

International Qualification

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Intercultural qualification has many aspects. To introduce only a few of them, JobUniverse today starts with a few examples of the real world. At the end of the article you can find out, what you can expect from our series.



In the age of globalisation, companies have to consider a variety of questions. Our new series will help companies as well as employees to find the right answers.

Frankfurt/Main, 9.00 a.m.: Susanne Gerland, 44, project manager and head of a German-American team of a software company employing 650 people. She is on the brink of a breakdown. After enthusiastically launching the start of a joint software project five months ago, the new software version both in English and German has almost failed. Beforehand the experienced project manager had, however, co-ordinated all important steps with her superiors and co-workers. But conflicts already arose during early planning. She had to face complaints of American colleagues who rejected endless German "theorizing" meetings. They seemed to be narrow, self-centered, perfectionist, showing an inflexible work method, lacking clearly outlined sectional objectives. In later testing phases, complaints of German colleagues accumulated from day to day. They accused Americans of superficial and expensive "trial and error" procedures with predictable results. The Americans seemed to reach decisions rather strictly. They did not consider German doubts and strongly objected to their so-called reasonable advice. Result: Within five months team atmosphere had totally been destroyed. Susanne Gerland slowly understood that early enthusiasm had blurred clashing German and American work processes.

Hamburg, 2.00 p.m.: Klaus Behrend, 43, owns a small, exclusive interior design company. In the morning, he had been assigned sole German distribution rights for four model series of an Italian furniture firm, under fair conditions. A series of frustrating experiences and months spent in Italy, costing him nerves and money for lawyers, translators and interpreters, had presided the transaction. Four weeks ago, necessary negotiations seemed take him nowhere. A customer who consults German enterprises in commerce with Italian

companies gave him the crucial clue. He was to invite the Italian directors and their families to spend a weekend in Hamburg. He booked a hotel near the Alster and arranged a harbor cruise, dinners at fine fish restaurants, shopping tours, visits to the Reeperbahn and a musical. Additionally he invited them to dinner at his home where they enjoyed exquisite red wine and grappa. They used their little English to engage in interesting conversations on soccer, car races, travel and haut couture. Besides, he had to promise to bring his family to their holiday home at the Riviera next summer. The following Monday was sufficient for a translator to get all contracts ready for signing.

Cologne, 9.00 p.m.: Wolfgang Klein, 55, human resources director of a chemical enterprise, is not able to make up his mind. He supports the board of executives' decision to invest several million Euro in the Asian market over the next few years and to increase the number of joint ventures in China from two to at least six. But at the same time he knows that the company is in no way prepared for the necessary number of personnel. Who should take care of the local Asian affairs? How can he prevent former human resources misdealings which cost the company millions? Which managers or future highlevel personnel is fit for this difficult task? Which must be the priorities for nomination? How must they prepare for delegation? How can he ensure appropriate care and support for them in Asia?

Working Globally Must Be a Joint Interest

The three examples described above, together with many others, illustrate which questions have to be considered by facing globalisation. It is no longer just the listed 500 biggest enterprises, already known to be global players, which analyse internationally encountered experience and refine related strategies. A growing number of smaller companies also start to feel the pressure of internationally expanding competition. They have to initiate business activities in foreign countries and their demand for support in all aspects of globalisation rises. Today, there are many institutes, varying in size, which offer a specific range of seminars and activities to help enterprises prepare staff for international operations. A few years back, companies could only rely on a small number of institutes which focused on intercultural qualification.

Aspects of Intercultural Qualification

The authors wish to stress the following issues:

- Strategic focus on new markets
- Staff delegation to foreign countries
- Criteria in staff selecting for international operations
- Preparation for working abroad
- Often neglected: Reintegration
- Going global within your own country
- Global work and support: Virtual teams
- Intercultural qualification and coaching - not just a privilege of business giants

Strategic Focus On New Markets

Source: Jobuniverse.com , Hans-Jörg Keller, Michael Thiel, Klaus-D. Wittkuhn

Europeans or Americans who want to do business in Japan have to deal with totally different customs and traditions. This is not always easy. An intercultural training or a language training is often not enough before starting a new job. Sometimes it makes sense to work closely together with a native person who knows the culture.



