Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development

Winnie Ng and Kate Vernon, Community Business
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The Diversity & Inclusion in Asia Network was set up by Community Business in March 2008. It is a unique network of diversity professionals looking to drive their companies forward on their diversity journey in Asia. In 2011 DIAN comprised 31 companies including: Accenture, AECOM, American Express, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Barclays Capital, Bloomberg, BNY Mellon, Cisco, Coca-Cola, Dell, Deutsche Bank, Ernst & Young, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Goldman Sachs, Google, Herbert Smith, HSBC, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, Linklaters, Moody’s, Nomura, PwC, Prudential, The Royal Bank of Scotland, Shell International BV, Sodexo, Standard Chartered Bank, State Street, UBS and Wells Fargo. Member companies meet regularly to understand the diversity issues pertinent to the region and to share and drive best practice in Asia. For more information about DIAN please see the Community Business website at: www.communitybusiness.org/DIAN/index.htm

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Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development

FOREWORD BY COMMUNITY BUSINESS

In March 2008, Community Business established the Diversity & Inclusion in Asia Network (DIAN) – a unique group of diversity professionals looking to drive their companies forward on their diversity journey in Asia. From the beginning, a key objective of DIAN has been to collectively deliver a tangible output every year that will go some way to progressing the discussion of diversity in Asia.

In 2008, DIAN members worked together sharing confidential data to produce the first Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia. In 2009, DIAN focused on the critical demographic challenge facing the region and produced a report entitled Ageing: Impact on Companies in Asia.

In 2010, DIAN turned its attention to the important and complex subject of culture. Recognising the challenges that many multinational companies face in terms of developing local talent and building local leadership, this study sought to look at what companies operating in Asia can do to create workplace environments that bring out the best in Asian talent and foster the development of greater Asian leadership.

The study, entitled Bringing Out the Best in Asian Talent, has attracted attention and provoked interesting debate – not just by corporate representatives within the region, but also by colleagues and senior executives at corporate headquarters. For as more companies understand the significance of Asia to their market strategies, they are recognising the urgency of attracting and retaining top talent and building a strong pipeline of future Asian leaders.

Yet this is a very real challenge. Many multinational companies observe that their Asian employees are not rising up through the organisation as quickly as they should and securing leadership roles. Whilst this may lead some to simply question whether Asian talent has what it takes to be successful in a global environment, the more enlightened are examining their approaches to talent development in the region and taking steps to ensure that they are appropriate to the Asian context.

This is the focus of this study, entitled Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development. Concerned that standard approaches to talent development may be overlooking Asian talent in the pipeline, it calls for companies to adopt a more targeted approach to talent development in the region. Focusing specifically on the markets of China, Hong Kong and India, Community Business has conducted primary and secondary research to identify how companies can better understand, appreciate and leverage their Asian talent in order to enable them to contribute more fully to business success.

The process of conducting this research has been fascinating, bringing us into contact with HR professionals, senior leaders and cultural experts across the globe. Many of the DIAN members that we work with are doing great work in this area and we thank all the participants in the research for sharing their insights, perspectives and best practices to inform the discussion.

As with all our work, it is hoped that companies will take the findings of this report and use them to raise awareness, engage leadership and facilitate discussion on this important subject in their organisations – in order to bring about positive change. We hope that companies committed to diversity and inclusion will embrace the opportunity to look at things from a different perspective – and in adopting an Asian lens achieve greater success in building their pipeline of Asian talent as future leaders.

Kate Vernon
Managing Director and Head of Diversity & Inclusion
Community Business
INTRODUCTION

In response to the unprecedented shift of global growth from West to East, a large number of Western multinationals are globalising their Asian operations and restructuring formerly centralised control to reflect, and capitalise on, Asia’s economic leadership. Some companies are restructuring along functional or business unit models and moving these global operations from a centralised headquarters to Asia. Others are relocating APAC regional headquarters from old favourites like Singapore or Hong Kong to places such as Mainland China or India. Both models rely on the availability of Asian talent who can lead in global roles. The ability to develop and retain Asian leadership talent is, therefore, mission critical. It is also a major challenge that many companies are struggling to address.

