($W = 0.259$) for the ranking of leadership competencies for middle-level leaders.

**Leadership development methods**

To answer the second research question, the participants were asked to provide the frequently used leadership development methods in their organizations in the first round. As a result, a total of 23 methods were identified. Then, in the second round, the participants
were asked to rate the frequency of use of each method using a Likert-type scale with points ranging from 1 (never used) to 7 (very frequently used). From the results of the second round survey, the top ten most frequently used methods for developing leadership competencies in the participants’ organizations were identified: coaching, success stories, action learning, 360-degree feedback, simulation, job rotation, case study, executive lecture, task force team, and MBA program.

In the third round, these ten methods were presented to the participants for selection in the survey questionnaire along with the ten most important competencies listed in tables 1 and 2. Then, the participants were asked to choose one best leadership development method for developing each competency. Based on the frequency of responses by the 15 participants, the most effective leadership development methods for ten leadership competencies were selected as shown in Table 3 (for executive-level leaders) and Table 4 (for middle-level leaders). For example, as Table 3 shows, action learning was selected as the most effective leadership development method in developing business insight for executive-level leaders in Korea.

For executive-level leadership development, in total, coaching was considered the most effective method, followed by 360-degree feedback, action learning, job rotation, and success stories. More specifically, as shown in Table 3, coaching was particularly effective for developing the following leadership competencies: identifying and articulating a vision.

Table 3  Most effective methods for developing executive-level leaders in Korea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership competencies</th>
<th>Coaching</th>
<th>360-degree feedback</th>
<th>Action learning</th>
<th>Job rotation</th>
<th>Success stories</th>
<th>Simulation</th>
<th>Case study</th>
<th>Executive lecture</th>
<th>Task force team</th>
<th>MBA program</th>
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<td>Identifying and articulating a vision</td>
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<td>Leading change and innovation</td>
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○ = the most effective method(s) for developing a leadership competency; ○ = the second most effective method(s) for developing a leadership competency.
communicating effectively, and motivating followers. Also, 360-degree feedback was ranked as the most effective method for developing ethics and integrity and enhancing creativity and autonomy. Even though MBA program was considered useful in developing executive-level leaders’ entrepreneurship, the participants considered that MBA program was relatively less effective in general in developing key leadership competencies.

When it comes to developing middle-level leaders’ key competencies, the most effective method is a task force team, followed by coaching, 360-degree feedback, action learning, and simulation. As Table 4 shows, the task force team was considered the most effective method in developing some of the middle-level leaders’ key competencies – particularly managing performance and building teamwork – although this method was considered less effective in developing key competencies for executive-level leaders. A lecture delivered by in-company executives was considered particularly useful in developing a competency aimed at providing a role model to follow, even though it was considered less effective in general by the participants. Although an MBA program was identified as one of the most frequently used methods in the participants’ organizations, it appears that an MBA program is perceived to be less effective than the other methods presented in Table 4.

As the findings summarized in tables 3 and 4 show, no single method is best for developing a range of leadership competencies (Yeung and Ready 1995). Each competency needs a different developmental method because the effectiveness of the method can vary across competencies. Also, the relationship-based leadership development methods (e.g.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership competencies</th>
<th>Task force team</th>
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<td>Managing performance</td>
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<td>Developing one’s own career</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

○ = the most effective method(s) for developing a leadership competency; ○ = the second most effective method(s) for developing a leadership competency
coaching and 360-degree feedback) and the experienced-based development methods (e.g. action learning, task force team, and job rotation) are perceived to be more effective in developing key leadership competencies required for Korean corporate leaders than the traditional methods (e.g. lecture, MBA program).

**Barriers and enablers**

To further our understanding of the characteristics of leadership development in Korea, we explored the factors that enable or inhibit the success of leadership development programs. Table 5 outlines the top ten barriers to successful leadership development identified by the participants. The lack of the organization’s long-term support for leadership development was considered the most significant barrier to leadership development. The difficulty in validating the effect of leadership development programs was considered the second most significant barrier. Other issues identified as barriers include the lack of strategic integration between leadership development and career development, the inconsistent policy and philosophy related to leadership development, and the lack of diagnostic tools to measure leadership competencies. Additionally, heavy workloads tend to hinder employees from participating in leadership development programs and hinder organizations from utilizing highly experienced and knowledgeable employees as in-house lecturers.