It might take years for somebody who is not from Japan to be able to deal with the business culture.

Those who work on strategies to venture into new markets, have the chance to contact foreign Chambers of Commerce and Industry, commercial centers and associations. Via internet they can research first information on the country of their choice. If there is a lack of data, statistics are not reliable or political influence is required, consulting companies, situated in the considered country, become important. They will work out actual market surveys and provide significant connections as well as information on legal procedures. They also help with realistic business plans and assist in precise profiles of requirements in qualification and personality of experts and managers that will come and work abroad.

It Might Take Years for Germans to Work Effectively in Japan

Take for example a medium-sized enterprise, based in western Germany, which specialises in machine manufacturing. It intended to expand its sales to the Japanese market. Its management knew that strategic success solely depended on the sales personnel delegated to Japan. But who was fit to supervise the extraordinary task? They could surely have recruited Mr. A., an experienced German sales manager. He already had done a good job in organising sales in the new German federal states. And he was known to be a loyal employee who understood the company's global strategy and was able to efficiently feed his interests to the headquarters.

But he was not experienced in Japanese business culture nor in the local market. It might take him years to work as effectively there than he did at home. And calculating the costs the enterprise would have to spend on him and his five-member family in Tokyo, it was clear that they would need twice as much money as a Japanese manager. Besides, many western subsidiaries had previously experienced that they were only accepted in Japan when these were on appear-ance run by Japanese managers.

Not Really an Alternative: A Japanese Manager in Germany

As an alternative to Mr. A. the company thought of employing an experienced Japanese manager. Mr. J. was recommended by a subcontractor. He had so far been working for a renowned enterprise in the same field for some time but, being 50 years of age, had had to leave in connection to staff reductions. He spoke Japanese, was qualified and experienced, knew all the rules and would, highly motivated, tackle the new challenge.

Of course the management thought about problems related to his employment. How would his loyalties be towards a western enterprise? Would he accept orders from German headquarters? Would he turn the branch into an independent Japanese "island" with its own interests? Who would check on figures and balances? There were also warning comments of German managers with knowledge of the Japanese market. They said that many Japanese companies trained their staff to function rather as bureaucratic officials than risktaking entrepreneurs. Would Mr. J. have the necessary qualities to organise the sales competently? It was known that the generation of Japanese managers under the age of 40 were highly qualified in terms of know-how but lacked guidance experience, due to strict hierarchies of age in Japanese enterprises. Would a joint German and Japanese sales management be the solution? How would responsibilities be split reasonably in order to make this sensitive collaboration work?

The Solution: A German and a Japanese Manager

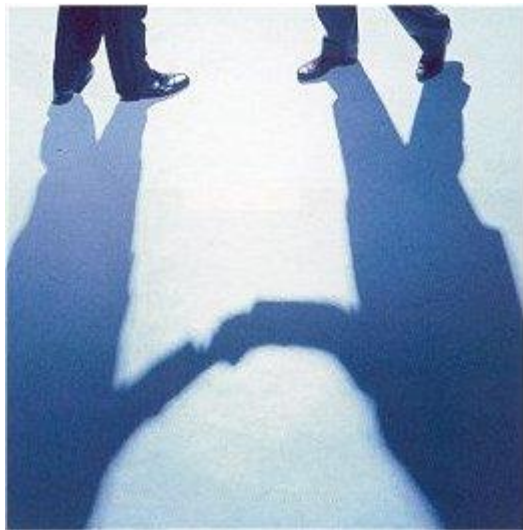
The dilemma was finally solved by a renowned consultation agency in Tokyo. Together with German management, it outlined precise profiles of positions and candidates. In the end, they settled on two 45-year-old managers, German and Japanese, to head the sales staff. Mr. B.'s and Mr. Y.'s responsibilities were distinctly split. Japanese Mr. Y. functioned publicly and in terms of staff as director of sales. German Mr. B. was responsible for dealing with German headquarters and also took over finances. The consulting agency assisted in setting up initial sales and marketing structures, offered longterm practical advice and acted as mediator in critical situations. Today, German headquarters are satisfied with the Japanese branch and its business results. Addresses of competent consulting companies and references are e. g. distributed by international Chambers of Commerce located in Japan.

