What are the Major Challenges that must be Overcome in Training Employees for Global Assignments?

Lang Xuanyi

Li Yixuan

Liu Hanzhao

Wang Yige

Ye Zimeng

Zhang Lu

Rochester Institute of Technology

Abstract

Training employees to cope with the task of globalization is an investment that can’t be ignored by every company who wants to survive in a transnational context. Finding appropriate training methods to lay a cross-cultural background for multiple employees is an important motivation behind each successful project. However, the diversity of internal and external factors has led different corporate entities to face a variety of challenges in conducting such training. It makes defining difficult points and preparing for countermeasures in advance to become the key breaking factor of enterprises. This study attempts to define the main challenges that may be faced in global employee training in three aspects, respectively capital input, culture difference and measurement and feedback, also analyze in detail how these challenges have different effects on company training. The finds of the paper could help managers better recognize the risks, then set up training plans and personnel arrangements more reasonably while making training more efficient and applicable to meet the needs of the optimization of global training.

*Keywords*: Employee Global Training, Challenges, Capital Input, Culture Difference, Measurement and Feedback.

What Are the Major Challenges That Must Be Overcome in Training Employees for Global Assignments?

In today’s business environment, globalization has become an irreversible trend, which dramatically affects the organizational decision-making and future development of the company. If companies want to survive better in the wave of globalization, they need to make relevant training for their employees, which could enhance the performance and productivity of employees (Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003, as cited in Sitzmann & Weinhardt, 2018). It can be seen that for many companies, staff training is an essential guarantee for the long-term development of the company in the context of global assignments.

However, rolling out training for employees to handle globalization tasks is fraught with obstacles and challenges. Through a multi-perspective analysis, the possible influencing factors are capital input including human capital and physical capital, cultural differences, as well as the collection of feedback including the employee satisfaction and the measurement of the effectiveness of training. When analyzed in more details, the consideration of capital input will affect the managers’ trade-off between the cost and return of investment. Cultural differences will affect managers’ design and decisions about training. Meanwhile, the difficulty of collecting feedback will prevent the company from identifying and solving problems in the process of training in order to adjust and improve.

Therefore, companies need to be aware of the issues they face when training employees. Nevertheless, previous studies have focused on the level of analysis within personnel at the time of training, ignoring the combination of challenges that arise in the dynamic process of training program implementation. The focus of this study is to examine the factors that affect the effectiveness of training from a different period of training, and thus contribute to better globalization training. This paper argues that there are three main challenges to overcome when training for globalization assignments: financial needs, cultural differences, and difficulty of collecting feedback.

**Before training: Capital input is one of the significant global training challenges.**

Capital input, which includes human capital and physical capital, is one of the significant challenges in global training.

In the context of globalization, the management ability of human capital raises more uncertainty and problems for the training assignment. Human capital, defined as “knowledge, information, ideas, skills, and healthy individuals” (Ployhart et al., 2014), including resources from inside and outside the company, is difficult for companies to treat and control properly. For outsourcing training tasks, to some degree, the expense positively related to the performance in training. For inside trainers, the payment and rewards level that the company apply to the employee will affect their performance in their works like training other employees for other guys inside the company (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Moreover, the attribution that company devote to manage employees dis-adaption, including different core values, customs, beliefs will bring up more expenditure and challenges for training tasks (Bhatti et al., 2013). If the trainers cannot receive the willing level of consideration to the offer, they will give a bad performance in the training preparation. Even worse, if they feel upset and leave the company, the damage will not just be the failure of training, but the loss of the investment in developing some skills and knowledge, and the profits that the employee could have brought (Guery & Pendleton, 2016). Therefore, how to control the employee turnover rate and how to balance the relationship between human capital input and corporate profit output are the difficult problems of human capital management in global assignments.

How to balance these costs of physical capital and the return on investment is another challenge for multinational companies to carry out training. The welfare security for parties of training means a lot. First of all, the company needs to provide labor safety protection, such as providing social insurance, obtaining relevant residence and employment permits for the dispatched employees for training. For example, in Singapore and Australia, the company’s commercial medical insurance needs to be covered in all local hospitals so that these foreign employees have no restrictions on medical treatment, so as to ensure the human resources department issue work visas (Causin, 2007). Therefore, compared with the domestic assignment, multinational training tasks have to pay more for the protection of employees. Besides, life compensation in family placement, which influences the satisfaction of their spouse and family, is another cost for trainers and trainees (Black, 1994). Statistical data shows that 80 percent of companies offer programs to the entire family, 33 percent to the employee and spouse, and 20 percent to the employee only (Bennett et al., 2000). So, some article argues that the company should consider spending money in providing settlements and workplaces relevant to the training, which seems as not negligible cost (Adler, 1986). In addition, diet compensation is also a large part of the finance cost for training. Some employees cannot adapt to ethnic cuisine because of their diverse eating habits that will affect training achievement (Liu et al., 2017). Chinese enterprises like ZTE and Huawei, provide Chinese chefs to solve the catering needs of Chinese employees and meet the challenges of diet maladjustment for employees (Sun, 2009). These aspects should take into account for other companies to prepare the training.

