

Crossing the cultural chasm – Managing global talent

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Posted On Friday, May 15, 2009 at 01:00:04 PM

What is it with 'Culture' that has turned out to be a hot potato and what does this have to do anything with managing global talent? Let's find out

Well, at least, we all could acknowledge that we get to see a lot of more people who look different and speak different in our workplace and communities than before – I mean racially diverse people, not just people from different regions or states within a nation.

Moving between cultures

On a rudimentary basis, we may relate to Culture as a variety or differences in traditions, customs, the way people dress, their habits, mannerisms, hygiene to some extent, the way people speak. Let us, for the sake of this conversation, call these as the 'extrinsic' aspects of culture. As global corporations send international assignees to a foreign land, this extrinsic aspect of culture becomes a subject of curiosity and intrigue for most expatriate employees. **Expatriate** employees go through a predictable cross cultural adjustment cycle typically referred to as the honey moon phase, cultural shock phase, adjustment phase, evolving into a mastery phase. Moving between cultures of, for example, Germany and India would require more adjustment than between China and India.

The level of **cross cultural** preparedness and the social lifestyle transition is a big determinant of success for any global talent deployment. Results from the Globalisation Trends Report in 2005 showed that 35 per cent of expatriate employees prematurely return to their home countries without completing their assignments, primarily due to the cultural shock and differences. This represents an obvious and tangible implication to managing global talent. In subsequent articles, I will share more insights on how we could reduce/mitigate the failure rates experienced with expatriate international assignments.

Leveraging skills and capabilities

Let us for a minute delve into another realm of 'Culture' that may be less obvious and tangible. How do we know that we are optimally leveraging the skills and capabilities of cross cultural global talent? Culture defines our concept of 'self', how we relate to ourselves and with others – a fundamental aspect of how people form relationships, work in teams, communicate with each other. There are distinct differences in how persons from different cultures of Germany or Japan or India perceive their role in the society, at workplace, in teams. What motivates persons of one culture may be a turn off for persons of other cultures. As HR practitioners develop and deploy performance management systems, reward and recognition systems to attract, engage and retain a global workforce how should we manage the cultural dichotomies and barriers to integration?

A Society for Human Resources Management case study highlights 55 per cent of survey respondents rated incompatible cultures as a major obstacle to organisational integration. Stay tuned to learn more about what Cultural Competence is, and the importance of Cross Cultural Strategies for successfully Crossing the Cultural Chasm – in your quest for effectively managing global talent!

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