The top ten enablers of successful leadership development are listed in Table 6. Results showed that three enablers out of ten are related to management’s or supervisors’ support for leadership development: CEO and top management’s long-term support for leadership development, supervisor support for leadership training transfer, and supervisor support for rearranging work schedules for active participation in leadership development program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Mean rank (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lack of organization’s long-term support for leadership development</td>
<td>3.60 (2.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lack of validating the effect of leadership development programs</td>
<td>3.93 (2.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of strategic integration between leadership development and career</td>
<td>4.20 (2.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Inconsistent policy and philosophy related to leadership development</td>
<td>4.53 (3.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>after changes in top management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lack of diagnostic tools to measure leadership competencies</td>
<td>5.07 (2.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lack of consensus for effective leadership development programs</td>
<td>5.87 (2.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Failure to rearrange work schedules for leadership training participants</td>
<td>6.07 (2.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lack of support for the application of knowledge from action learning</td>
<td>6.53 (2.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>into practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Difficulty in proceeding with leadership development program due to</td>
<td>7.33 (2.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>changes in organizational structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Difficulty in utilizing high performance human resources as in-house</td>
<td>7.87 (2.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lecturers due to their heavy workloads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kendall’s $W = 0.235$, $\chi^2 [9] = 31.68$, $p < 0.001$.  
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Other organizational factors include strengthening the link between HRD and HRM, and building consensus on leadership development programs among key decision-makers. With regard to leadership development systems and processes, the participants indicated that developing a company’s own leadership competency model, leadership diagnostic tools, and a learning transfer system is important and that leadership development programs congruent with the company’s core values tend to be effective. The participants further agreed that employees should be responsible for their own leadership development through continuous self-development efforts. Finally, continuous marketing of leadership development programs was seen as a vehicle for facilitating leadership development.

**Discussion and conclusion**

**Valued leadership competencies for corporate leaders in Korea**

Some of the leadership competencies listed in tables 1 and 2 are also found in the literature on global leadership competencies. These leadership competencies include: leading and managing change; establishing, understanding, and sharing an organization’s vision, values, and strategy; social skills such as motivating and directing others; business acumen; and personal characteristics such as emotional connection with people, integrity, and inquisitiveness (Black, Morrison and Gregersen 1999; Brake 1997; Conner 2000; Gregersen, Morisson and Black 1998; Jokinen 2005; Moran and Reisenberger 1994; Mumford et al. 2000; Rhinesmith 1996; Spreitzer, McCall and Mahoney 1997; Yeung and Ready 1995).

On the other hand, some leadership competencies often found in the global leadership literature were not reported in the current study as highly important ones for Korean leaders. These competencies include: managing complexity/uncertainty and sensitivity to
diversity (Black, Morisson and Gregersen 1999; Conner 2000; Gregersen, Morrison and Black 1998; Jokinen 2005; Moran and Reisenberger 1994; Mumford et al. 2000; Rhinesmith 1996; Spreitzer, McCall and Mahoney 1997). In addition, a few leadership competencies such as demonstrating enthusiasm for achieving business goals, providing a role model to follow, demonstrating responsibility, and developing one’s own career shown in tables 1 and 2 are not mentioned in the global leadership literature and, thus, appear to be unique to Korean organizations. These leadership competencies are closely related to the leaders’ roles as key players in teams and role models for followers to imitate.

Generally speaking, as tasks and responsibilities at different hierarchical levels are different, the competencies required for leaders are also likely to differ depending on their level (Den Hartog et al. 1999; McGurk 2010). The findings of this study show that this tendency is especially conspicuous in Korea. Specifically, the nature of the competencies required for executive-level leaders and that of the competencies required for middle-level leaders are clearly distinct in the participating organizations. As mentioned above, only two leadership competencies – communicating effectively and motivating followers – were identified as important for both executive-level and middle-level leaders (tables 1 and 2). This result can be explained partly by the highly centralized and formalized structure in Korean organizations, where top level leaders are exclusively engaged in developing and communicating a vision and strategy and in initiating and leading organizational change. As a consequence, leadership competencies such as identifying and articulating a vision, understanding and sharing a vision, and leading change and innovation are highly valued ones for executive-level leaders (Table 1) but not so critical for middle-level leaders (Table 2). On the other hand, middle-level leaders are responsible for operational works and social interaction with subordinates. Therefore, leadership competencies such as managing performance, coaching followers, building teamwork, and providing a role model to follow are highly valued for middle-level leaders (Table 2). Arguably, the separation of the two sets of leadership competencies reflects the tall hierarchical structure and the centralized decision-making power that characterize Korean business organizations (Steers, Shin and Ungson 1989; Yang and Kelly 2009).