Companies need to invest more capital to provide employees with more skills training. In order to make employees adapt quickly to the changes in the global market, companies need to spend more money to provide employees with global management skills training and the latest global technology software. For example, IBM’s employee training requires continuous training at headquarters and work and study in other countries (Ramayah, 2012). That means companies will continue to invest in training their employees at a greater cost. Compared with domestic companies, multinational companies are more sensitive to the impact of globalization. Therefore, the knowledge and skills needed by the company are iterated faster, employees are required to master more types of skills, and more training programs need to be established. Multinational companies’ employees need to accept more kinds of skills training, which leads to an international company internship training cost is higher than domestic company. In addition, it remains to be seen whether temporary teams assigned to different national subsidiaries for specific tasks are also necessary for training. For example, P&G company will send outstanding employees from various departments to training and work in its branches in the United States, Britain, Japan, Singapore and other places, so as to achieve more comprehensive development in globalization (Ramayah, 2012). These expenses are also entirely borne by the company. So companies need to find a new round of rapid training methods. Companies need to reduce investment, improve efficiency so that employees can quickly adapt to market changes.

Although training staff is an extra expenditure, training can also bring better performance and higher efficiency. It is reported by Gallié and Legros (2012) that training can improve the innovation and absorption capacity of enterprises. Besides, innovation and absorption capacity are the crucial factors of productivity and technological progress of enterprises (Gallié & Legros, 2012). Furthermore, the employee may undertake the training expenditure and development responsibility by themselves. Some companies would not bear the training cost if the employee fails to complete the regulated performance or fails to obtain relevant certificates due to personal reasons (Nguyen, 2013). As a result, training employees might be not a financial challenge but an opportunity for a company to catch up with global technological change.

**During training: cultural differences are considered one of the biggest challenges in training employees for global tasks.**

Culture can be defined as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural differences influence our values, which, in turn, affect attitudes and, ultimately, behaviors (*Organizational Behavior* 53). The following three sections will explain why cultural differences are one of the primary challenges in training employees for global assignments.

Firstly, when training employees, the first challenge is to choose an appropriate language to teach. Different native languages have different levels of acceptance of other new languages (Towler, 2001). At the same time, there is a significant correlation between learning potential and English proficiency, but not with the results of training tests (Schoeman, 2002). In addition, some countries do not like to communicate in the official language, such as many countries in Western Europe, where they prefer to communicate with foreigners who speak the local language and exclude English-speakers. Therefore, the choice of language for employee training should be considered from several perspectives, provided that the purpose and content of the training are clear.

Secondly, training in mindsets is also extremely challenging. A global perspective can better help employees integrate into their host country. However, it is very difficult to train. Different national cultures lead to different ways of thinking, and national cultures are difficult to change because they are deeply rooted in individual behaviors (Ozorhon et al., 2008). It leads to a disadvantage: qualitative thinking can lead to a failure to understand and accept new things. However, there is a positive side to diversity in thinking. One study found that it promotes interaction and integration of ideas between different individuals and facilitates problem-solving from new perspectives. “Diversity makes the workforce heterogeneous; if managed properly, it can increase productivity” (Ankita, 2014). However, without proper management mechanisms, diversity of ideas remains a challenge to be overcome.

Third, the different levels of employee engagement and participation in training challenge the effectiveness of training. Employees in other countries have different perceptions of motivation and level of engagement due to cultural differences. Training for global tasks as an additional requirement and challenge has the potential to increase employee stress, which in turn reduces employee engagement and participation. Research has shown that “training and employee engagement significantly predict employee performance by 44.7% and employee engagement was found to be a major predictor of employee performance as compared to training” (Sendawula et al., 2018). Knowledge retention, passive learning, and lack of commitment can all lead to training and development challenges. When engagement is clearly inadequate, training may seem irrelevant or unnecessary, and most learners will mentally and emotionally “check out” and refuse to participate. This results in them not appropriately utilizing the resources and mindset that comes with training to learn as much as possible. Chinese and Western perceptions of engagement include immersion in the training, and immediate feedback on the information received are different. For example, Western employees show a higher level of engagement and willingness to provide direct feedback during training. Asian cultures, on the other hand, tend to be reticent in the learning process. “Distinguishing the effectiveness of participation can be beneficial in appraising training” (Thomas & Qiu, 2012). Lower levels of participation with recurring scenes of silence would be detrimental to the emergence of new ideas and the measurement of acceptance of knowledge. In brief, cultural differences are considered to be one of the challenges of global task training, which can hinder communication between employees in terms of language, mindset, engagement and participation, thus affecting the efficiency and execution of global training.

