

Cross-cultural training

Today, many organizations realize the importance of intercultural management and therefore increase the use of cross-cultural training programs offered by specialized companies or provided by internal departments within multinational corporations. For example, Fortune 500 companies, including Microsoft, Wal-Mart, Apple, Exxon Mobil, Procter & Gamble, Coca Cola, etc. regularly purchase seminars or provide other forms of cross-cultural training. Multinational companies use cross-cultural training “to increase skills and knowledge of international assigners” and “help them operate effectively in the unfamiliar host country” (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2005, p. 15-16), as they realize more and more that the cost of cross-cultural blunders is much higher.

Findings

We interviewed representatives of fifty multinational companies and received the following results.

Working in a multinational environment

Most respondents claim that working in a multicultural environment poses more challenges to effective company work, including dealing with cultural differences, proper management of a diverse workforce, and ensuring effective cooperation. Consequently, this requires better understanding of cultural differences and peculiarities of various stakeholders, for example, employees (from workers to top-managers and executives) in order to ensure effective company functioning, as well as cooperation and goal achievement within global work teams. Therefore, the role of cultural competencies of managers and HR practitioners increases.

On the other hand, a cross-cultural environment provides more opportunities for growth and development; for example, new market segments, improved management approaches, better understanding of diversity of customer needs, etc.

The need for cross-cultural training

Over half of the respondents claimed that in case they were assigned an overseas job, they would want to undergo some kind of cross-cultural training in order to better understand foreign culture, including business culture, as this is likely to increase the effectiveness of management and help to avoid some mistakes caused by cross-cultural misunderstanding. Still, some respondents stated that their decision to take part in CCT is likely to be influenced by the country they might be assigned to (namely, the extent to which its culture is different).

Training programs' contents

The respondents indicated the following aspects of cross-cultural relationships that they would want to learn within cross-cultural training programs: 1) business ethics and etiquette of a foreign country, as this is one of the most important factors that influence further relationships; 2) cross cultural negotiation factors; 3) cultural features and mentality, which strongly influence the overall behaviour of people, including business activity and working traditions; 4) motivational factors, which are connected to the nation's culture and mentality and are essential in ensuring adequate employee management; 5) specific country information, for instance, peculiarities of business traditions and law, as they reflect the mentality of foreigners and help to understand some of the motivational factors; 6) management of online cross-cultural relationships, as the number of such forms of communication is increasing in today's globalized and highly technological world.

The impact of CCT programs implementation

Most respondents agreed that the implementation of cross-cultural training programs might be beneficial. However, they stressed the importance of the use of proper mechanisms

(including active participation, role plays, etc.) and focusing on the most essential aspects of cross-cultural issues.

Other solutions to multicultural problems

Some respondents suggested the idea of using Arts in order to get a deeper understanding of foreign culture and mentality, as well as some aspects of etiquette and ethical issues. The reason is that Arts are likely to provide examples of cultural features existing in a certain country that are bright and easy to remember. Herewith, Arts can be used as a part of cross-cultural training programs.

Analysis

The interview results show that cross-cultural training is of great importance to multinational companies. Herewith, such aspects of training as specific information about a country, its business etiquette, communication and negotiation styles, organizational and workplace culture, intercultural issues, etc. are often included in cross-cultural training programs offered by various specialized companies (Business training works, n.d.; Cross-cultural training, n.d.; Noetic Training Solutions, n.d.). For instance, Dvorak International offers programs aimed at ensuring effective foreign negotiations and supervision of multicultural staff. In particular, it provides Cross-Cultural Awareness Seminars, addressing diverse aspects of intercultural management and communication (cultural values and their influence on negotiations, cross-cultural team-building, etiquette, etc.) (Dvorak International, n.d.).

Nevertheless, the role of the host country in cross-cultural training is often undervalued, as well as its active participation. Meanwhile, host country nationals can act as experts, having inside cultural knowledge, and are able to ease expatriates transition (Anker, 2010).

Additionally, as the role of information technologies is increasing, more communication processes are taking place indirectly, via these technologies, which can be proved by the interview results. Therefore, cross-cultural training programs change accordingly. For instance, the 2010 annual Global Relocation Trends Survey Report, conducted by Brookfield Global Relocation Services, showed that 35 % of the respondents offered a media-based training course, while 25 % provided it together with a face-to-face instruction (Foley, 2010).

References

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