

Competencies for international working

When organisations select people to work internationally they must ensure that these individuals possess appropriate competencies if they are to fulfil assignment objectives.

The list of desired attributes can be lengthy and detailed but it is important to ensure that key capabilities are included in the selection process.

DEFINING COMPETENCIES

Competencies refer to the combination of knowledge (what we know), skills (what we can do) and behaviours/value sets (how we adapt and apply what we know and can do to the situation). In an international context this requires cross-cultural adaptability.



STRATEGIC AWARENESS

Strategy is about choice and this can require fast response capability. Individuals will need to be able to work flexibly in their organisations in situations of intense global competition.

Global managers should have strategic awareness of the business and its direction. This involves having a clear understanding of organisational goals and the objectives of the assignment. They must also be able to manage change and transition. Management development assignments must take into account these strategic requirements as well.

PROFESSIONAL & MANAGERIAL CAPABILITIES

Individuals must be trained and competent in their professional discipline. Professional capabilities are particularly sought for functional heads and technical specialists.

People management capability is critical. Global managers will have to manage cultural diversity and must have cultural sensitivity. They will have to operate effectively across both their home and host cultures and possibly third cultures, depending on the cultural diversity in the host environment. They will have to be able to deal with interpersonal conflict and adapt their leadership styles to the culture(s) in which they are working.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS CAPABILITY

The ability to build relationships is critical to be able to operate professionally and socially in any society. All who work internationally need strong communications capability. This includes being able to speak the local language (at least to some extent) and to be willing to communicate in this language with host

country nationals. Working cross-culturally will require flexibility in communication style to seek the best way to get the messages across to local colleagues.

Team working capabilities will be required. An understanding of the societal culture will be required for effective team work.

Individuals will need to possess multi-dimensional vision rather than follow unitary thought as they will have to see things from different perspectives. They will also have to be able to deal with information from many sources in an international environment.

Global managers must be sensitive to the needs of others, particularly when working in different cultures. They must also be able to delegate and trust their subordinates.

A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Individuals will need to be willing to take some level of risk given they are operating in an environment of ambiguity. They will need to be action-oriented and have strong personal goals. This means that individuals need to have a degree of maturity to be able to cope with ambiguity and change. They will need to be able to examine situations constructively, not defensively.

Individuals must be willing to learn, to have a constructive attitude to the assignment, and a positive view of the host location.

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