

EAP & Globalization: Management of Cultural, Personal and Professional Issues

Companies around the world are faced with pressures to reduce costs and compete more aggressively. As a result, professionals need to adapt to changes faster, and often without clear guidelines. Professionals also need to learn new skills and interact with people from cultures they're not familiar with.

More than ever, all professionals need assistance. Whether they're based in their home country, in the United States or globally, whether they travel often or whether they are relocating, the ability to understand new cultures and countries is essential for professional and personal success.

Outsourcing is clearly at the top of most professional agendas and is one key area that is being impacted by cultural challenges. Outsourcing, as some of us know firsthand, can be beneficial as well as challenging and stressful, depending on your perspective. Much of the stress is due to the personal and professional challenges. The cultural challenge and the resulting communication misunderstandings can compound the stress.

Cultural challenges

When you're dealing with people from another culture, you may find that their business practices, communications and management styles are different from what you are accustomed to. Understanding the culture of the people with whom you are dealing is key to successful business interactions as well as accomplishing business objectives. For example, employees need to understand how people in a given culture:

- communicate
- view time and deadlines
- handle uncertainty or perceived "negative" situations: do they ask questions or highlight problems?
- respond to management and authority
- perceive verbal and physical communications
- make decisions

It's important to focus on how cultures evolve and what impacts them, and not just focus on a list of dos and don'ts.

Personal challenges

Many people are stressed and even resentful. This may stem from seeing work colleagues lose their jobs or living in fear of losing their own, or having to work on projects or with teams based in cultures new and relatively unknown to them. This stress and resentment leads to a number of issues, including depression and anxiety.

Professional challenges

As jobs and organizations are restructured due to outsourcing and general global corporate changes,

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employees are not always equipped with the right work skills to do their new job. Skills training is an essential component of transitioning employees.

It's important to understand employee needs specifically with regard to the cultural, personal and professional challenges resulting from globalization. Providing learning and services solutions for all three areas can help to sharpen skills, build trust and improve overall productivity. Targeted learning programs can help employees understand how culture is impacting their work issues and improve communications with colleagues. As a result, you can enhance the ability to reduce employee stress and improve overall well-being.

ValueOptions and Atma Global can provide a unique set of cultural and personal solutions to your global workforce. Please contact your account executive for more information.