Talent Beyond Borders

An organisational guide to delivering the promise of global talent management

The Talent Management Expert
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Foreword: a complex landscape

The world today is a complex place to do business.

Markets are volatile, unpredictable and increasingly reactive to the economic conditions around them. Even those that are stable are still challenging environments in which to operate. Organisations are scrambling to redefine their business model and structure their operations to do what they can to safeguard their future. Businesses everywhere are adjusting to suit the turbulent world all around them. Agility and innovation have become business bywords.

Globalisation remains an inescapable backdrop to the boardroom agenda and colours every Executive Committee’s decision making. As organisations and businesses seek to unlock new and emerging markets, adapt to the changing needs of existing markets and react to new competitor threats and regulations, the internationalisation of business is a relentless march that cannot be halted. But it can be embraced.

To survive and thrive organisations are increasingly working across borders and in new territories. While arguably there are very few truly “global” organisations, the rise of multinational corporations stems not just from traditional markets like Europe, Japan and the US, but increasingly from emerging economies such as India, Korea, Brazil and China. To take one example, Wall Street listed and Dublin, Ireland, headquartered management consulting firm Accenture estimated 35% of its workforce are currently working from India. Agility and innovation have become business by-words.

But despite the turbulence, many core factors remain. Factors that define an organisation’s ability to grow, to survive and to be successful. Primary of these is the talent an organisation is able to deploy.

Be under no misconception, the much-debated war for talent has never abated. People remain the competitive differentiator for almost all businesses, and skills shortages are for many the biggest hindrance to growth. Despite rising unemployment in some regions, many organisations are still unable to find enough people with the right skills and experience to achieve their strategic goals or business plan. According to long range forecasts from leading research organisation IBISWorld, the global HR and recruitment services industry will see a strong rebound of hiring. From 2012-16, the global HR and recruitment services industry will achieve an annual growth rate of 3.5% and hit $610.3bn in five years.

Furthermore, as the DDI Global Leadership Forecast 2011 uncovered, not only is there a shortfall of talented executive leaders, the success rate of these leaders in role remains a concern. Not only is the dynamic business world we read so much about demanding more of our business leaders, the skills they need to be successful are changing. The stark fact is that without leaders and people able to be successful in their jobs, organisations have no chance at all of achieving their goals.

Organisations understand this is a complex situation and that global talent management programmes are a challenge to design and implement, but talent management professionals also know that the potential benefits are huge. This document is intended to help talent professionals break through the barriers and make global talent management a reality.

Simon Mitchell, UK General Manager & European Marketing Director, DDI

Why take talent management global?

With so much complexity, why then should organisations invest the time and effort needed to integrate their talent management, other HR systems and people processes globally?

Are there significant benefits in joining up the talent strategy across the borders and geographies in which the business operates? In our view, certainly. But whilst creating transparency and agility of talent around the globe is a seductive proposition and should not be ignored, a global talent management strategy comes with a significant array of challenges. Getting global talent management right is the most effective and efficient way to manage people in a large organisation and at the same time will create a more responsive, proactive and unified organisational culture.

But whether an organisation should embark on a global talent management journey may not be the right question to ask in the first place. Assuming the organisation is indeed operating against a backdrop of increasing globalisation and trying to better equip itself to navigate the troubled waters of today and tomorrow, perhaps the key decision to make is whether to try and sidestep the undoubted complexity and continue to operate in a passing paradigm or to embrace the complexity, dynamism and benefits of the new challenge. For any ambitious company, we are not sure there is a choice.

A 2012 paper by McKinsey highlighted that as the economic spotlight shifts to developing markets, global companies need new ways to better manage their people strategies. It predicts that 400 midsize emerging market cities will generate nearly 40% of the global growth over the next 15 years. Yet many of these cities remain unfamiliar to the West.

Western organisations must become much better at adapting to meet the needs of these new and relatively unfamiliar territories. McKinsey finds that while executives recognise that the people in their workforce represent an invaluable asset, companies find that deploying and developing people in emerging markets is a major challenge. Barely half of the executives in global companies studied in the research thought they were effective at tailoring recruitment, retention, training and development processes for different geographies.

It may not always be an option to recruit managers locally, even if they are the best and brightest. Of course dynamic markets like India and China are offering increasing opportunities for growth and commerce, and as a result many organisations have entered into these countries. The competition for local talent with the common skills demanded by western-originated companies is fierce. Three decades of double-digit growth in China has led to a serious talent shortage. In order to gain some perspective on the scale of the challenge, it is estimated that there may be as few as two million (or 0.015% of the population) Chinese nationals with the relevant professional experience and bilingual language skills required by multinational companies: a vivid illustration of the disparity between the market opportunity and the available local talent pool. In addition often less apparent barriers are also present: according to a global executive search firm, the top 5% of local talent are paid at 30% to 50% premium compared to the next performance category, and the compensation of top local talent and expatriates is fast converging.
A global approach to talent management is the antidote to many of these challenges and will, in the end, yield better business performance. A joined-up strategy that unifies the key talent management systems and processes across every region an organisation operates in is not only more efficient, it also allows organisations to:

• Take better advantage of emerging markets and opportunities for growth
• Create a more agile, fast and responsive organisation
• Build a more flexible workforce with the skills necessary to meet changing business strategy
• Ensure there are enough people with the right skills, experience and motivation across the business to ensure succession and prevent potentially catastrophic skills gaps

For any organisation operating in more than one region, market or geography, the shift to a joined-up talent strategy that works above and beyond borders offers potentially huge benefits to the business. Delivering a global talent management strategy in a highly decentralised business will be different to doing so in a more integrated organisation; but evidence suggests that for both the benefits significantly outweigh the difficulties.

In many cases the true value of a joined-up, global talent management strategy and process is found when life runs less smoothly. Long term planning is increasingly difficult and when the unexpected happens - as it surely will - a global talent strategy will mean the organisation is able to respond more quickly and more nimbly.

When considering how to implement a global talent management strategy, many companies don’t plan for many of the issues that will inevitably present themselves – organisations think they can simply “dictate” global talent management, or that a “one size fits all” approach will work just fine. But it simply will not.

It’s analogous to the situation during a merger or acquisition. Companies fall in love with the business strategy side of the equation, but fail to pay enough attention to the people strategy. As a result the overall goal often fails or the expected benefits are realised much more slowly than had been expected.

### What is talent management on a global scale?

“The right quality and quantity of talent required to meet the demands of the business strategy.”

Although anyone in a talent or executive function in a multinational organisation will be familiar with the phrases and processes of the talent management discipline, where talent management begins and ends varies from organisation to organisation. Therefore, it’s probably helpful to start with an agreed definition. In DDI’s view, and for the purposes of this guide, talent management is defined as:

- The recruitment, development, promotion, and retention of people, planned and executed in line with the organisation’s current and future business goals.

Because the activity is aimed at building a depth of exceptional organisational talent, a well-developed process creates flexibility to meet rapidly changing operational conditions. A structured talent management process will systematically close the gap between the human capital an organisation currently has and the talent it needs for the future.

An effective talent management system underpins the building of a successful organisation specifically by:

• Connecting corporate strategy with the quantity and quality of leadership required to execute that strategy
• Defining what great talent looks like throughout the organisation
• Helping to embed organisational culture
• Putting the best talent in every job, irrespective of geographic location
• Developing critical skills at every level
• Identifying and differentially developing high potentials as part of a proactive global succession management process
• Managing the performance of all employees – at all levels – to drive bottom-line performance

The future orientation of the global talent process is a critical factor in its success.
Barriers to taking talent management across borders

Before we look at the specific ways in which an organisation can go about aligning its talent processes in the different parts of the world in which it operates, it is worth identifying some of the challenges that are likely to present themselves.