The War for Talent and the Leadership Gap in Asia

The ‘war for talent’, the need for companies to fight to attract and retain top talent to lead their organisations, is a very real phenomenon for companies operating in Asia. It is not just that western multinational companies are increasingly competing with successful large Asian companies for talent – although that is certainly true. It is that finding the ‘right’ people with the right skill sets to be successful, both in the Asian context and globally, is notoriously hard. As articulated by Professor Steven Dekrey, Associate Dean at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology:

“The sophistication demanded of talent in this part of the world magnifies the war for talent. It’s not just the numbers, it’s being able to manage a complicated environment. You have different cultures, languages, the East-West dynamic – all these complications that managers have to be able to negotiate. The people who can handle all of this are few and far between. So the dearth of leadership is magnified by that.”

Christie Caldwell and Anita Zanchettin of Aperian Global* echo this point:

“What makes the talent demands particularly challenging in [Asia] today is the need for a very high degree of competence in the local markets coupled with global business skills and acumen.”

Often referred to as the ‘Asia leadership gap’ it is an issue that is perplexing many corporate leaders with aggressive growth targets in Asia. According to research by the Corporate Executive Board:

“Only 25% of employees in Asia feel that their leaders are fully prepared for future challenges. What’s more, just 26% of Asia’s rising leaders believe their successors are ready to move to executive roles, as compared to 43% in the rest of the world.”

Tom Monohan, CEO and Chairman of the Corporate Executive Board, highlights that the speed of growth in Asian markets adds an additional dimension to the leadership gap in Asia:

“The high growth rates are forcing leaders into managing more people, broader spans of responsibility, sooner in their careers. That does expose some gaps as they arrive at these leadership positions earlier with fewer years of experience. In general in the region, you find people, comparable to the rest of the world, getting to leadership positions five years sooner. They are getting there with far fewer years with the same employer so there are some gaps in their skills profile that are important for them to manage effectively.”

* See profile in Appendix 1
Where are the Asian Leaders?

In the past multinational companies have tended to transfer highly skilled and experienced executives from corporate headquarters to manage and drive operations in emerging markets in Asia. Whilst this import of expertise may seem logical in the short-term, it has led to a disproportionate representation of non-Asian leaders in markets such as China, Hong Kong, Singapore - and to a lesser extent India. Of more concern perhaps, is that we are not seeing Asian views expressed at headquarters in a way that the growth and focus on this market deserves.

In the attempt to put some numbers around this and illustrate this point more clearly, Community Business invited member companies of its Diversity & Inclusion in Asian Network (DIAN) to provide data showing the representation of Asians in leadership positions in their organisations. This was an ambitious exercise and one that provoked some interesting discussion around definitions of what it means to be Asian.

It was identified that being ‘Asian’ was more than just a question of ethnicity or colour of skin. For example an American Born Chinese (ABC) who has spent all her time in the US, and never lived or worked in China, may be no more Asian in her outlook, way of thinking or working than her American colleague. As such she may be no better equipped to lead a team in China or represent Chinese views at the global level than a non-Asian counterpart. In addition, there has been such a rapid pace of change in Asia – particularly in China and India, that Asians who have been out of the region for over a decade, may not understand how current cultural norms have changed. On the other hand an American who has spent most of his working career in China and speaks Mandarin may be very attune to the Chinese mindset, way of building relationships and doing business. He may be considered ‘Asian’ in his approach and therefore a more effective leader for a team in China.

We explore further definitions of ‘Asian’ in Part 1: Understanding Asian Talent of this report. However, for the purpose of this straw-poll exercise, the following definitions were agreed by the group:

**Definitions of ‘Asian’ for Data Collection Exercise**

| At Board Level | • Born in Asia  
|                | • Some career experience in Asia |
| At Global Level | • Born in Asia  
|                | • Some career experience in Asia |
| At Regional Level | • Born in Asia  
|                | • Majority of career experience in Asia |
| At Country Level | • Born in the local market (ie China, Hong Kong, India)  
|                | • Majority of career experience in the local market |

This is what the data revealed:

**Representation of ‘Asians’ in Leadership Positions in DIAN Member Companies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Average Size of Leadership Team</th>
<th>Average % of Asians in Leadership Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Committee</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Leadership Team</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management Team – China</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management Team – Hong Kong</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management Team – India</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>96.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of Participating Companies: 10
These companies care about diversity, inclusion and building a global talent pipeline. They have invested heavily in diversity strategies and initiatives. Yet looking at these numbers, we see a disappointing representation of Asians in leadership positions. This is particularly evident at the board and executive committee level, but also at the regional level - and in the case of Hong Kong and to some extent China, at the local level too. This points to a potential risk for companies looking to develop their business in this part of the world.