**After Training: The difficulty of effectively collecting employee satisfaction and measuring training efficiency is also considered as a major challenge in optimizing the training process.**

The collection of feedback, including collecting employees’ training satisfaction and measuring training efficiency, which contains the measurement of assignment completion efficiency as well as the employee performance, will affect the adjustment and improvement of training. However, there are still some difficulties and challenges for companies to collect these feedbacks in the context of international assignments.

In terms of collecting effective employees’ training satisfaction, the major challenges involve the authenticity of the information collected and the company’s own attitude to feedback. Once research argues that the degree of “one’s willing to open up mind and share real thoughts and feelings” is positively related to the authenticity in the work content (Kwan, 2018). It represents the direct reason why companies and managers sometimes cannot always get accurate opinions toward the training assignments. For instance, in typical relational society, Chinese employees, as relational beings, may be influenced by other employees around them in making decisions” (Xu, G., & Dellaportas, S, 2019). This phenomenon may result in employees being unable to express their real thoughts or being inadvertently influenced by others’ opinions when asked for feedback so that the companies cannot get adequate and objective feedback and cannot make correct adjustments to the existing training process.

Additionally, “companies are often reluctant to conduct a “satisfaction survey” of their assignees because they fear it will result in a series of complaints that compensation packages and allowances are inadequate” (Herod, 2012). Status inconsistencies may cause conflict because of the different (*Organizational Behavior* 447). Generally speaking, managers seek to minimize the cost of these international assignments, while employees want to be more rewarded for international assignments, which is one of the motivations for employees to accomplish tasks across borders. Therefore, when a mismatch between expected benefits and actual benefits leads to employees’ complaints, companies face the challenge of balancing achieving their goals with meeting the needs of their employees.

In terms of measuring training completion efficiency, the first challenge is a lack of awareness to set up indicators to measure the effectiveness of assignment completion. Only about 14 percent of the companies seem to have noticed the importance of track program metrics to “assess the success or failure of their assignment programs” (Herod, 2012). The purpose of measuring the assignment completion efficiency is to examine the effectiveness of training employees for global assignments. Lack of awareness of measurement may result in managers not knowing whether the training is effective and then not being able to improve training further.

Meanwhile, the lack of comprehensive measures of employee performance is the second challenge that prevents organizations from evaluating their assessments. Moriarty Gerrard (2009) points out that applying measures in the context of global assignments is more complicated than applying to a traditional job. For example, individuals in roles involving significant behavior change in the context of global assignments require abilities distinct from those necessary for work in a traditional role (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). In a global assignment, assessing employee performance also involves assessing how acculturated they are and how well they work with customers in different countries. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult for companies to fully identify and find appropriate methods to measure all criteria that are different from the evaluation criteria in traditional assignments. The lack of comprehensive evaluation measures will lead to the fact that managers can not directly see the problems and defects in the training, let alone put forward targeted solutions.

**Conclusion**

Providing high-quality training to employees in the context of globalization has become a necessary way for many companies to improve productivity and lead changes. In the meantime, enterprises also face great challenges brought by the uncertainty and diversity of capital input, culture difference and measurement and feedback, which consider being the three biggest competition perspective. As important scarce resources, the investment of human capital and physical capital affect enterprise restrict the effective development of global training. Language choice, the way of thinking and the degree of engagement and participation due to the influence of cultural differences challenge the efficiency of global training by influencing the degree of understanding and corporation among participants. Also, the feedback raised by trainees and the measurement index set by trainers greatly affects how decision-makers redesign a suitable training model. The above elements are critical modules that must be overcome to improve in global training tasks. Therefore, the effectiveness of training employees for global assignments can be maximized by correctly identifying and actively responding to risk challenges, additionally, adopting effective and targeted training programs. From the perspective of this paper, it provides a feasible way to identify specific challenges. In future research, further considerations on how to transform challenges into greater opportunities to help enterprises develop their employees in the tide of globalization will be involved.

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