In addition, the sets of highly valued leadership competencies reflect the recent changes affecting organizations in Korea. In a cross-cultural study conducted in the 1990s, having integrity and trust was reported as the most important leadership competency in Korea, while being a catalyst of change was considered less important (Yeung and Ready 1995). However, in the current study, ethics and integrity was ranked as low as the sixth important competency of executive-level leaders and was not even included among the ten most important competencies of middle-level leaders. Instead, the participants of the current study considered competencies related to driving organizational performance and realizing an organization’s vision, such as identifying and articulating a vision and managing performance, to be most required ones for contemporary leaders. The increased emphasis on performance is consistent with the move toward a market and performance-oriented paradigm, which organizations in Korea have been pursuing since the late 1990s (Bae and Lawler 2000; Bae and Rowley 2001; House et al. 2004; Kim and Kim 2003).
One of the reasons for the Korea’s economic crisis in the late 1990s was seen to be the failure of leaders to adjust to a rapidly changing business environment (Shim and Steers 2001). As a consequence, leaders’ role in driving organizational performance and leading organizational change has been highly stressed since then. As discussed above, the valued leadership competencies in the contemporary Korean organizations reflect the changes in the environment where organizations operate and the changes in the expectations regarding leaders in Korea. Furthermore, the highly centralized structure of Korean organizations makes the leadership competencies required for executive-level leaders and the ones required for middle-level leaders largely distinct.

Effective methods for developing leadership competencies in Korea
As researchers have argued, national and organizational culture moderates the effectiveness of a variety of HR processes, including leadership development (Schneider and Barsoux 2003; Shipper, Hoffman and Rotondo 2007). Due to Korea’s high uncertainty-avoidance culture (Hofstede 1980), Korean organizations have often been assumed to be skeptical of new and innovative approaches to leadership development (Shipper, Hoffman and Rotondo 2007) and to prefer traditional approaches. In addition, due to its emphasis on collective values, Koreans workers have been thought to be less able to assess individual performance separately from that of the group and to be reluctant to be critical of a group member for fear of upsetting group harmony (Hofstede 2001; Lau and Ngo 2001; Shipper, Hoffman and Rotondo 2007). Therefore, some researchers have argued that training methods that involve the sharing of feelings about other people and aim at developing individuals rather than groups are less effective in Korea (Earley 1994; Hofstede 2001; Lau and Ngo 2001).

However, the findings summarized in tables 3 and 4 are not consistent with some of the beliefs held by researchers regarding effective development methods in Korea. Three trends are noticeable in tables 3 and 4. First of all, as the comprehensive list shows, many innovative interventions developed in western countries and globally popular, including coaching, action learning, and 360-degree feedback, are being widely practiced and perceived to be effective in Korea. This trend reflects the movement toward American-style HR practices in Korea (Bae and Lawler 2000; Bae and Rowley 2001; Kim and Kim 2003). Another noticeable trend is that more traditional forms of interventions, such as lectures and MBA programs, even though still commonly practiced (Kim, Kwon and Pyun 2008), are perceived to be less effective than the newer methods in developing the leadership competencies required for contemporary leaders in Korea. Finally, leadership development methods such as coaching and 360-degree feedback which focus on sharing of feelings about other people and developing individuals are perceived as the most effective methods across a variety of competencies of both executive- and middle-level leaders.

Even though researchers commonly identified Koreans as being collective, some researchers have pointed out that organizational culture in Korea is more competitive, individualistic, and dynamic than that of other Asian countries (Chang and Chang 1994; Cho and Yoon 2001; Ungson, Steers and Park 1997). According to these researchers, contemporary Korean culture is more complex than the traditional culture and can be char-
acterized as a composite of traditional Asian values and western values. They define Korean corporate culture as dynamic collectivism in that individualism coexists with group spirit and harmony-seeking collectivism. This characteristic may provide the context which allows relatively new leadership development methods which focus on individuals and developing relationships to be effective in Korean organizations. Furthermore, even though Korean workers have difficulties in expressing views contrary to those of their leaders, they are not offended by criticism. Rather, they usually feel easy about receiving feedback from their colleagues and supervisors, even if it is negative (Yang and Kelly 2009). Korean workers tend to recognize the power that their colleagues and supervisors have on their work and even personal lives and are motivated by ways to get close to and have informal social ties with them (Yang and Kelly 2009). Therefore, in that context, the relationship-based development methods such as coaching and 360-degree feedback can be effective in fostering necessary competencies.

In sum, Korean organizations have adopted many leadership development methods that are based on the individualist values. While various methods are employed to develop leadership competencies, the relatively new methods such as coaching and 360-degree feedback are perceived to be more effective by leadership development practitioners in Korea than the traditional methods such as lectures and MBA programs. This trend is inconsistent with some of the previous literature which argues that the relationship-based approaches and the developmental methods focusing on individuals tend not to be effective in the collectivist societies (Earley 1994; Hofstede 2001; Lau and Ngo 2001; Shipper, Hoffman and Rotondo 2007). As some researchers have pointed out, contemporary Korean corporate culture can be defined as a mixture of individualism and collectivism and of its own traditional values and western values. As the findings of this study suggest, the developmental methods based on individualist values may work well in the Korean corporate context.