**Investing in Asian Talent**

Meena Thuraisingham, Director and Principal of TalentInvest* highlights that more recently multinational companies have focused on aggressive recruitment drives, bringing in external Asian talent as quickly as possible. However she cautions against this approach and highlights the need to invest in the accelerated development of local Asian talent:

“The lack of leadership experience among emerging Asian leaders brings into question the limited impact of relying on just recruitment solutions. In fact at a macro level, the over-reliance on recruitment solutions is worsening this issue of experience as it encourages job hopping which then results in talent not deepening their experience and consolidating their contribution or maturity on the job before they move on. Instead, focus needs to move quickly to the systematic identification of internal talent and the acceleration of this talent, and this does not mean churning them through classroom training. It has to be a combination of high impact stretch assignments and provision of compelling career paths.”

Given the complexities that leaders in Asia need to be able to navigate and the growing importance of Asia to market strategies, global business leaders too are increasingly aware that investing in local Asian talent and developing local Asian leadership is critical.

“Asia is one of the largest growth areas for our business… it is unsustainable to be able to continue to explore and develop those business opportunities without having key local talent able to participate in that development.”

*Bernadette Ryan, Chief Operating Officer, Global Services Hong Kong, State Street Bank & Trust Company*

“There is an unstoppable phenomenon which is the ascent of the major Asian economies… Invest in our Asian talent because they know Asia better than anyone else. They are the best equipped to help us achieve our global ambitions.”

*Colin Grassie, Chief Executive Officer, Deutsche Bank UK*

“Asia plays a key role in our plans for the firm’s growth. Asian companies are also playing an increasingly important part in the global economy. As an international law firm, we need Asian talent working both in the region and in our other centres across the Middle East, Europe and (shortly) in the US, and we need to develop our local talent across all our offices to help us achieve our goals.”

*Justin D’Agostino, Partner, Herbert Smith*

“We spend significant resources growing our businesses in markets with high GDP growth - developing local talent is critical to our strategy. In order to be successful commercially, we have to recruit and cultivate talent in these growth markets.”

*Brooks Entwistle, Chairman of South East Asia, Goldman Sachs*

* See profile in Appendix 1
The Need to Adopt an Asian Lens

As companies seek to invest in Asian talent and build greater Asian leadership they need to do so in a way that is appropriate to the cultural context – that is ‘adopt an Asian lens’. That is the focus of this study. It is based on the premise that the current ways of assessing and developing talent in multinational companies are primarily based on a western perspective - recognising and rewarding individuals who display certain competences and characteristics that are associated with western leadership styles.

There is a danger in this approach. There is not only the risk that such an approach disadvantages local Asian talent from doing well, but many companies may be failing to understand and appreciate the unique strengths that Asian talent can bring to organisational success. The result is that companies are potentially overlooking key talent in the pipeline and ultimately denying their organisations of exactly the skills and competences they need to grow in Asia. Indeed many multinational companies fail to acknowledge the unconcious bias and institutionalised reactions that shape how they are assessing Asian talent.

Jane Hyun, Asian leadership strategist and author of *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling* recognises the significance of this, and challenges companies to think about the following:

“If Asians come in with education and aspiration, why are they not moving past middle management level in organizations?” This critical leadership question, based on research conducted with 100 executives, has perplexed us in the United States and we believe there are learnings that now resonate across global Fortune 500 companies in Asia. The next generation question should be: “How can we, by using culturally relevant approaches, not only hire Asian employees, but support the development of this emerging talent pool to play a role in growing our businesses throughout Asia, while fully leveraging the cultural capital that they bring?”

Purpose of This Study

Recognising the benefits of embracing cultural diversity and the importance of creating culturally inclusive environments where all can contribute to their full potential, this study seeks to explore how companies can better understand, appreciate and leverage their Asian talent to ensure success for their business globally. Through focus groups with HR professionals in China, Hong Kong and India, interviews with global leaders and input from cultural experts (see profiles in Appendix 1), this DIAN study has sought to answer questions such as:

• What are the characteristics of Asian talent? What specific strengths can they bring to organisational success?
• How can companies more appropriately assess and develop leaders in Asia to make sure they are not overlooking key talent?
• How can companies leverage Asian talent globally?
• What can companies do to improve the cross-cultural competency of the whole organisation and thus increase global capabilities?