Staff Delegation To Foreign Countries

Hans-Jörg Keller, Michael Thiel, Klaus-D. Wittkuhn

Current surveys on successful or failed endeavors illustrate how important preliminary systematic coordination is for delegating staff to foreign countries. Enterprises still focus on immediate and short-term demands of their international subsidiaries or joint ventures.

Yesterday, a sales manager was needed in China, today they have to send an engineer for production in Slovenia, and tomorrow a financing director must go to Brazil. In most cases, chosen expatriates do only have little time to attend evening classes to acquire necessary language skills. Not even one out of five expatriates is involved in intercultural training to get a first taste of the new country and culture. Most enterprises still hold the opinion that a good man will always make his way, no matter where he is. And to go there head over heels and unbiased will only speed his integration.



Not even one out of five expatriates is involved in intercultural training to get a first taste of the new country and culture.

Empirical analysis shows, however, that only a combination of corporate strategy, choice of suited staff, efficient preparation for and support during their stay abroad, and not to forget a well-planned reintegration, is a decisive factor of a successfully delegating expatriates. External consultants and trainers can assist in all previous aspects and offer specific international know-how.

Success Analysis of Stewart Black, Hal Gregersen, Mark Mendenhall and Linda Stroh, listed in their study "Globalizing People Through International Assignments"

In 1999, a first major empirical analysis was published in the USA which dealt with success and failure in relation to staff distribution abroad. A team of authors around Stewart Black found out, why the delegation of expatriates by global players such as General Electric, Ford, General Motors, Motorola, Monsanto, Colgate-Palmolive and other US companies were more successful than that of competing enterprises. These suffered a high rate of failures (10-20 %), a declining performance of expatriates (approx. 30 % less than expected) and faced a high notice rate (approx. 25% during the first 24 months after return).

From the enterprises quoted above, the authors distilled three distinct factor of success which are closely linked with each other:

1. Expatriates as part of a global strategy. The strategy systematically aims at constantly acquiring new perspectives and establishing a pool of international experienced high-level personnel. Companies which only rewarded staff with interesting jobs abroad or only reacted to international demands proved to be less successful.

2. The careful choice of staff. In selection, the company must not only focus on know-how of prospective expatriates but must recognise intercultural competence as well.

3. The successful reintegration of expatriates. Successful enterprises understand the difficulties of returning staff and help them with reintegration. They have to offer new career perspectives and to value the internationally acquired skills.

Choice of Personnel for International Operations

Hans-Jörg Keller, Michael Thiel, Klaus-D. Wittkuhn

Many well-established companies, relying on selling good-quality products, only recruit expatriates in terms of qualification. For some time they did not realise where they went wrong. They noted that aspects such as cultural flexibility, nation-specific communicative skills, cosmopolite ideas, cultural sensibility and a high frustration tolerance were as significant as know-how. Therefore, some consulting institutes cooperated with human resources departments in order to create selective criteria.

Criteria for a successful endeavor must be formulated. These include corporate issues such as aims and tasks for expatriates. But personal aspects like the comfort of expatriates and their families must also be considered. A right degree of integration into social structures in the new country must be defined. An employee working in marketing must be more deeply involved culturally than an engineer who constructs a new plant with an international team.



Employers have to formulate criteria to select successful expatriates.

These criteria help to draft detailed candidate profiles which encompass both qualification, personal assets and intercultural competence. Will a person be able to successfully make use of his know-how abroad? Is his personality compatible with the foreign culture? Will his partner or family value the chance of a stay abroad or will they suffer from leaving jobs, school and friends behind?

Candidates Should Be Tested

Human resources staff can e. g. distill from biographical questionnaires or structured interviews relevant information. They give hints about personality, views and values, about the way a candidate perceives himself and how he acts. These characteristics must be compared to the profile.