Factors affecting the success of leadership development practices in Korea

As reported in tables 5 and 6, many of the critical factors affecting the success of leadership development programs in Korea are concerned with the support from the CEO and top management. Specifically, the participants reported that changes in policies and philosophies caused by changes in the CEO and top management hindered them from implementing effective leadership development programs. The absence of long-term planning for leadership development was also commonly identified as a barrier to effective leadership development. Among many other factors affecting leadership development training transfer (Gilpin-Jackson and Bushe 2007), support from direct supervisors was rated as one of the critical factors affecting the success of leadership development. In addition, according to the participants, the supervisor’s support for followers to take advantage of leadership development opportunities is critical in the success of leadership development programs in Korea. As mentioned above, these findings are consistent with the characteristics of organizational culture in Korea, particularly the centralized authority and decision-making power in the organizations.
In conclusion, key enablers and barriers affecting the success of leadership development in Korea are highly intertwined and mostly related to organizational-level factors. Even though Korean organizations have placed enormous emphasis on developing leaders, the findings of this study revealed that little attention has been paid to creating a customized model of leadership competency, measuring the impact of leadership development efforts, and enhancing leadership training transfer. As reported in this study, creating an organizational culture that embraces the value of leadership development cannot be achieved without strong support from the CEO and top management in Korea.

**Implications for leadership development research and practices**

Contrary to the previous studies which typically focused on top level leaders (e.g. House et al. 2004), this study included not only executive-level leaders but also lower level leaders. The findings of this study show that the inclusion of lower level leaders was appropriate in the Korean context where many organizations have hierarchical structures. As discussed above, the findings of this study revealed that the sets of required leadership competencies differ depending on the hierarchical positions of the leaders, possibly due to the strict hierarchical structure in organizations. The findings of this study suggest that efforts to understand leadership competencies need to include leaders across various positions and rankings in organizations.

Determining which leadership competencies are most important is one thing, and understanding how to best develop the competencies is another (Yeung and Ready 1995). Considering the differences in expected outcomes of each developmental method, some methods are likely to be more effective in developing certain leadership competencies than others. Despite the potential practical implications, little attention has been paid to which developmental method is potentially more effective than others to develop a certain leadership competency. This study provided a framework for future study on the relationship between leadership competencies and development methods.

Suggestions for leadership development have been primarily based on practices in the North America (Yulk 1998) and, consequently, are not necessarily applicable to leadership development elsewhere (Schneider and Barsoux 2003). Multinational organizations need to effectively develop the competencies valued and required for leaders within a particular cultural context (Abbott et al. 2006; Harvey, Speier and Novicevic 2002; McDonnell, Stanton and Burgess 2011; Yeung and Ready 1995). Without those leadership competencies, a leader may not be effective in interactions with the country’s employees, customers, and other stakeholders. Furthermore, when it comes to local organizations, it is insufficient to benchmark from global leadership competency models or to adopt general suggestions from organizations with worldwide fame. Local organizations must define leadership competencies and develop them based on their own context, needs, and challenges (Yeung and Ready 1995). This study contributes to the leadership literature by examining the leadership competencies and leadership development practices in relation to the characteristics of a given society and culture. The findings of this study can help organizations in Korea or in other countries with similar cultural patterns as well as the
multinational organizations which interact with the people in these countries prepare their leaders to be effective in performing their roles.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

By leveraging the experience and insight of leaders, a leadership competency model can provide clear guidance on the leaders’ effective behaviors (Hollenbeck, McCall and Silzer 2006). However, there has been intense debate concerning the usefulness of leadership competency models or, more fundamentally, the validity of the assumptions underlying the competency movement (Hollenbeck, McCall and Silzer 2006). We acknowledge that there must be other qualities besides competencies leaders should have to perform effectively and that focusing only on competencies might limit the depth of the discussion in this article.

Furthermore, by adopting the Delphi method with quantitative surveys, this study did not capture the deep-rooted meanings that leaders have concerning their roles and competencies. Studies using an interpretive approach to leadership competencies (e.g. Sandberg 2000) would enhance our understanding of leadership competencies and leadership development practices.

Finally, this study was based on the assumption that leadership competencies and the characteristics of leadership development practices reflect the unique features of a given society. Future research that compares the characteristics of leadership development across organizations from various cultures will be of great value to leadership research and practice. The research can enhance our understanding of the effect of national and organizational cultures on leadership development practices and of the applicability of global leadership development models to various cultural settings.

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