Many clients we work with start out on the global talent journey only to run into problems that seem insurmountable in the moment but which, with some planning, can be anticipated and successfully navigated.

These challenges often come as a rude awakening to organisations looking to enter new markets or regions for the first time, perhaps naively expecting to be able to replicate operations from one country in another. Some of the most common challenges include:

1. Cultural differences

We are all part of a global economy, but it should come as no surprise that social and cultural norms vary hugely from one place to another and incidentally within virtual teams. Many experienced business people are familiar with, and know how to work with, the basic cultural differences in different parts of the world. However culture runs far deeper than knowing when to offer a handshake or how to exchange business cards.

Organisations so often misjudge the true importance of culture when working across borders and make judgements that in consequence are fundamentally flawed.

This is one of the reasons why it has been posited that there are so few organisations that are truly global, in the sense that their internal culture is universal. Most organisations retain a structure and way of operating derived from the location of origin that makes it very difficult to internalise that there could be a better way. A company founded in the West, no matter how far its operations extend, will predominantly retain the habits, aims, purposes – even the philosophy – of a Western organisation.

Let’s take an example of leadership behaviours as related to culture. In some countries, stepping up and taking responsibility for problems and issues not immediately within a manager’s remit would be encouraged and seen as a sign of leadership strength. This kind of behaviour would be taken as evidence that the manager is ready to move up and take on greater responsibility. In other cultures however, this behaviour would be regarded much more negatively, and a sign that the manager in question has little trust or respect for the executives or more senior leadership. Clearly there are issues here to address both in fostering a way for groups of leaders to work together in harmony, but also for the global talent management programme.

How can one set of consistent values be driven through the organisation when there are huge differences in behaviours of its people, and when, for example, an EU or US multinational may want to see behaviour change in terms of coping with authority or speaking up. This is a question of desired leadership style and, although there will be different interpretations in different parts of the world, there must be a common language and aligned objectives. If commonality is widespread, people from different cultural backgrounds will form more effective teams and can more easily be benchmarked effectively, fairly, and without bias.

Global Talent Management in action

A business services organisation was running its annual global high potential retreat using a confrontational, debate-based process and wondering why Asian and Indian high potentials were not making the progress expected. It looked first at the nomination process, but only when it considered the Asian discomfort with challenging hierarchy did it understand that its high-potentials from that region were at a cultural disadvantage in this confrontational environment.

Also at play here are the different starting points for leaders themselves. The 2011 Global Leadership Forecast highlighted the very different picture of leadership across borders. When asked about the skills needed for success, Asian leaders placed the biggest emphasis on innovation as a skill needed in the coming years, while for their North American and Australian counterparts fostering creativity and innovation did not even make it into the top three skills needed in the near future. This underlines the different challenges (perceived or real) of leaders and managers operating around the world, and demonstrates that extending talent management to a new region requires gaining an understanding of the challenges of operational leadership in that market as well as the default way of operating.

2. Legal and economic requirements, plus the “P” word

Looking at the process without putting on a legal, economic and political lens will set the global talent management process up for failure.

The different laws governing each country and region have important implications for the talent management professional, beyond the obvious and immediate practicalities of the employment laws in a particular country. Operating across borders adds significant legal complexity and planning problems. Considering these ahead of time is one of the most important factors in a programme’s success.

There are both obvious and opaque elements in operation here. For example, local laws will govern how long expatriates can legally remain before a work permit is required, which impacts the movement and transfer of staff overseas. Expatriation is furthermore an expensive undertaking, with implications around an employee’s salary and worth in their home market compared to their destination. Can the Rio office afford to offer the same financial reward as the one in Dubai? Unless incompatible budgets can be overcome, the flow of talent around the entire organisation is likely to be stymied.

But there are other, more subtle factors. Laws governing intellectual property and data protection can vary enormously across different countries. If a business is setting up a new enterprise in a region where data gathered on employees during the performance management or selection phase cannot legally be removed from the country, the implications for a global talent management strategy are far-reaching. The corporate centre would essentially be blind to an entire part of the workforce. These issues have to be understood and worked within to allow a global approach to talent management to function smoothly.
Global Talent Management in action

A leading petrochemical organisation and longtime ODI client faces complex operational issues and employs a highly skilled global workforce to run its dynamic business. A key feature of the business model is the requirement to move oil platforms from one global location to another. On top of the considerable operational challenge this presents are the differing legal, economic, taxation and political circumstances from area to area. Decisions leaders make can have multimillion-dollar implications.

To help leaders prepare for the challenges they will face, the company gathered together stakeholders from around the world to create a development programme entitled “Finance Fundamentals.” The real-life simulations which are an integral part of the programme enable leaders to understand the complex world in which they work and try out decisions in a safe environment. The organisation employs local subject matter experts to facilitate the sessions and help illuminate the financial, legal, tax and cultural considerations of the organisational business model. The programme has been an overwhelming success and has been rolled out globally.

Other issues to be understood and overcome can include:

- Labour law in some markets that requires a higher ratio of national vs. expatriate hires
- Visa restrictions limiting the flow of talent from country to country
- Income tax regimes, compulsory social contributions and restrictions on personal financial planning
- Local cultural norms, which limit an individual’s ability to assume local leadership roles on the basis of gender and religious beliefs
- Expense associated with retracting an employment decision
- The level of influence unions and other work councils have
- Targets or quotas for gender and other workforce diversity

In some parts of the world the political and economic environment directly influences people trends. It’s hard to remember that just a few years ago with almost unlimited access to capital for expansion many companies stated that “the only restriction on our growth is the inability to find enough people”. How quickly that has changed into the era of austerity and the associated high unemployment and engagement challenges in many parts of the world.

And don’t think that Europe invented financial crises and austerity; the Asian financial crisis of the late 90s was swiftly followed by the currency crisis that crippled the economies of many South American countries for years. These factors are outside the control of the organisation, but they must be understood and the implications thought through. A global talent management professional has to be able to interpret local economic and political factors and identify the implications for the talent management programme.

3. The role of technology

Technology is a key driver and enabler of the processes and systems of talent management and has a critical role to play in all parts of a global talent management roll out.

However, as a key delivery tool and channel for gathering data, it also has a number of stumbling blocks. The primary among these being that improved access to data to help inform talent decisions can only be as useful as the data mining. Too many organisations have invested heavily in implementing enterprise-wide talent software and find themselves either with an absence of data to populate it or a concern about the veracity of the data they have available.

As a starting point we must consider that the type of technology in each region of the business is likely to vary significantly – and not just in terms of which version of the software is being used. In order to be successfully significantly – and not just in terms of which version of the software is being used. In order to be successfully implemented, talent management systems should try and first work within existing technology usage boundaries rather than impose new systems and standards of working. Regionally, the ability to use technology will be seen as more important than the sophistication of the system. As a client recently told us “the power of the system does not matter at all if the system isn’t usable. Usability is all important”.

It is perhaps helpful to think of the wider technological landscape as a “cultural” issue rather than one affected purely by sophistication of the technology itself. This can play out in many ways: smartphones may be the data access norm in one country while traditional desktop platforms more usual in another. One region may feel more comfortable with online web-based learning while another will want something more classroom based.