If there are some interesting candidates, they should be tested by experts in intercultural assessment centers for two to three days in order to learn about their individual communicative, social and intercultural skills. Prices of assessments seem, on first impression, to be high. But costs might be lower compared to possible expenses due to an ill-selected expatriate who fails abroad.

Preparing For Working Abroad

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People who are working abroad for a while need to be prepared very well. Companies have a variety of possibilities for this preparation. JobUniverse.com is introducing a few of them.



An informative event offers practical advice for people who will work abroad.

Visiting Week. Most bigger enterprises pay for a one-week visit abroad for future expatriates and their partners. The expat and his partner, eventually the whole family, can get first impressions of living in another country. This will help to decide whether to accept or decline the expat position.

Language Training. At least 2-3 months prior to departure, expatriates start preparing for future tasks. If they and their families have to learn a new language, specialised language training is best to acquire a basic knowledge of every-day and business communication. High-quality language training must prepare for active communication and highlight commonplace verbal situations. Substantial handling of the language will ensure a speedy and uncomplicated integration into the new culture.

Informative Events. Those who do not have the chance to visit the country prior to moving should attend informative seminars which focus on life and culture in the concerned foreign country. Offering practical advice, they illustrate topics such as housing, school systems, sporting and cultural facilities, official procedures, health care, services, political system, cultural values and regulations and other information. Next to films, videos, short talks and role plays, former expatriates report on their experience.

Intercultural Training. Because informative seminars merely highlight facts and outline cultural standards, norms and values, thorough intercultural training is preferred by a lot of enterprises. Favourite types are so-called Culture Awareness training and

Cross-Culture Training. A Culture-Awareness training centers on increasing awareness of one's own cultural identity, roots of prejudice and general difficulties in relating to other cultures. Participants experience exotic examples, group-dynamic sensitive methods and mixed cultural role plays. Some companies use this intercultural basic training and, with view to their corporate interests, further add discussions with internationally experienced staff.

Contrast-Culture-Training. Most enterprises like to submit expatriates to Contrast-Culture training for preparation. This type of training stresses distinct differences of German culture in contrast to foreign cultures. All characteristics are analysed and examined in terms of socio-cultural background. Based on the assumption that learning only succeeds when pragmatic, cognitive and emotional levels are simultaneously stimulated, participants are encouraged to get new cultural impulses through days filled with role plays, case studies, questionnaires, videos, lectures and instructive talks. Next to a German trainer, there will usually be a native co-trainer present, depending on the expats' destination.

Intercultural Management Training. High-level personnel often wants to prepare for their future assignments in detail, apart from doing a basic intercultural training. Some training institutes offer special training which includes presentations, management structures, team building, conflict management and negotiations. Training will be arranged according to individual professional demands. Participants engage in case studies,

simulations and role plays in order to realise their own perspective and cultural determination in contrast to the foreign one.

They will also try to identify possible mistakes. Training will be highly effective if it refers to contrasting cultures, national and international corporate identities and individual personalities. Therefore this training must be prepared well, if human resources experts, former expatriates and interculturally competent German and foreign coaches are to be part of the program.

Support and Care Abroad. A lot of expatriates emphasise the importance of a well-coordinated preparation before leaving their home countries. They are also aware of its limits. A few days of training can only stir up some aspects, whereas more complex situations will be encountered the moment they arrive in a foreign country. Here they notice that previously acquired knowledge does not necessarily guarantee an instant active competence within a new social system. They need some time, not only to register different norms and rules, but also to emotionally accept them.

An ideal local situation for an expatriate would be to have a mentor as personal support. This might be a close colleague or a coach. Because such a person cannot be found in each case, most home-based intercultural trainers or coaches offer further support for German employees abroad. It can be done by telephone, video conferencing or constant e-mail correspondence and helps them get over culture shock more quickly and gives them psychological support for both professional and personal crises.

Often Neglected: Reintegration

Hans-Jörg Keller, Michael Thiel, Klaus-D. Wittkuhn

So far, most companies often overlooked the problem of reintegration of returning expatriates. Many former expatriates would leave their enterprises during two years following their return. They took away new valuable know-how with them, frequently handing it over to competitive companies. At this point, managers started to think about successful reintegration.

