

## **SELECTING INTERNATIONAL TALENT: WHOM TO HIRE?**

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### **Abstract**

It is challenging to find talented managers willing and qualified to work outside their home countries in the global marketplace. Prospective managers need several critical characteristics to be successful in foreign operations. These characteristics are related to managerial competence, appropriate training, and adaptability to new situations. Because failure rates among expatriate managers are still high, this paper reviews critical selection characteristics. It introduces a scenario centered around selecting an international executive from a pool of candidates. The paper concludes with a discussion of and suggestions for practical applications.

### **Introduction**

As globalization of business has become fact rather than fiction, one trend is clear: the market for executive talent has become globalized. Finding talented managers willing and qualified to work outside their home countries is a challenge in the global marketplace. In firms with multi-country operations, there are mainly three types of managers: (1) parent-country nationals (PCNs), citizens of the country in which the company's headquarters are located; (2) host-country nationals (HCNs), citizens of the country where the firm's foreign operations are located; and, (3) third-country nationals (TCNs), citizens of countries other than their home country or their host country (Cavusgil, Knight & Riesenberger 2022). Host-country nationals and third-country nationals are generally referred to as expatriate managers or ex-pats. They

are individuals living and or working in a country other than their home country, often temporarily and for work reasons (Kagan 2021).

To be successful in foreign operations, managers must have management competence, such as technical and leadership skills, knowledge of corporate culture, appropriate training and formal education, knowledge of the host market and its culture, and adaptability to new situations. Adaptability may include adjusting to new work and job environments, working with local management, and adjusting to a new national culture (Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou 1987; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991; Bird, Mendenhall, Stevens & Oddou 2010).

These characteristics are important when selecting expatriate managers because the firm's failure cost is very high (Baruch & Altman 2002). The cost per failure to the parent firm is almost three times the expatriate's annual domestic salary plus the cost of relocation, estimated between \$200,000 and \$1.2 million (Barbian 2002, Black & Gregerson 1999; Shay 2015). Moreover, failure rates appear to be higher in US firms than in European and Japanese firms. For instance, failure rates for US managers are estimated between 25 and 40 percent when assigned to developed countries and close to 70 percent when assigned to developing countries (Shay 2015).

Expatriate managers rarely fail because they cannot accommodate the technical demands of the job. They fail because of personal and/or family issues or a lack of cultural skills, all of which were, perhaps, not considered in the selection process (Solomon 2000; Shay 2015). Nevertheless, the primary issue for expatriate failure remains the inability of the managers and or their spouses and family to adjust to the new environment. Consequently, international firms are concerned with how well the prospective manager will adapt to the foreign environment and how well the manager will fit into that environment (Ryan, McFarland, Baron & Page 1999). Country culture, traditions, and regulations impose various roles on men and women. In more traditional societies, such as in Latin America, firms might consider a woman's marital status in hiring or avoid hiring young married women with no children on the

assumption that they will shortly leave to start a family. For instance, in Asia and the Middle East, female managers are often mistaken for the secretary or wife of the male manager. In other countries, women have limited opportunities to work outside the home or advance their economic interests.

In 2017, the international consulting firm McKinsey reported that women represented 50 percent of the world's working-age population but generated only 37 percent of gross domestic product. In a study of more than 10,000 senior executives in firms worldwide, McKinsey found that women in senior management positions were highest in Russia and the Philippines, with 45 and 40 percent, as compared to about 22 percent in US firms, followed by India, Germany, and Japan, with 19, 18 and 7 percent, consecutively. Even though women represent about half of the world's higher-education graduates, McKinsey's study also suggested that, on average, only 25 percent of women occupied management positions. Moreover, among senior positions, women worldwide worked more often as human resource directors and chief financial officers than in other executive functions (Devaux 2017; Hunt 2018). While the study suggested that just as many women seek international positions as men, relatively few are asked to fill international positions (Devaux 2017; Hunt 2018). McKinsey suggested several reasons for this phenomenon. First, senior managers may assume that women do not make suitable leaders abroad or foreign men do not like reporting to female managers. Hence firms hesitate to send women to countries where traditional gender roles are the norm (Prime, Jonsen, Carter & Maznesvski 2008), and where obtaining a work visa can be problematic. Moreover, in some countries, male managers enjoy a drink, nightlife, and sports events together, making many women feel uncomfortable in such male-dominated settings (John & Lakshmi 2017). Second, having children and other family obligations can disrupt women's career paths.