At the extreme end, some government authorities or other stakeholders will require full access to any IT systems in use and the implications for data protection in online personal assessments can be enormous. (The issues and implications that the virtualisation of data storage in the cloud brings to the data protection agenda are being hotly debated as this paper is being written.)

Cultural norms and media etiquette pose an additional challenge for multinational organisations. The social norms or even legal boundaries in how people communicate and the level of information sharing may be quite different from culture to culture. As an example, the challenges involved with gathering 360 degree data in cultures where the concept of upward feedback is uncomfortable (e.g. Russia, China, Japan) can be significant.

These are not issues that can be easily predicted in advance. Gaining an understanding of what works and is used in each part of the business is a key part of the process of creating a global talent strategy, and a practical step towards implementation. Taking the time to understand local conditions and preferences is a fundamental step before deciding on a system or process to roll out globally. Ensuring local users are a key stakeholder in the process and understanding local technical preconditions are also critical success factors. Adapt to fit local habits where possible, rather than imposing an extensive new system that is unlikely to be widely adopted simply because it is unfamiliar.

The good news is that there is a huge prize to be won. Technology can and will play a much bigger role in global talent management systems and can give organisations cross border access to individuals within the organisation who have the motivation, skills, experience and knowledge to take on a particular role. Aided with diagnostic data, it can illuminate whether an organisation globally and locally has the leaders it needs to deliver on its strategy and identify where the gaps are.

The rise of social media offers an invaluable tool to help share knowledge and experience across organisations in a natural and organic way. Never before has it been so easy for the office in the UK to learn from the site in Singapore - and in real time!

The promise of social media won’t be delivered without attention to structure, discipline and measurement, just as with other successful learning activities. Don’t mistake the existence of social media tools with the peer networking activity that it may help facilitate. The complex makeup of teams mean that some people are much more social media savvy than others. So expecting a learning journey that contains social media elements to have the same impact on people around the world is, at best, unrealistic.

4. Local market affordability

The cost to deliver certain elements of the talent strategy – whether that be a training programme or a resourcing solution – must be considered extremely carefully. Local markets and offices will often resist paying for something that may have sounded cost effective to the corporate head office but in a developing market is too costly to be viable. Mandating a price for tools and systems from the corporate centre demonstrates that other parts of the business had only a limited stake in the decision and this will further drive strategy and process disengagement which, of course, is completely at odds with what was intended.

Rationalising suppliers of resources like learning and development is a straightforward way to reduce cost and gain value for money, while ensuring consistent outputs, but the hallmark of a well thought-out global strategy is ensuring there is a solution that offers the same benefits and outcomes for every likely L&D budget within the business. Talent professionals need to be smart about the balance of quality and consistency. If they don’t get pricing right, the local office will always choose a cheaper, cheaper and more easily accessible replacement, and ignore the materials or initiatives set from the corporate head office, even if that happens “under the corporate radar”. Keep in mind that the prize on offer is far greater than any single local pricing issue.

When recruiting, promoting or relocating talent, consider the best person for the job alongside the legal implications of their appointment. This is especially true in succession situations. Even in an economy with flexible labour laws, any decision will have a significant organisational cost attached; in a region with less flexible labour laws this cost can be even greater. As well as in financial terms, cost will be measured in reputation, credibility and impact.

TOP TIP
Managing diverse and global teams

It can be a bewildering task for leaders and managers, especially for those early in their careers, to lead teams of significant diversity. Gender, culture, generation, experience, nationality – the diversity challenge has never been more acute. As organisations “go global”, so too does the necessity for leaders to manage teams of people with very different backgrounds, skills and experience to their own. People at different ages and stages of their career often have very different expectations and needs in the workplace. But arguably the differences within the same generation or other grouping are as great as those between them. How can a manager possibly be sensitive to all the differences in culture and background of his team of people, who may also be working across several different countries? The answer is pretty simple; they probably can’t.

But there is a solution. Increasingly teams need a common understanding, an agreed way of operating and a fundamental expectation of leadership. This isn’t about process and systems so much as a shared way of interacting with each other – and inevitably what the leader does, says and how they act is what the team will follow.

A leader sets the tone for the rest of the group and a positive tone can help the team function in the best possible way.

Many DDI clients around the world help create team and cultural cohesion using what we call the “Interaction Essentials”. These are a core set of skills managers and leaders need to master before they can build effective and functional working relationships. While these can be thought of as simple behaviours, they do not necessarily come naturally or easily. Time and time again research tells us that the skills that really matter in this domain are to do with:

- Maintaining self-esteem
- Creating empathy
- Encouraging involvement
- Building trust
- Encouraging ownership of objectives
- Being skilled in the personal needs of the relationship between the manager and team member

Listening, respecting, supporting and helping to maintain self-esteem are not “soft” skills. They are business-critical skills and research demonstrates that the most effective leaders use them more consistently (see Lessons for Leaders from the People Who Matter). These skills are indispensable, require consistent use and take practice to learn and deploy properly. They can be better described as the hard skills and, according to the research, employees tell us they would be up to 60% more productive when working with their best ever leaders – leaders who use these skills consistently. The good news is that they can be developed and work for everyone regardless of the boundaries of culture, gender and generation. Core skills as described by the Interaction Essentials are well accepted by many multinational companies driving global leadership best practice. For example, we have observed that emerging global Chinese companies are finding such a core set of skills applicable in engaging the general workforce. For more about these vital leadership skills, see our Lessons for Leaders from the People Who Matter or Interaction Essentials Guide.

Global Talent Management in action

Air Liquide, a world leader in gases for industry, health and the environment recently conducted extensive research into the unique needs of its leaders. It included those without hierarchical management responsibilities, yet for whom the skills of leading across a global matrix organisation - communicating, coaching, and influencing - are critical for inspiring a team to exceed its objectives. The research revealed that, counter intuitively, not being “the boss” may be the toughest leadership role of all.

In response, Air Liquide and DDI developed a training programme to meet the unique needs of these so called “Transversal Leaders” which enables them to:

- Understand what is critical in their role and why leading in the absence of formal reporting line responsibility can be especially challenging
- Build self-awareness and develop skills to create high value interpersonal relationships, irrespective of country culture
- Learn how to focus their time and effort on what is most important to their personal, team and organisation’s success
- Discover the impact they can have by communicating clear vision and values, and by building influential relationships and networks both within and outside the business
- Learn how to successfully match person and responsibility, while at the same time maximising involvement, productivity and motivation of team members
- Recognise the warning signs of conflict and take action to address the situation effectively or prevent the situation from escalating
Without doubt, most organisations operating internationally, especially multi-regional ones, will be undertaking some parts of their talent management process on this global scale. If they are not, the business is likely to feel fragmented, inefficient and be faced with a long list of seemingly insurmountable blocks to achieving its overall strategy.

But it’s important to understand where improvements can be made, and what good practice looks like. In the following pages, we set out what we believe organisations should be undertaking in order to deliver a fully realised global talent management strategy. The information will help benchmark where your organisation is on the continuum, and help identify where to look in order to achieve a greater level of sophistication. Later we’ll examine where to start.

Examining talent management practice through the lens of the five key components of DDI’s talent management growth engine – success profiles, leadership development, succession planning, assessment and selection and performance management – enables a more digestible view of the wider process.

