

GLOBAL

The Economy-Training Op Connection

Company expansions worldwide are creating career possibilities.

By Saul Carliner

It's common to hear about a company moving or expanding into other country, but we probably don't think often enough about the global economy potential opportunities. It's time to start taking notice. Globalization is creating opportunities specifically for training and performance improvement professionals.

A global reach

Companies have gone outside the United States to find bright new markets for products and services. One reason is that economic development, especially in China and India, can generate higher returns than are possible in North America.

As those enterprises expand, they must localize their products to succeed in their new markets, and they must prepare their U.S. workers for interactions with non-U.S. clients and co-workers. To do so, a company typically employs a combination of local and international training staff. For example, product training groups in transnational organizations tend to have international staffs develop the courses. Then those staff go home after the introduction and deliver the training. Similarly, during the initial days of operations abroad, a company may use trainers from its headquarters to prepare courses about corporate culture.

But local trainers play a key role from the beginning of such efforts, and eventually handle all of the training. In many transnational organizations, some or all of the management training is conducted in a centralized location.

During cross-border mergers, not only do the companies have to integrate corporate cultures, but they also must find common ground among national and ethnic cultures, in which beliefs and business practices might vary widely.

Increased cooperation among governments on matters of regulation and trade also foster global opportunities. Although conflict seems to rule foreign policy, governments try to cooperate in their economic dealings to minimize barriers. For example, a process called *harmonization* may reconcile the current differences among the drug approval processes in various countries. Similarly, many countries have adopted food labeling similar or identical to what is required in the United States.

Such cooperation allows for free-flowing goods and services among countries. That, in turn, creates training opportunities. Some of these new avenues involve teaching employees about a country's trade regulations and policies, such as a regulation that requires product information be made available in all of the country's official languages. In other instances, organizations such as e-learning suppliers must tailor their products and services to the local market.


The competitive factor

Despite the tight U.S. job market, the labor market suffers from a shortage of skilled workers. In some fields, such as nursing, the shortage exists today. In other areas, experts predict that the economy will experience a severe shortage over the coming decade—similar to the one before the bust of the dot.com boom. Filling those shortages will generate several opportunities for trainers.

As enterprises expand, they must localize their products and prepare their workers.

For jobs that must be performed in the United States, many enterprises are importing skilled workers from other countries. For example, U.S. health-care organizations actively recruit nurses from South Africa. As a result, training and development specialists are and will be training people from other countries, as well as developing programs for achieving high performance.

More specifically, working with people from outside the United States creates additional human resource needs. For example, new immigrants need assistance adjusting to company life and a new culture. In the context of learning, many of these non-U.S. workers studied in substantially different school systems and have a different approach to learning. For example, some Asian cultures don't encourage students to speak up in class. Different cultural beliefs and values will affect the success of performance interventions.

Enterprises may also choose to contract with companies in other countries. You might be aware that a lot software development occurs in India or that China is seeking to increase its share of the market  "The Next China Revolution" (May T+D). But you may not know that much of the development work on large e-learning libraries occurs in India, where workers have strong IT skills as well as outstanding English language skills. In other words, those who design and develop learning programs—especially e-learning programs—are competing globally for work.

The HR commonality

Governments across the globe are enacting policies to promote the development of their human capital. For example, the European Union offers various programs and incentives to promote workplace learning. China recently signed a landmark agreement with four universities to support development efforts that include employee training and programs to enhance the skills of their training professionals.

Those government policies provide opportunities for training organizations. In the case of the European Union, opportunities exist to provide specialized corporate training. That usually happens at the course level: Organizations contract for training in specific areas. In the case of China, opportunity exists at the organizational level: The government signs agreements with specific institutions to provide training.

Even without formal agreements, many training firms are seeking cross-border alliances with trainers who have expertise in areas essential to the growth of a company's local economy. For example, experts in e-learning have been sought by training organizations in Singapore and India, where that industry is still growing.

Training has been affected by the struggling economy, but companies continue to invest in training. As the economy globalizes, many opportunities will come from outside the United States—as the result of company expansion, hiring workers from outside U.S. borders, and alliances to develop the human resources of another country.

Saul Carliner is an assistant professor of educational technology at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada; saul.carliner@education.concordia.ca.

Send submissions to **Global**, T+D, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043; global@astd.org.