Although flexible and part-time policies have benefited women's progress up the corporate ladder, many firms do not offer such prospects (Shortland 2015). Finally, because women still occupy relatively few senior executive positions, as alluded to earlier, there are fewer women with the necessary experience to send abroad for leading roles.

Nonetheless, the situation for working women is improving (Hunt *et al.* 2018). In developed economies, more women are in the workforce than ever before. For instance, in the US, unemployment rates for women are lower than for men. In the European Union, women have filled most new jobs created since 2000. And legislation in the European Union requires women to occupy at least 40 percent of seats on corporate boards of publicly held companies since 2020. However, the effectiveness of this legislation has not yet been reported. Indeed, in a survey of 100 multinationals and 17,000 male and female expatriates, Mercer Human Resource Consulting found that firms substantially increased the number of women on foreign assignments. About half the firms surveyed sensed that female expatriates would continue to rise. At the same time, however, 15 percent of the firms reported that they would not send women to male-oriented locations such as the Middle East (Leopold, Ratcheva & Zahidi 2017). When firms are staffing for international positions, they must decide whether to hire parent-country nationals (PCNs), host-country nationals (HCNs) or third-country nationals (TCNs). The choices a firm makes are critical to the success of its international operations. But, with the availability of global talent comes the responsibility firms must consider regarding local and foreign employment laws. While a discussion of employment law is outside the scope of this paper, remember that the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Laws and Executive orders apply to US employees working at home and abroad. For instance, when hiring for a parent-country position, most US employers do not include candidates' families in the selection process. However, because it is often difficult for the spouse and or family members to adjust to conditions abroad, international selection should include candidates' families because the family adjustment is critical to the parent or home country candidate's success (Gowan 2022). Also, remember that when selecting employees for foreign assignments, US firms cannot discriminate (Gowan 2022). Even though employers will argue that they cannot send women to male-dominated societies, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits US employers from discriminating based on gender. However, if the host country's laws and customs prohibit a woman in the position the US company is offering, employment law application is complex. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) addresses this complexity in a

document entitled, *“Enforcement Guidance on Application of Title VII and the Americans with Disabilities Act to Conduct Overseas and to Foreign Employers Discriminating in the United States”* (www.EOCC.gov). The document intends to guide existing requirements on two distinct issues: (1) *“the circumstances in which American and American-controlled employers can be held liable for discrimination that occurs abroad; and (2), the circumstances in which foreign employers can be held liable for discrimination that occurs within the United States”* (www.EOCC.gov). Thus, understanding employment laws and customs at home and abroad is essential when making international hiring decisions.

Next, the paper proposes a set of characteristics appropriate for selecting talent for international positions and continues with an introduction to a scenario, **Whom to Hire**. The scenario centers around selecting a global marketing executive from a pool of candidates. The paper concludes with a discussion of the scenario application. The scenario and application are in Appendix.

### Selection Characteristics for International Talent

When selecting talented managers for international positions, firms must first understand the tasks, duties, and responsibilities needed to do the job. Once these skills have been identified, firms provide a job description or written summary of the job's activities and working conditions. Next, the firm prepares a list of job specifications of the competencies—knowledge, skills, abilities, and other talents—required to operate and function effectively. In the case of an international position, the liability of foreignness (Peng 2021) adds an extra layer of complexity to the job—identifying the characteristics that a manager needs to work effectively in a foreign environment.

For instance, a firm's international marketing manager must know local demographics and consumer segments, competition in the market, distribution channels, and advertising availability. The manager must also have the ability to adapt to, and fit into, local cultural

environments. A firm with a manufacturing plant in a foreign location needs a plant manager who understands the engineering and technical aspects of the product in the manufacturing process (Griffen & Pustay 2020). Next, the firm must identify the skills and abilities to work effectively in a foreign environment. These skills and abilities are the following selection characteristics: Job Knowledge, Education and Experience, Independence, Adaptability, Interpersonal Skills, Leadership Skills, Physical and Emotional Health, Motivation, and Preparedness. Each characteristic is described next and summarized in Table 1. Selection Characteristics for International Talent.

