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Essential Skills for Your Organization

Going Global

Your Learning and Development Guide to Supporting a Multinational, Multicultural Management Team

This guide outlines ways that you can train and develop managers who are located across different countries and cultures.

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Organizations face learning and development challenges when they expand into new regions.

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Companies expanding into new markets can struggle to develop consistent management approaches across different countries and cultures.

As a result of the intense globalization of the past 20 years, many previously local companies now operate across many different regions and cultures.

This provides many advantages. It also presents challenges for learning and development teams, particularly when it comes to supporting and developing a global management team.

For example, managers with similar roles in different locations may have different skill levels and conflicting learning styles. The approach that managers use with their people may also be different across cultures – what's effective in one region might not work elsewhere, and vice versa.

In this guide, we outline ways that you and your learning and development team can deal with the challenges of training managers who are based in different countries and cultures.

Help Leaders Understand the Challenges

If your organization operates globally, you may well have seen imbalances in your talent pool. For example, staff in some locations may lack certain skills because of their educational backgrounds. In other regions, local managers may not apply "home" management methods, because these do not fit with the local culture.

You may also find that leaders from your home location don't have a realistic picture of the other markets or cultures that your organization operates in.

It's your job as a learning and development professional to help leaders understand these challenges and differences. Discuss them, and highlight how your organization can deal with them effectively.

Deal With Local Differences

The more widespread your organization, the greater the number of localized learning styles, behaviors, and attitudes you need to work with.

This can be daunting. However, it's essential that you identify these styles and traditions – your learning program (for staff as a whole, as well as managers) will

likely be more successful if you work with, not against, these differences.

Research shows that culture has a major impact on how people learn. For instance, in a collectivist culture (where people see themselves primarily as members of a group), training will likely be more effective when you communicate how it will benefit the team, rather than the individual. Other factors, such as how people view those in power and how they relate to their environment, will also affect learning.

Therefore, you need to make sure that you use learning methods that are appropriate for your audience. If you can, involve local trainers or managers in program development, and ask them to outline how education and training styles in their culture have influenced management approaches in the past. You can use this knowledge to design learning programs that will be effective in that location.

You can also do your own research into how workplace values vary between cultures. Our articles on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model and The Seven Dimensions of Culture are good places to start.

Remember, though, that you must communicate a consistent message to all managers in your organization, even when you use a variety of different learning methods and approaches.

Consider Using Interim Managers

To train local managers in your organization's management approaches, consider bringing in trainers and interim managers from your organization's home location for a period of time, if this is practical. This is so that they can transfer their expertise, and bring local managers up to speed gradually, without them losing their ability to deal with local needs.

You can also develop local managers by bringing them to your home location to work with trainers and other experienced managers. This helps them learn more about the company's culture, and it provides an opportunity for them to share knowledge about the differences between the home location and the local markets that they work in.

Encourage a Consistent yet Flexible Approach

While it's important to bring all of your managers up to a similar skill level, it's best not to impose too much control over how they should behave. This is because they will need to adapt their management approach, depending on the prevailing culture in their location.

You may need to work with local consultants to meld your organization's management style with local culture, so that managers are using the most effective approaches for their situation.

Respond to Change

Cultures and management approaches evolve constantly, and your organization will need to respond to these changes on an ongoing basis.

You can support your leaders by understanding how changing cultures affect learning and management approaches, and by being ready with solutions to the problems that can arise when you have a globalized management team.

Also consider using management forums or online groups, so that managers can share management best practices throughout the organization. (These need to be open to all managers, in all locations, to be successful.) Ask participants to outline the approaches that they've used in their locale, and to explain what outcomes they've observed. Then encourage other managers to think about how they can use these findings in their own situations.

You can also use our LinkedIn Group to share your experiences, and to get expert advice from other L&D professionals.

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References

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