**Key talent questions to ask:**

- Is the diversity of the talent pool representative of the global nature of the organisation’s business?
- What is the expatriate trend?
- Are the biggest barriers to global mobility internal or external?
- What percentage of internal applicants come from outside the country with the vacancy?
- What are the language requirements to be successful? How will people be equipped to be proficient in these?

A functioning global talent management strategy can help more easily deliver the business plan, and indeed the long term success of the business, whatever the context or specific company in question. It’s not a “nice to have” – it’s real strength in times of opportunity and in more challenging times.

**The global talent management continuum**

**A framework for talent management integration**

Many models exist that describe the talent management process, and this is DDI’s. It’s practical, business focused and aligned to growth. It integrates all elements of the talent management process and crucially focuses on business outcomes.

**Communication :: Accountability :: Skills :: Alignment :: Metrics**

Technology Enablers
Success Profiling

Understanding the mix of competencies, knowledge, skills and personal attributes required to successfully perform different roles within the organisation is a vital step towards fuelling a global talent pipeline.

What good looks like must be articulated and understood in Singapore, Norway and Mexico, the differences noted and the consistencies agreed. Of course, rather than leaving these languishing in some long-forgotten folder in the HR department’s server, the profile for role success must be well communicated and used by line managers throughout the business. Profiling what success in role looks like can also be a useful starting point, as the process fuels a significant amount of in-depth understanding of talent management requirements in the business. Many talent management professionals regard these descriptions as the blueprint of the talent plan. After all, how else can you know what to build if you don’t understand what is required?

“DDI’s Success Profiles™ is a range of comprehensive job analysis and competency management services that allow an organisation to quickly and accurately identify the competencies and motivations needed for successful job performance. The business focused and streamlined process for getting to the heart of a role profile quickly identifies the four characteristics that describe the ideal candidate – experience, knowledge, personal attributes and skills. 

Starting Out
Framework focusing on competencies
Some local-level success profiles, with a view of the local region or country

Mid-Stage
Globally agreed success profiles created for key roles (e.g. critical leadership, vital divisions and highly skilled roles)
Role profile language agreed and descriptions communicated to wider organisation
Local-level independence for less critical roles
“Manual”, non-automated search for people with matching profile or candidate initiated conversations

Mature Global Talent Management
Agreed definitions and success profiles for all key roles and divisions within the organisation, clearly linked to the overall business plan
All success profiles regularly reviewed to ensure they are up to date and relevant. New roles have success profiles created as standard
Agreed autonomy to decide local success profile for less critical roles
Regular auditing across the organisation to ensure compliance with role profile definitions
Active, data driven candidate search

Success Profiles* seen as a key resource for the information that drives talent decisions
**Assessment & Selection**

Effective assessment and selection must be informed by reliable and appropriate data. Recruiting and promoting people for most organisations has a long history of mixed success.

Managers are often too ready to trust their intuition, and can tend to favour those that are most similar in outlook and personal behaviours to themselves, rather than who the organisation actually needs. One consequence of this bias is the creation of an organisational monoculture. Naturally, there is a huge desire by managers to be involved in the selection or promotion decisions, but a reluctance to embrace the training and development needed on their part to objectively assess candidates. Vice versa, there are some who are happy to devolve responsibility to a third party almost entirely. It’s not the role of the global talent management strategy to dictate the exact method for selection or assessment, but it must ensure the decisions taken are consistent and that the methodologies and tools used are fit for purpose.

### Starting Out
- Minimum legal requirements for each country or region
- Collate talent biography data and performance track record
- Localised standard process for new hires or promotions
- Local search first

### Mid-Stage
- Cross organisational training of managers in interview practice, particularly HR managers
- Reactive cross border identification of possible candidates
- Selection decisions informed by agreed and relevant success profiles
- Agreed standards defined for new hires across the organisation
- Local on-boarding, induction and transition support templates
- Localised and reactive assessment process

### Mature Global Talent Management
- Suite of flexible tools created to deliver required hiring outcomes in every location
- Clear and timely data available to the business to show the current capability and skills within the organisation
- Consistent measurement and analysis of key metrics such as retention rates and time in role in order to validate the accuracy and value of the hiring and promotion process
- Uniform on-boarding programmes using data gathered from selection and promotion decisions
- The role of assessment clearly understood and the appropriate assessments employed

*All managers required to undergo training in selection and talent identification process as part of their role. Leaders trained and understand the tools available and the key role they play in building organisational talent*

**A brief word about assessing leaders**

There are three main reasons to assess leaders: 1) for potential 2) for readiness and 3) for informing development needs. When an individual is assessed for potential, the assessment will often look at a number of factors, including: learning agility, receptivity to feedback, and propensity to lead. When individuals display these factors, there is a better chance they will succeed as they move up the leadership ladder. Assessment of readiness, on the other hand, is made against the agreed success profile for a specific role (e.g. CFO, VP Marketing), where the assessment provides a prediction or signal that someone is capable of moving into a specific role and succeeding. Assessment for development is designed to identify areas of strength to be leveraged in role as well as development needs as part of an overall development programme.

There is tremendous value in each of these assessments, as they provide the objective data needed to understand current talent capability and gaps. This is why many highly effective organisations understand the place each particular assessment plays and uses the appropriate assessment for the particular scenario.

A properly designed assessment programme is substantially more effective than relying on being able to “spot” those who are ready for key jobs right now or those who may be developed to step into those jobs in the future.
Leadership Development

The most recent DDI Global Leadership Forecast found that there is universal dissatisfaction with the effectiveness and quality of leadership development.

Only around a third (35%) of HR professionals and leaders themselves (37%) across the globe reported that the quality of the leadership development provided to their organisation's leaders was high, despite an estimated global spend running into the tens of billions of dollars. Only one in three leaders felt they were obtaining value from the development they were receiving.

The opportunity to improve is enormous. In the Lessons for Leaders from the People Who Matter research, employees from around the world stated that they believed they would be 40-60% more productive if they were working for their “best ever”, rather than current, leader. With few organisations believing they have enough leadership talent to meet future demand, the potential rewards are worth more than perhaps any other organisational investment.

Starting Out

Country-specific leadership development programmes

“One-off” programmes reactive to short term need

Some awareness of the differences in the quality of leadership between different markets and geographies

Pockets of good leadership development practice

Ad hoc identification of high potentials

Mid-Stage

Clear understanding of how many leaders the organisation needs today, and the behaviours required to drive the business forward

“One size fits all” approach to leadership development, whereby every leadership cohort receives the same training irrespective of starting point

Some, but limited, global diversity of high potential development pool

Awareness of the shortfall in skills and capability to execute business plan

Mature Global Talent Management

Sustainable development programme at multiple levels according to leadership needs and informed by the level of centralisation vs decentralisation in the business

Leadership development viewed as a journey rather than episodic, focused events

Accelerated on-boarding programmes at all levels including robust transition programmes for leaders moving into new roles around the business

Clear sense of how many leaders will be required today and in the future, and mapped development courses to meet this demand

Leaders consistently use their manager as a key resource in their development. All learners and managers understand and use a 70/20/10 approach to leadership development

Consistent leadership culture and language, driven by one clear vision and set of values for the business
Succession Management

Where are the organisation’s best leaders - Thailand, UK, Canada? You can safely assume that they probably don’t reside in a single geography.

A key part in, and benefit of, the talent management strategy that stretches across the entire business is that it is focused on preparing the whole organisation for the future. Good succession practice will ensure the business has the sufficient quantity and quality of leaders to meet the business needs of the future. If the process is not strong the major source of talent will be from outside the organisation; a much more expensive and risky proposition. Given the significantly higher failure rates of external appointments, an organisation without strong succession on a global scale is unlikely to meet the challenges ahead.