### Characteristics for International Talent

- **Job knowledge** - When working abroad, experience in and understanding the job's administrative and technical dimensions and organization are essential.
- **Education and Work Experience** - Managers must have appropriate training for the job and knowledge of the host market, its culture, and its language.
- **Independence** - International managers frequently function with increased freedom abroad and limited support from headquarters. These are situations that require a sense of self-reliance and innovativeness.
- **Adaptability** - Managers must overcome stressful situations in adapting to diverse and multicultural environments. Flexibility, diplomacy, cultural empathy, and a positive attitude are critical traits in such settings.
- **Interpersonal Skills** - Managers will interact with numerous colleagues, employees, local partners, and government officials. Thus, getting along well (with others) and building and maintaining relationships is key.
- **Leadership Skills** - Successful managers see change as positive; they collaborate with employees and successfully motivate them to implement change.

- **Physical and Emotional Health** - Living abroad can be stressful affecting everyday life. Managers must be able to adapt to local culture and environment. Medical care abroad is different and may be difficult to access.
- **Motivation** - Considering the manager's motivation for and interest in the foreign position is essential.
- **Preparedness** - Equally important are spouse and family members, who must welcome the foreign experience and exhibit the ability to cope with unfamiliar environments.

Table1, Selection Characteristics for Successful International Managers, summarizes these characteristics.

**Table 1. Selection Characteristics for International Talent**

Source: Adapted from Cavusgil, Knight & Riesenberger. *International Business: New Realities, 5th Ed.* Pearson.

Selection Characteristic	Description
<b>Job Knowledge</b>	Experience in and understanding of administrative and technical dimensions of the job and organization.
<b>Education</b>	Appropriate training and/or education for the job.
<b>Experience</b>	Knowledge of the host market, its culture and language.
<b>Independence</b>	Function with independence abroad with limited support requiring self-reliance and innovativeness.
<b>Adaptability</b>	Exhibit cultural empathy, flexibility, diplomacy, and a positive attitude to diverse environments.
<b>Interpersonal skills</b>	Getting along with others: building and maintaining relationships with diverse constituents.
<b>Leadership skills</b>	Collaborate with and motivate employees. Capable of implementing change.
<b>Physical and Emotional Health</b>	Adapt to local culture and environment.
<b>Motivation and Preparedness</b>	Motivated and interested in foreign position.
<b>Preparedness</b>	Spouse and family members exhibit the ability to cope with unfamiliar environments.

## Discussion of Scenario and Application

As globalization of business has become fact rather than fiction, one trend is clear: the market for executive talent has become globalized. Selecting the right person for an international position cannot be overstated because the failure rate is high. The **Whom to Hire** scenario in the paper's Appendix is centered around selecting a Vice-President of Global Marketing for Global Data, a multinational software firm headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark. Global Data's primary markets are Europe, North and South America, and the Pacific Rim. The company would like to develop what it sees as a robust potential market in the Middle East. The company has created a new position as Vice-President of Global Marketing to accomplish this. No internal candidates were qualified for the job. An outside search firm recommended five candidates with good potential. Now the company must decide whom to hire. The scenario will set the stage for Global Data's new position and include each final candidate's description. The challenge is to match the prospective candidates' skills to do the job with their ability to adapt to a new cultural environment. Thus, the scenario lends itself well to applying the selection characteristics to the job description and includes four application exercises. These applications are 1) writing a job description and job specifications, 2) preparing a short overview of the culture and work values of the countries in which the firm, Global Data, does business or is planning to do business, including Denmark, the company's headquarters, and 3) ranking the candidates' potential for the position of Vice-President of Global Marketing, and 4) justifying in a written summary the reasons for rankings taking into consideration the job description, job specifications, cultures within which the individual will be doing business, and selection characteristics described in Table 1.

Finally, once individual participants have ranked the candidates, participant teams are formed to discuss individual rankings and create team rankings. Subsequently, team rankings are shared, leading to interesting discussions between individual and team perceptions about who will be the best for the job.



Alternatively, one can adjust the scenario to fit a multinational company headquartered in any country desired. For instance, one can create two participant groups with two country scenarios, for example, the US and Denmark, looking for a VP of International Marketing. Splitting up participants into two scenario groups lends itself well to comparing and contrasting the liability of foreignness when staffing foreign assignments. Discussion on how and why the rankings of the candidates may differ for each scenario will provide some takeaways for international talent management.



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## Appendix A. Whom to Hire?