* See profile in Appendix 1
PART 1:
UNDERSTANDING ASIAN TALENT

Challenge

In seeking to adopt an approach to talent development that is suitable for the Asian market, a logical starting point is to take steps to better understand Asian talent. Much academic work has been done in this area and various frameworks exist to help understand the different working styles and preferences of people of different cultures. One of the earliest and most widely referred to is Hofstede’s ‘Cultural Dimensions Theory’. This argues that people differ in the extent to which they endorse six dimensions of values – power, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, temporal orientation and indulgence. Further explanation and more detail can be found in Appendix 2. Hofstede’s work has been adapted in various ways to make it more applicable to organisations and the working environment. One example is Aperian Global’s online tool, GlobeSmart which focuses on ‘5 Dimensions of Difference’. Box 1 details this framework and Box 2 shows the assessment profiles for China, Hong Kong and India – the geographies that are the focus of this study, as well as the US and UK for comparison purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Interdependent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‣ Take individual initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Prefer quick decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Openly express opinions or disagreement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Collaborate well with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Prefer group decision-making processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Express disagreement or opinions cautiously</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egalitarian</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‣ Be comfortable challenging the views of superiors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Treat everyone much the same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Be relatively flexible regarding roles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Prefer not to challenge those above them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Have a formal interaction style with more junior staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Adapt their behaviour depending on relative status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Restraint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‣ Prefer rapid decision-making and quick results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Place great importance on flexibility and initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Value speed over thoroughness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Spend significant time on background research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Establish proper procedures before starting a project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Value thoroughness over speed</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‣ Come to the point quickly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Be forthright in asking questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Feel comfortable disagreeing with others and giving them feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Spend time explaining the context before coming to the point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Avoid giving feedback publicly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Express disagreement in subtle ways</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‣ Move quickly to business topics in conversation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Value reaching goals and objectives on schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Focus on what you do; your achievements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Take the time required to build trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ View time building relationships as key to achieving good results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‣ Focus on who you are; your connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 2: GlobeSmart Assessment Profiles – By Country

The value and benefit of leveraging a cross cultural-tool is expressed by Tracy Ann Curtis*, Founder and Principal Consultant, TAC Global:

"It is said that the best way to understand a country is to learn the language. And while this is not always possible or realistic for many reasons, cross-cultural tools (and there are many) facilitate a common language and vernacular in which we can speak about, explore and leverage the value of our cross-cultural diversity. Cross-cultural tools provide a construct that can be used to create stronger shared understanding and more fluid collaboration as we move into global territories that are new and in which we know little about. I have used these tools successfully for over a decade. I reference these tools when I coach leaders in working across cultures, with colleagues to increase cross-cultural knowledge and expertise, with diverse teams to increase collaboration and innovation in problem-solving, and to prepare myself for conversations and meetings in new cross-cultural territories."

Academic frameworks provide a useful starting point. However as Meena Thuraisingham of TalentInvest points out:

"The identification and assessment of talent in Asia has not reached the level of sophistication that it ought to in a market as unstoppable as this one. The broader issue is our tendency to gravitate to models that, in my view, over-simplify Asia and in doing so fall into the trap of labelling. We are all prone to labelling peoples and traits we do not understand deeply and herein lie the issues. While Hofstede and others have had a huge impact in helping us deconstruct the cultural paradoxes we experience in Asia, it ignores context."

To gain a better understanding of that context, Community Business engaged with local stakeholders in the markets that were the focus of this study.

**Approach**

Through a series of focus groups with local HR professionals in China, Hong Kong and India, (including representatives from both DIAN member companies as well as large local companies) and via telephone interviews with non-Asian global leaders from multinational companies, we sought to explore how talent in Asia is perceived to be different to talent in the West – namely the US and Europe, and what are seen to be the particular strengths of talent in China, Hong Kong and India. Specifically, Community Business as the facilitator and interviewer, asked 2 key questions:

1. “Based on your experience, in what ways do you understand Chinese/Hong Kong/Indian talent to be different from Western talent (eg US or Europe)?”
2. “In your view, what are the top 3 strengths local talent in China, Hong Kong and India bring to organisational success or leadership?”

* See profile in Appendix 1
The views expressed by participants in this study are summarised on the following pages and where relevant have been compared to the country assessment on GlobeSmart. It should be noted that participants – both in the focus groups and telephone interviews, were keen to point out that all individuals are unique and the differences highlighted are, to certain extent, overgeneralised. Whilst it is important to be wary of stereotypes, the findings do provide some interesting insights into not only why companies should be motivated to do their best to retain, develop and advance their local talent, but also an understanding of why they might need to adjust their approaches to assessment and development in order to better leverage Asian talent across their organisation.

**Key Findings**

**Key Differences**

When it comes to key differences with Western talent, there were some themes that were common to all the markets that are the focus of this study.