The reality is that few organisations believe they have an effective system in place to supply future senior leaders (the Global Leadership Forecast stated that only 20% of leaders believe their organisation has a strong bench strength) and there is an opportunity to make a significant impact on business performance through global succession planning. The global talent strategy need not concern itself with every role in the business; a more realistic approach is to support local geographies with the tools and process for effective succession management but ensure global alignment for leaders above a certain level or for mission-critical roles.

Starting Out

Pockets of good practice
Succession mapping in local areas or business units
Reactive approach to a succession, often to deal with an unforeseen crisis
Understanding of likely future gaps in local country only

Mid-Stage

Separate succession process for senior leadership and business-critical roles
Small pool of possible candidates available for every key position that becomes available. Some candidates not at full readiness
Measurement of potential rather than simply performance
Inconsistent talent assessment
“For the good of the business” buy-in to talent movement across business units and geography

Mature Global Talent Management

Clear view of global talent capability and capacity
Effective global talent pools, able to supply potential leaders at the right stage in their development, to key parts of the business
Incentives to encourage succession and to compensate for loss of departmental productivity when losing top talent
Harmonised local succession programmes, that fit seamlessly into senior leadership/business-critical talent succession programmes
Pool of potential candidates available for every mission-critical role in the business
Accurate and common understanding of how “ready” a successor is and clear understanding of steps and accountabilities to close the readiness gap
Evidence of increased cross business unit and cross country moves (quantity) and evidence of the success of the individuals moved (quality)

Managers motivated to “let talent go” and move people in their team on, both for the greater good of the business and for long term health of their own department
Performance Management

In DDI’s Lessons for HR from the People that Matter research, managing performance was identified as the HR activity that delivers the most strategic value to the organisation.

Effective performance management supports many other parts of the talent management strategy and process. Effective evaluation of an individual’s performance and the ability of the manager to improve that person’s performance should lie into everything from reward and compensation packages to selection for promotion decisions. In a global context the sheer scale and the support required to obtain and use this data may seem daunting – especially when the organisation may be required to compare different types of data from different locations. Be in no doubt that the benefits of investment in the performance management process will far outweigh the cost. The challenge is that it is unrealistic to expect every part of the business to use the same strict process. In fact a suite of flexible tools may be required to achieve the desired outcome.

Starting Out

Effective local performance appraisal systems in operation but without joining information together at an organisational and regional level

Inconsistency in performance data and judgements

Inconsistent skills of leaders to improve performance and effectively employ the performance management system

Mid-Stage

Increasing understanding that potential, performance and readiness are different and need to be assessed and developed separately

Flexible performance management process in various regions but increasingly delivering consistent data

Some agreement and understanding of the skills managers need to deliver effective performance management discussions that improve performance

Mature Global Talent Management

Globally agreed definitions of both good performance and future potential, coupled with technology to help manage data

Set of tools to help managers gather employee information through the performance management process, which are then used by the business that helped co-create them

Managers globally audited and challenged to ensure they accurately assess employees

Managers able to not just gather, but access and understand fuller performance management data for their team and division

Clear, multi-dimensional view of talent strengths and development areas in each market and country, as well as at the organisational level

Ability to examine whether high performance ratings correlate with high performance against business goals

TOP TIP

Often overlooked is the fact that despite the provision of critical data for the global HR and other talent teams, the whole performance process falls directly and solely into the hands of the business and its line managers to make work. Many organisations are often disappointed in their performance management efforts and look first at the process. A better place to look for potential weaknesses is often in the skills of the managers having performance discussions with their subordinates. Without the core leadership skills to drive performance, whatever the system is, it is probably set up for failure.
The Executive Suite’s role in global talent management

Effective global talent management begins right at the top.

Most CEOs acknowledge this, good ones understand it, the best live and breathe it. In a DDI survey with the Economist Intelligence Unit, CEOs stated talent management was a significant part of their role – taking up as much as half of their time. No small investment considering the other priorities on their radar. So what is it that causes the smart Boardrooms and CEOs to regard talent management as a critical process and key part of the business? What do they know that drives them to put so much effort into this area?

Global talent management...

...means more of the right people with the right skills in the business. People as the one true, sustainable competitive advantage isn’t management speak, it’s real and never truer than right now. Complexity, challenge and adversity will increase and a company won’t survive simply because of its history, processes, brand, reputation, patents, market share or whatever. It’s people are either capable of charting a path to success or... well they are not. Not only will a joined up approach to talent management offer a more flexible workforce, with far easier movement internally, it will also provide a better pipeline of high quality leaders and managers able to step up to the next level. Proper talent management will help identify where the organisation has potential skills gaps today and in years to come.

...is essential to help the organisation better compete in a global economy. In its marketing, HSBC states that in the future, all businesses will be international – and it probably has a point. Today, the challenge and opportunity of globalisation is a fact of life for any large business. As a result, organisations simply have to be flexible enough to take advantage of new markets and new opportunities for growth. Recognising that replicating the way of operating in the country of origin won’t work (or won’t work as effectively) in different territories is an essential, if possibly counterintuitive, step to more effective integration. A fully joined up talent management approach will deliver local requirements and maximise organisation-wide opportunity. The organisational whole must be greater than the sum of the local offices or regional divisions, but not at their expense. While local operations may not need to operate as a single business entity, the organisation still needs to speak with a common voice on key talent issues. Parochialism, protectionism, narrow-mindedness, lack of data and opinion-based decisions are the poisons to a global talent management programme and must be stamped on by the senior leadership.

...means the business is more agile and can react faster. Bigger isn’t necessarily better. Size is no longer an indicator of business success, if indeed it ever was. Given the volatility of the world in which we operate, agility and speed are real competitive advantages. Whether it’s the sudden departure of a key senior figure, the opening up of a new market opportunity, a reaction to an outside event or a change in overall strategy, global talent management will increase the speed with which the business can respond.

Operating efficiently, it will mean there are more people ready to fill the shoes of the departing senior figure, that the right leaders are the able and willing to take advantage of a new opportunity, show where the organisation is missing a key set of skills and experience needed for the new strategy and identify those with the most potential throughout the organisation. Speed and agility can only be delivered through consistent talent management systems and processes that provide talent transparency, provide current data on availability and allow organisations to move people quickly.

Smart senior leadership teams understand the investment made in the talent programme yields a high dividend. But what if the Executive Committee is lukewarm and part of the implementation challenge is to get the senior team on-board in the first place?

The fact is that implementing a global talent management strategy becomes much more difficult – if not impossible – without the backing and support of the senior leadership. One senior talent professional we spoke with recently shared her frustration with her senior executive colleagues: “They just don’t get it. No matter what argument we give them or the data we provide, they just don’t see talent management as a priority.”

Correlating business results to talent management initiatives is of course the ultimate proof and destination. But it is just that; a destination that will never be reached. Circumstances will always change, requiring a shift in strategy and change in objectives. Providing the direct link to business results is not easy. Difficulty, however, does not provide an excuse for avoiding collecting data that correlates talent initiatives with business results. In fact, the more the alignment conversation continues, the better senior leaders will value the talent management process.

The HR profession has a reputation for not using language the rest of the organisation understands and success has to be framed in terms of business achievement, or this separation will remain and silos reinforced.