### *Setting the Stage*

You are the Vice President of Human Resource Management of Global Data, a multinational company that sells data mining software in 23 countries. While Global Data's headquarters are in Copenhagen, Denmark, sales offices are dispersed evenly throughout the four hemispheres. Global Data's primary markets have been in Europe and North and South America, with the most robust emerging market in the Pacific Rim. However, sales in all regions, except for the Pacific Rim, have shown slower growth over the past two years. Moreover, Global Data's management team would like to develop a robust potential market in the Middle East. Hence, Global Data has been working toward restructuring and revitalizing its worldwide marketing efforts. To accomplish this, you and Global Data's top management team have decided that the company needs a key marketing executive to introduce a new perspective and fresh ideas to boost Global Data's global business. Unfortunately, no one within the company was qualified to fulfill this position, so you decided to enlist an executive search firm to assist you in finding the right person for the job. The job title is "*Vice-President of Global Marketing.*" The position carries a salary well into six figures (Euros), including an elaborate benefits package, an unlimited expense account, and a corporate car. The position is based at the company's headquarters in Copenhagen and requires frequent travel. A lengthy search turned up five candidates with good potential. It is now up to you, in consultation with the search firm, to decide whom to hire. Although all applicants expressed a sincere interest in the position, they may change their minds once they receive a job offer. Therefore, candidates must be ranked in order of preference so the company can offer the second-choice candidate the job, should the first-choice decline. A description of each of the five candidates is next.

***Kenji Tanaka***

Kenji is a 40-year-old married man with two children. Currently, Kenji is the senior vice president for marketing at a Japanese high-technology firm. The Tokyo office has told you that his reputation as an expert in international marketing is outstanding. Since he joined the company about fifteen years ago, the company's market share has consistently increased and is now well ahead of competing producers in the Pacific Rim.

Kenji began his career with the present company immediately after graduating from the University of Tokyo and working his way up through the ranks. He does not have a graduate degree, but it seems that he has a keen understanding of organizational politics. Because the company is family-controlled, Kenji recognizes that it is unlikely that he will ever move much higher than his present position. Kenji has made it clear that he is interested in the growth potential offered at Global Data.

In addition to his native tongue, Kenji can carry on a reasonably fluent conversation in Korean and some basic English. His wife, a traditional stay-at-home mother, and his children speak only Japanese.

***Yara Arslan***

Yara is a 48-year-old, widowed Muslim woman living in Istanbul, Turkey. She began her teaching career during her Ph.D. program in Marketing at New York University in the United States. Her first book on international marketing was published eight months after graduation. Her doctoral dissertation was on the marketing of pharmaceuticals, but she also researched and published in other areas of global marketing.

Soon after publishing her book, Yara went to work in the international marketing department of CVS Health, a Fortune 500 company headquartered in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, where she remained for the next ten years. She returned to academe when Istanbul University offered her a professorship with tenure, where she is currently. Her academic position has allowed her

to pursue her research interests and to write books and papers in international marketing. Hence, she is well published and internationally recognized as an international marketing expert. In addition to her academic position, she has an active consulting practice throughout the Middle East and Asia.

Global Data's branch office in Istanbul informed headquarters that Yara's only child, her 15-year-old daughter, is severely disabled. Sensing that part of Yara's interest in the position is to have the income to guarantee her care should anything happen to her. Should she be offered the job, her daughter would accompany her to Copenhagen, requiring special education and support programs. In addition to fluency in Turkish and English, Yara also speaks and writes German and has a working knowledge of Chinese.

### ***Vihaan Patel***

Vihaan is a 38-year-old Indian male. Vihaan worked in a key marketing position for Ford Motor Company until it shut down all its manufacturing operations. While Ford wanted to keep him on, offering to move him from India to its headquarters in Detroit, Michigan, Vihaan decided that it was time to look elsewhere. He began to feel somewhat dead-ended in his current position and sees the position at Global Data as an opportunity to try out new territory. Comparable to the other candidates for the job, Vihaan has a long list of accomplishments and is recognized as outstanding in his field. People from Global Data's branch office in New Delhi, who have had contacts with him over the years, say that Vihaan is creative, hardworking, well-organized, and loyal. In addition, Vihaan has a reputation for being a charismatic leader who motivates his employees to the highest performance levels.

Vihaan has a Ph.D. in engineering from Stanford University and an MBA from the Indian School of Management. Vihaan has been very active in the LGBT movement in India, which has made his life challenging at times. With more rights afforded to LGBT persons in India, there still is a significant amount of homophobic presence among the Indian population, hence his interest in pursuing a career abroad. His constant male companion, William (Bill) Smith, would be coming

with him to Denmark, and Vihaan would like Global Data's assistance in finding an appropriate position for him. Vihaan is fluent in English, Hindi, and has some basic knowledge of Malay.