Most returning expatriates had to cope with cultural alienation and the loss of their privileges abroad. They also struggled with rejoining corporate hierarchies at home. Situations might get worse if enterprises do not react to these problems but rather enlarge them by letting expatriates wait for appropriate assignments or not valuing recently acquired know-how.

Companies can rely on external support in terms of reintegration. Seminars and coaching will help expatriates to get over reentry shock. They give returningd personnel the chance to exchange experience, analyse reintegration problems and find solutions.



Former expats will leave the company, if nobody wants to hear their opinion, ideas or doubts.

Failed Integration

Mrs. T., aged 28, is an accountant from Malaysia. An established German financial institute recruited her from a competitor in Singapore. There she had been in charge of a 15-member international crew, because of her outstanding accountancy and informatics qualifications gained at Universities in Singapore and Australia. She was now to work for four years at headquarters in Frankfurt to get to know the new corporate culture and to prepare for her future managerial job. For a successful set out, even objective circumstances were not promising. She was the only female in her department, Asian and at least 20 years younger than her colleagues. Like many other foreigners, she blamed her colleagues' and neighbors' little effort in communication for her poor German skills. To compensate, she went to evening classes and studied at home on weekends for several months.

The fact that she now spoke and understood German well did not result in better integration or personal appreciation by means of interesting assignments. In the contrary: it became obvious that nobody in her department wanted to hear her opinion, ideas or doubts.

A training in verbal communication made her converse more securely and eloquently but caused some co-workers to withdraw even more. Open conflicts, which she was not used to as an Asian, soon became a psychological strain showing in stomach pains and headaches. Visits to doctors increased.

A seminar on conflict management did not help because it dealt with German persons using German methods to fight German conflicts. In the end she realised that non-native colleagues were successful when they almost turned into ?Germans?. She resigned and kept herself to her Asian and English friends. When at a conference, Mrs. T. was offered a less paid position at a London branch of an American Investment Bank and she did not hesitate to accept it and hurriedly left Germany.

Successful Integration

Mr. N., aged 36, biologist, was employed by a Japanese subsidiary of a German chemical enterprise. He had long considered a four-year stay at German headquarters. It was a week spent in Düsseldorf, paid for him and his spouse, which made them realise that circumstances for a professional exile were not too bad. Most important, his 7 and 9 year-old children could go to a Japanese school and would be able to keep up with their

schedules of learning at least 7000 letters. Their house and garden, located in the Japanese colony in Neuss-Meerbusch, was four times as big as their Tokyo apartment. Japanese shops, restaurants, a fresh fish monger and a club were near by. They had nice German neighbors which initially spoke in English and later encouraged his German skills. In this way, culture shock was successfully repressed.

At work, they also tried to integrate him as soon as possible. First Mr. N. was given the chance to improve his German in a language and cultural training which lasted three months. Here he also learned about major differences of German and Japanese culture.

At the same time, Mr. N.'s boss chose a German colleague experienced in Japanese culture to be his mentor who talked to him every day for 15 minutes before starting work. He soon was his best and personal contact within the company. After two months he was successively introduced to procedures and took over first assignments. During the first year, English as communication language slowly gave way to German. After five months, culture shock was at its worst, and Nosaka, together with other Japanese employees, did a German-Japanese cross-culture training. It was a great help. He felt better and knew how to place his personal experience in the overall cultural context.

The training had also initiated his idea that his German colleagues should learn more about himself and Japanese culture. His boss picked up this idea and, after six months, organised a three-day seminar for his department, focussing on cultural, personal and corporate topics alike. This helped to turn the department into a real team which identified its potentials and chances, shared goals and interactions. Getting together far away from work resulted in a closer personal contact, followed by dinner invitations, parties and sports activities. Another workshop summed up their positive resonance to the team's three-month progress. Mr. N. stated both happily and ironically that they were on the best way to become a Japanese-quality team consisting of German individualists.

He himself, after 15 months, heads a multi-cultural developing team. He still does a work-based language training twice a month. He also spends some hours per month on intercultural coaching to secure his future as an executive employee.