In a situation where executive team buy-in is not what is required to support the programme, the responsibility is on the HR and talent professional to create a strategy to increase the level of motivation. This will include taking steps to actively demonstrate to the executive team how a joined up talent management process can better support the most urgent business challenges. When, rather than if, successful, the talent management team may be one of the few functions to have a bird’s eye view of the whole organisation, and will be able to spot problems and opportunities in advance. Use this perspective to help colleagues in the Executive Committee look at the business in a new way and the stock of the talent function will escalate quickly.

Here’s a key test – if you were in a lift with the CEO and had just one question to demonstrate your business credibility and to gain valuable information to help drive the global talent management strategy, what would it be?
Global talent management: Myths, misconceptions and half-truths

Regardless of where organisations are on the continuum, our work with talent management professionals and senior leadership teams around the world to implement global and multi-regional talent strategies means we regularly come across a series of common misconceptions, myths and half-truths.

These are often the points where a well-intentioned nascent global talent management strategy can go awry. Employing the maxim "prevention is better than cure" will help deliver success more quickly and avoid unnecessary roadblocks:

“Ah, but we’re different.”

When it comes to developing rigorous people and talent processes, there is a temptation for every organisation, business unit or region to think "but we’re different from every other organisation". This is partly true; there is no single, off-the-shelf approach that will meet all the requirements of a particular business. Nevertheless there are some universal truths that remain, and organisations would do well to learn from the common assumptions and mistakes that can hold back even the best of global talent management intentions. It is impossible to enter the global talent management journey without an optimistic belief in a positive outcome. But there is little room for naivety. A healthy dose of realism in areas including scale, speed, the support required, visibility of results and local resistance from the outset will deliver the best chances of success.

“Global talent management will be easy.”

It won’t. A typical first step is to replicate what’s working well in one country in another region. This is often the most simple and straightforward approach, but can lead to a host of complex problems. It can ignore the legal, cultural demographic and technology issues we have already looked at. It is also reductive of the complexities of the business and the experience that exists outside the corporate centre. Just because everyone is on the same payroll, it doesn’t mean they are moving in the same direction. Different parts of the business will have different perceived priorities, and a different understanding of the business strategy. What’s more, the levels of enthusiasm by which different divisions of the business take up the global talent management gauntlet will vary enormously. The global talent management strategy needs to be flexible to encompass multiple perspectives and starting points. The challenge is not to mandate consistency, but to manage the differences within the overall global talent management framework. Success takes time, effort and commitment.

“Global talent management is too complicated to bother with.”

Absolutely not. Some organisations may be put off taking the global talent management road because it seems like an endless, complex and thankless task. The fact is that every journey starts somewhere and the goal is achievable for any organisation committed to the outcome. Chances are, if your organisation is operating across borders in different regions there will be some pull toward globalisation of the organisations talent anyway. Some, perhaps informal, activities will be already be happening and achieving good results. These areas of good practice at a local and regional level are the ones to build on. Knowing where to begin is often a challenge and starting with simpler initiatives is no bad thing. And there is another factor at play. As we look at business today, the march towards increasing globalisation is inevitable. Global businesses need to be supported by an increasingly global talent strategy.

"We can get this done quickly.”

No, you can’t. All the benefits that could possibly be achieved in a joined-up and truly global talent management strategy simply won’t happen overnight. It takes time, first to identify where the organisation is now, then to design and implement a sensible number of new innovations and talent initiatives and, finally, to see the fruits of this labour. You will likely require people to change what they do and how they work – never an easy ask. Typically this roll out will be measured in years, not months. So how long before organisations can measure real success? It might be heartening to know it won’t take a decade to see change; we typically look at a three to five year horizon to see significant strategic business benefit. However this does not mean that there will not be some quick wins and more immediate benefits that can be achieved early in the process. Even the act of taking a step back and considering the talent of the global business as a whole will likely reveal some easily fixed problems and gaps.

“Talent can be easily moved across the globe and into different markets.”

This can be true, but more commonly it’s a stumbling block both on an organisational and individual level. Despite a vocal willingness on the part of the individual or executive to relocate in principle, when it comes down to it the reality may be different. Personal factors always come into play, even if the individual has had a supportive training programme to help prepare them for the new role elsewhere. What if they have just moved house, or settled into a new relationship? This underlines the importance of having a pool of possible candidates for each new role or position; relying on one person will not be enough. Secondly, what makes an individual a success in one market will not necessarily translate easily to another; a change of context can make all the difference in the world. A robust global talent management strategy will identify those who are not just willing, but will also assess how well their skills, readiness and experience fit into a new role elsewhere.
“Strategy and culture live in isolation.”

They do not, and if there is conflict, culture will win every time. Even with the strongest business case and a well thought-out and practical talent programme designed to grow the business, the strategy won’t be realised if it runs contrary to the culture of the organisation. If the senior team at Google suddenly decided the organisation needed to be risk and innovation-averse, it just wouldn’t happen. If a century-old Chinese state-owned enterprise suddenly decided to have its leaders in their twenties lead a group of senior executives in restructuring the organisation, it likewise probably wouldn’t happen. The talent management team need to understand the organisation they are working within, and design initiatives in line with organisational culture – even if the organisation is on a journey towards a different type of cultural environment! In some cases, the reality is that successful implementation of a global talent management strategy might require a shift in organisational mind-set and culture.

“Content is more important than implementation.”

When things go wrong the tendency is to blame the process or the content. For example, great content designed for leadership development initiatives or assessment programmes should not be mistaken for a good overall strategy. There may be many great elements in the programme, but these are wasted if no one is able (or wants) to use them. Implementation and content go hand in hand, but for a successful programme the balance of effort should be on implementation rather than content. Good content and excellent tools should be a given.

“We have a process - that means we have a strategy.”

No, it doesn’t. Many valuable individual initiatives and processes are fine, but unless they tie into an overall strategy, which has defined and measured goals and helps the business achieve its aims, activities are likely to be sub-optimised or potentially even wasted. Processes are informed by the strategy, not vice-versa. Organisations should be asking themselves whether their processes and systems need to change when the business strategy does. For example, an organisation’s talent pool often stays the same in make-up, size and process, despite the succession needs of the business radically altering.

The role of talent in M&A

Talent management programmes should always align with the way organisations are experiencing growth – or how they expect this to happen in the future. Organisations that are experiencing rapid growth through M&A activity may find driving forward a coherent talent management programme difficult. The process of redefining and re-creating a new organisation has to come first, before joining up the differences between culture and geography.

The role of HR and talent professionals is to drive the new vision and set of values created by the Executive Committee through an integrated talent management strategy. And first on the list after this is on a journey towards a different type of cultural environment! In some cases, the reality is that successful implementation of a global talent management strategy might require a shift in organisational mind-set and culture.

“Distance is just kilometres, and we’re all virtual now anyway.”

If the company is structured around a single corporate centre, it is often further away from other parts of the organisation than can be measured in mere kilometres. What do we mean by this? In terms of information flow, communication, understanding of practical and cultural barriers and available support there is often an enormous gulf. Often those at the corporate centre assume that because something happens there, it should cascade out to every part of the business and be successful. This is naïve in the extreme. Even if the mandated programme does transpire – there will be vast variance in how it is received and implemented around the world. Organisational culture can vary widely within the same business, and senior executives can be guilty, to a surprisingly high degree, of corporate blindness to parts of the business. If the objective is for a successful programme, a much more effective approach is to develop initiatives and tools in conjunction with representatives from the parts of the organisation that will implement them. This maximises relevance, value, understanding and buy-in. Somewhat comforting, despite the wonders of modern communications technology, the only way to really understand a different part of the business located in a different country, together with all of the issues at play, is to spend a significant amount of time on the ground there. There is no substitute for the talent management professional charged with creating and implementing a global programme.