### ***Rex Roberts***

Rex is a 33-year-old divorced male who is currently job hunting. Rex's former position as head of marketing for a single-product high-technology firm specializing in workstations for artificial intelligence applications ended when Hewlett Packard Intelligence (HPI) acquired the company. Rex had been with the company from the start six years earlier. Having to leave his position was absurd to Rex because it was due to his marketing efforts and success that HP acquired the company. He seems a little bitter and feels that the position offered to him by HPI was beneath him and not worthy of consideration.

Rex has both his undergraduate and MBA degrees from the University of Texas. In addition, he won a Fulbright scholarship, which he used to support himself while undertaking a two-year research project on marketing high-technology equipment in Latin America.

Global Data's New York office reported that Rex has a reputation for being a hard-driving workaholic known to work eighteen to twenty hours a day, seven days a week. He seems to have little time for his personal life. In addition to his native English, Rex has a good command of the Spanish language, which he picked up when he lived in Mexico and Chile, and some conversational French, which he admits he hasn't used since his college days.

### ***Aron Davidson***

Aron is a 41-year-old male, married with four children. After receiving his MBA from HEC (Haute Ecole de Commerce) in France, Aron began as an international marketing manager for Safran, a primary French defense and technology supplier, selling products to defense contractors in Israel. Aron received his undergraduate degree in engineering from Weizmann Institute of Science in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Because of Aron's success with the company, he was recruited by Graphcore, a British smart chip maker known for its intelligence processing unit optimized for machine learning. Again, here he proved to be exceptional, boosting the company's market share beyond all expectations within two years. After five years, Aron got a chance to go back to Israel, this time to coordinate all the international marketing programs for an industrial park of 14 companies run by Israel's leading scientific research institution. Aron's responsibility was to interface the research component with product development and sales and manage the park's international marketing wing. Again, Aron succeeded beyond expectation.

Global Data's Haifa office learned that Aron is well-respected with extensive contacts in the scientific community and high-tech world. He is exceptionally creative in his approach to marketing, often trying bold strategies that most of his peers would find too risky, but for Aron, these approaches have worked well.

Aron is a religious man, an observant Jew. He will not work on the Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath, which takes place each week from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, nor any of his religion's major and minor holidays, about eighteen a year. He will, however, work on Sundays. In addition to his native language, Hebrew, he fluently speaks and writes English, French and Arabic and can carry on an elementary conversation in Danish (Aron and his family lived in Denmark for several years when he was a young boy).

### **Application**

Read the background information and description of each of the applicants. Consider the job and the cultures within which the individual to be hired will be operating. You will observe from the scenario above that the company headquarters are in Denmark. An understanding of the culture and work values of the Danish and an understanding of the culture and work values in the countries/regions in which the company operates is essential in making the right hiring decision. Before ranking the candidates, prepare the following:

- 1. Develop a job description for the “Vice-President of Global Marketing” position.** Then, provide a list of the job specifications: the competencies—knowledge, skills and abilities, and other talents required to work and function effectively in the job.
- 2. Develop a short profile of the culture and work values in Denmark** and a brief overview of the other cultures/regions in which the company operates or is planning to operate.
- 3. For each candidate, write a paragraph on his/her potential** for the "Vice-President of Global Marketing" position, justifying the reasons for your decision. Consider the job description, job specifications, and the cultures within which the individual will be working, using the selection characteristics described in **Table 1**. Then rank the candidates from 1 to 5, with 1 being your first choice, 2 your second choice, etc., entering your rankings in **Table 2, VP Global Marketing Candidate Ranking Sheet**, in the column marked "my ranking." Include what you believe are the most critical characteristics in your ranking of the candidates (in bullet points).



**Table 2. VP for Global Marketing Candidate Ranking Sheet**

	<b>My Ranking</b> <i>Your individual ranking of candidates, here.</i>		<b>Team Ranking</b> <i>Do not fill in, this is part of a team exercise.</i>	
<b>Applicant's Name</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>List major criteria for your ranking in bullet points</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>List major criteria for your ranking in bullet points</b>
<i>Name here</i>		<i>Rank order the characteristics from Table 1 in bullet points, here. Just key words.</i>		<i>Leave this part blank. You will work on this part with your team.</i>

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