“So everything must start away from the HQ.”

Also not true. While involvement and participation of teams and divisions in other geographies and markets is absolutely crucial to a global talent management process - especially when it comes to developing some of the tools, processes and initiatives that will be used in the field - that does not mean that the centre is not the logical place to start. It has a key role in understanding the local talent situation, translating business strategy into talent strategy and defining the processes, tools and systems that the organisation will have access to. But the centre’s role has to be informed by the global locations. For example, not all the knowledge and expertise to put together consistent success profiles will emanate from the corporate HQ, but it is the natural place to bring people together from other parts of the business to explore what defines success in that location. In the end an integrated global talent management programme will balance consistency and difference around the world.

“Implementing a global programme.

There is no substitute for the talent management process or the content. For example, great content designed for leadership development initiatives or assessment programmes should not be mistaken for a good overall strategy. There may be many great elements in the programme, but these are wasted if no one is able (or wants) to use them. Implementation and content go hand in hand, but for a successful programme the balance of effort should be on implementation rather than content. Good content and excellent tools should be a given.
First steps to going global:
Where to begin?

Now that we have tackled some of the areas where global talent management frequently stumbles, where should an organisation begin in the global talent management journey?

More accurately, this section should really be thought of as how to identify where to begin with your organisation. Every business is different, so adopting a global talent management strategy model from some other organisation is unlikely to yield the best results.

Like eating an elephant or walking a thousand miles it’s best to not be put off by the whole and instead start with small steps and bites. Whether it is recruitment, development or performance management – here are some steps to help identify the logical place within the organisation to start building a fully-fledged global talent management strategy.

Pain points will highlight the immediate business need.

Business need, of course, has to be a rationale for embarking on a global talent management programme. A logical place to start is often by identifying the areas currently causing the business most consternation. What’s causing difficulties now, or what is likely to be in the next few years? Is innovation not happening fast enough? Does the business need to hire an additional 2000 people in its sales team to fuel growth? Is there a pull to consolidation? Is risk a major worry? Is your Board asking uncomfortable questions about the health of your senior succession strategy? The necessary input can come from many places: frustrations may be highlighted at Executive Committee level or practical implementation and operational barriers reported further down the chain. If there are no immediate or obvious people issues preventing the execution of overall strategy, will help find the areas of most immediate need.

Decide what can be run from the centre, and what responsibility should be devolved to local, market or divisional offices.

Although the level of central control will be different for different organisations, as we have discussed, total central control is not an option (or rather given the complex world in which organisations operate, more and more an illusion). It won’t work; it won’t be efficient and it won’t be anywhere near as effective as a mix of initiatives and programmes that can be run locally and harmonised with critical, mandated parts of the talent management strategy that run centrally. Good global talent management is as much about managing the differences, rather than the elements that are the same – which can feel counterintuitive. The various processes involved in the talent strategy will need to be flexible enough to handle variations in culture, technology and attitudes – but the outcomes need to be the same. An early activity will be to identify the areas and budgets that need to be controlled from the centre for the benefit of the overall global business strategy, and which elements the talent function is happy to sanction to regional and local control. This will provide clearly outlined areas of responsibility.

Create multi-regional implementation teams.

A core, multi-region virtual implementation team has a number of benefits to delivering various elements of the global talent management programme. Not only is it important to identify the challenges at local, regional and organisational levels, but creating understanding and buy-in right from the start offers the best chance that the initiative is going to stick. These teams should ideally report directly into the senior HR or talent team leader.

Identify the organisational talent supply and demand situation.

One of the fundamental parts of any talent management system is an understanding of how many people are needed in the organisation – both today and in the future – what skills they need to have and where they will need to be within the overall workforce. This is a vital part of creating a joined up talent management process, and feeds critical areas such as recruitment, selection, development, performance management and succession.

Build success profiles for key roles.

In any organisation, there will be a finite number of roles that are more critical to the success of the endeavour. Usually these are senior leaders or highly skilled experts core to the delivery of the business’s products or services. It will be different for every business, but identifying the critical roles and focusing on the competencies and other important requirements for these is a sound place to look at early in creating a strategy. This then leads to other valuable information – such as what development and experience do we need to give our people to get them to this standard? What do we need to assess for when selecting? This information may change the way roles are structured around the business.

Global Talent Management
in action

A global organisation marketing household name products in every corner of the world embarked on implementation of a new global manufacturing process that included new practices, protocols and structure.

From the outset, talent management was recognised as an integral factor in the overall programme’s success and global competency models for production team members, professional and people leader job families were introduced. The design process included consistent job profiling, assessment tools and rigorous selection scoring methodology which would be used in multiple new country operations.

Upon roll-out the team saw marked variance in the actual candidate competency profiles from country to country. Further investigation indicated that the differences were due largely to local cultural priorities and practices.

In their desire for a skilled workforce around the world that matched the global competency model the organisation had to decide which approach to take: a) source additional candidates who could meet the global scoring criteria (which would require more time and resources) or b) flex the process in order to meet the unique workforce requirements in each country and close the global consistency gap with specific development plans. The company elected the latter but recognised time pressure caused them to implement a programme that given sufficient time could have been more effective. In hindsight the project roll-out problems could have been anticipated and the desired outcome better realised.
Rolling out global talent initiatives:
A global implementation model

Having identified where to start building a strategy, exploring how specific new global talent initiatives are rolled out across the organisation will improve the chance of acceptance and usage – AKA success. A failed initiative will damage the overall ability of the global talent management strategy, so getting the foundations in place despite the time and effort involved, is important.

1. Identify Landscape
- Clarify business need
- Identify desired outcomes
- Gain stakeholder support & involvement

2. Design & Deployment
- Identify, design & adjust the solution
- Plan
- Implement

3. Measure Outcomes
- Monitor & Measure
- Improve

To recap:

1. The business landscape
Identify a clear business case.
This is vital, whether it be reacting to a shortfall of leaders, improving the quality of retention or improving succession planning. From here, a solution can be devised to meet local needs with the efficiencies and benefits of a global programme.

Identify the desired outcome.
It sounds deceptively simple, but we know from experience that the outcomes of many global or local talent programmes remain untracked. Create a vision of what success and improvement in this area will look like, including ROI. Despite the difficulty of measurement, avoiding it is not an option.

2. Design and deployment
Find good practice that is already happening.
If it meets the needs of the overall strategy and will adapt easily to deliver the required outcomes, picking up good practices happening in other locations and using them centrally is a good foundation to build on. But it is important not to disengage these areas by forcing them to revisit work they have already done to establish this process or practice. Duplication will cause frustration and disillusionment – give credit where it is due. Involving people from around the organisation must happen to secure their buy-in; it’s hard enough asking people to act differently, so don’t make it any harder than it already is.

Define consistent standards, while allowing flexibility.
Even if the delivery and specifics of the talent management processes vary across different areas of the business, the outcomes should remain the same. Thus an important part of the process of deciding what to mandate centrally and what activity to allow locally is defining what the intended outcomes and results are.

Make sure the local and regional parts of the business have what they need.
There will inevitably be a desire by the remote parts of the business to demonstrate autonomy and convincing them of the need to change systems, tools or processes may be a challenge, especially if it comes as a dictum. If local and regional sites are not getting what they need to operate successfully, the global talent management strategy has by definition failed. Look at what’s needed at this level, and then work backwards across the business to find the duplications and crossovers and design sensible products that meet these needs as well as those of the corporate centre.

Ensure training and development programmes are flexible enough to adapt to the area using them.
The 2011 DDI Global Leadership Forecast found organisations in North America use web-based learning and virtual classrooms more, while using fewer external coaches compared to other regions. The channel is less important than the outcome – and the impact should, of course, be measured and tracked.
Choose the right speed.
Local initiatives will be much faster to implement than ones across the whole organisation. Plan this into the timeline and prioritise what needs to happen first.

Secure a budget and develop a solution.
Starting with the outcomes expected, create a plan with key milestones, build in stakeholder engagement, design an on-going management framework and implement a formal communication process. Crucially, look to ensure this project dovetails with, or is at least conscious of, other major organisational programmes and initiatives outside of HR, or it may quickly become obsolete and/or too abstract for concrete business needs.

Obtain the clarity and perspective needed through better data.
Technology has become more than just an enabler of good talent management. One of technology’s principal benefits is that it remains the best facilitator to gather useful data from across the organisation to help inform decisions about talent. A global talent management strategy needs data from across the entire organisation so that it can provide insight into all the major local and regional talent processes. The right mix of technology and process will bring this complex information together, and offer a valuable global perspective on the organisation.

3. Measure outcomes
Use meaningful metrics. Typically, these can fall into four core areas;

- **Focus**: Is the talent management initiative meeting the most critical business need?
- **Process**: Is the solution being implemented well? Typical diagnostic data can come from usage rates, user feedback and regular feedback from the implementation team.
- **Outcomes**: Is the solution delivering the intended benefit to the business? There is no need to be afraid of broad statements like “better performance” or “improved engagement” as starting points, but what are the numbers behind these statements that make them meaningful and allow proper objectives to be set? And are they in the kind of language the rest of the business (outside the HR department) can understand?
- **Impact**: The business needs to see the overall benefit of the initiative. Time needs to be invested demonstrating how the organisation has benefitted from the changes brought about by the project.

Make improvements.
Actively consider where adjustments can be made on a global, regional or local scale. The process needs to be flexible; so too must the different parts of the talent management strategy.

Don’t swamp the organisation with a flood of new initiatives and programmes. Keep it simple and focused, building on the systems the organisation is already familiar with and the level of understanding managers and leaders have. Wholesale change won’t happen overnight. Don’t make any assumptions about the understanding of talent management in the wider business, instead build a three year plan.

### TOP TIP

| Don’t swamp the organisation with a flood of new initiatives and programmes. Keep it simple and focused, building on the systems the organisation is already familiar with and the level of understanding managers and leaders have. Wholesale change won’t happen overnight. Don’t make any assumptions about the understanding of talent management in the wider business, instead build a three year plan. |

Developing successful global leaders
Good leaders that operate across borders need to be able to adapt to different surroundings, understand what it takes to engage and motivate different people in different countries and be comfortable tackling unpredictable challenges. Global leaders don’t appear spontaneously; the organisation has a duty to help create them.

Given the increase in leaders operating internationally, it makes sense to invest in dedicated development. However, 62% of the multinational executives surveyed in the Global Leadership Forecast described their preparation for their global roles as only fair or poor.

Designing development programmes for global executives is not always straightforward but is an essential starting point in ensuring global competencies are built into development. Effective training will tie directly into organisational business strategies and the skills that leaders need to be able to deploy. According to global executives themselves, the top three “global” requirements are:

1. The ability to influence people from other cultures
2. Resourcefulness, to get things done in unfamiliar situations
3. Cultural sensitivity

Alongside these abilities global leaders also need the practical knowledge of government and political issues in the markets and local areas to help them navigate the business landscape and be credible. This alone is a significant learning process and intelligence gathering exercise. How best to supply them with the knowledge they need? Again, this is where a global talent management strategy can help. Expatriate assignments, external networking and internal mentoring are the best ways to prepare global executives for their role, and these elements will be more powerful, better thought-through and effective as part of a global talent programme. Giving executives a real sense of the wider world they work in as part of a cross-border organisation helps improve their understanding and ability to perform within it. A diverse range of development activities, integrated with existing programmes such as high potential or executive talent pools, will cement the skills and experience needed for executives to operate in new environments.

A final note; the most senior leaders in the business need to show active support and sponsorship of global leader development. If they do not, emerging executives are likely to feel they are drifting ‘away’ from the organisation, and may think they are being exiled overseas!

One organisation we spoke to had an illuminating example of the changing landscape for its leaders. Already a large operator, it had effectively doubled in size from its home country in Europe, mainly through acquisitions, resulting in several hundred thousand employees across the globe today. Five years ago, before the majority of this significant growth, two-thirds of its employees were based in its home country. Today, that same number is based overseas. It was vital for that business to invest in building a common understanding of what leadership looks like in the new organisation; especially through the values and behaviours that are rewarded and promoted.
Some closing thoughts

HR and talent departments exist to help businesses achieve their strategic aims, and are most successful when they are able to clearly and overtly articulate how they help facilitate their organisation’s success. This is a noble and laudable cause.

As challenging as the environment is for businesses today, so it is for HR and talent functions. As we have discussed, volatility, rapid change and uncertainty are not going away anytime soon. But one thing we can predict with a fair degree of certainty is the continuing march towards increasing globalisation. The talent function can do nothing to stop this, so the choices are few:

1. Continue to operate in an old paradigm and become irrelevant
2. Be pulled along by momentum and hope progress is enough for the organisation to succeed
3. Embrace the challenge and see global talent management as the driver to propel the talent profession to the next stage in its evolution

Do not think that the HR and talent functions are alone in facing these choices: finance teams have had to embrace global accounting systems; borderless information systems like the web have made local marketing redundant; lower cost manufacturing has changed the face of operations and logistics; and the need for increasing innovation has led to globally dispersed R&D.

DDI sees the prize of global talent management as a huge one for organisations and the journey for talent professionals this offers is an exciting, challenging, enlightening, and ultimately rewarding one. We are all incredibly fortunate to be in this profession in such a dynamic time. Today, our organisations need us more than ever and the challenge is ours to take up.

Simon Mitchell, UK General Manager & European Marketing Director, DDI

Author biographies

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Simon Mitchell is the General Manager UK & European Marketing Director. Simon is responsible for developing and executing DDI’s European marketing strategy through the UK, France, Germany, Poland and Russian operations. Simon is the co-author of Is the Sales Force Delivering Business Value: 2007/2008 Global Sales Perceptions Report, Leaders in Transition: Stepping Up, Not off, Lessons for Leaders from the People Who Matter and Surviving and Thriving in Today’s Economic Environment.

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Further reading
ABOUT DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS INTERNATIONAL:

For over 40 years, DDI has helped the most successful companies around the world close the gap between where their businesses need to go and the talent required to take them there.

Our areas of expertise span every level, from individual contributors to the executive suite:

- Success Profile Management
- Selection & Assessment
- Leadership and Workforce Development
- Succession Management
- Performance Management

DDI’s comprehensive, yet practical approach to talent management starts by ensuring a close connection of our solutions to your business strategies, and ends only when we produce the results you require.

You’ll find that DDI is an essential partner wherever you are on your journey to building extraordinary talent.

Take a closer look at www.ddiworld.com/talentmanagement