- **Communication styles**

  Consistent with Community Business’ earlier study, *Bringing Out the Best in Asian Talent*, differences in communication style of Asians were highlighted as a key point of difference. Chinese from both Hong Kong and Mainland China were identified as being less direct in communication than their Western counterparts, more hesitant to voice their opinions and generally reluctant to express criticism – particularly of superiors.

  "When operating in China there is so much indirect communication, you have to read between the lines in order to understand the real issue, perspectives and someone’s position."

  It was highlighted that Asian talent, particularly in China and Hong Kong, tends be quiet in meetings and public forums. This is because people prefer to speak up when they have thought the issue through and have a particular point to make, rather than provide an ‘impulsive’ response. Often they will be more ready to resolve problems or suggest ideas outside the formal meeting environment. Frank T Gallo*, author of *Business Leadership in China: How to Blend Western Best Practice with Chinese Wisdom*, further highlights this difference:

  "Westerners believe in the value of making quick decisions and then taking action. Chinese often want to be sure of all the angles of an issue are reviewed first and all matters are thought through before coming to a conclusion."

  Even in India, where executives are seen to be more comfortable in voicing their opinions or engaging in debate, it was highlighted that there are often subtleties to communication, and that what is being said may not actually be an accurate reflection of what is happening and cannot be taken at face value. Frank T Gallo explains:

  "Indirectness is seen as less threatening and always leaves room for face - of both the leader and the follower."

  He provides this further explanation, pointing to the importance of being open to interpreting things from a different perspective:

  "Both Western and Chinese cultures are truthful. Both Western and Chinese cultures are courteous. But Westerners will usually favour truth over courtesy and Chinese will usually favour courtesy over truth."

* See profile in Appendix 1
Our experience with DIAN leads us to conclude that the comments about ‘Chinese’ apply elsewhere in Asia as well. The points raised by participants in this study are consistent with the profiling of these markets on GlobeSmart’s cultural dimension of ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’. China, Hong Kong and India appear more on the ‘indirect’ end of the scale. As such there is a cultural preference for ‘avoiding giving feedback publicly’ and ‘expressing disagreement in subtle ways’. These are important points to bear in mind as companies think about how they assess their Asian talent – particularly if assessment of top talent is through a lens that values more direct forms of feedback or challenging of ideas.

- **Concept of ‘face’**
  The concept of ‘face’ was highlighted as being an important phenomenon – and applicable particularly in China and Hong Kong, underpinning many day to day interactions. However it was also seen to be at play in India, being mostly associated with giving people of certain status the appropriate levels of respect. Whilst ‘face’ is not a concept unique to Asia, it plays a key role in this region. Indeed, China, Hong Kong and India may be described as ‘high-context cultures’:

  “In high-context cultures, group harmony is of utmost importance. People in these cultures dislike direct confrontation, and for the most part avoid expressing a clear ‘no’. Evasion and inaccuracy are preferred in order to keep appearances pleasant. There is a danger of losing face simply by not reaching an agreement with another person or group, if that was the goal.”

- **Importance of trust and ways of building relationships**
  It was highlighted that for Asians trust is of paramount importance and is critical to building relationships. However, unlike the West, trust cannot be built quickly over, for example, an evening drink, it needs to be built up over a period of time and based on mutual respect. Face-to-face interactions were seen to be critical to establishing this trust – which points to why many Asian executives find it so hard to build their personal network with their counterparts on a purely virtual basis.

  In addition it was highlighted that as Asians seek to build relationships, hierarchy and status are important factors. In China and India in particular, titles are very important, hence the desire for elevated job titles on business cards, and one’s personal educational background and family credentials can be very important. Further it was highlighted that in China and Hong Kong executives tend to only feel comfortable to build close relationships with people at their own level or one level above.

  These comments align to the profiling of these markets on GlobeSmart on a couple of cultural dimensions. Firstly China, Hong Kong and India are positioned nearer the ‘relationship’ versus ‘task’ end of the scale, indicating a preference for ‘taking the time required to build trust’ and ‘view time building relationships as key to achieving good results’. Secondly these markets, and China and Hong Kong in particular, are nearer to the ‘status’ rather than the ‘egalitarian’ end of the scale, indicating a tendency to ‘adapt their behaviour depending on relative status’.

- **Working styles**
  Various comments were made regarding differences in working style between Asian and Western talent. In general, Asian talent was seen by participants to have a stronger work ethic than counterparts in the West, driven by both a strong national pride and the desire to contribute to the growth of one’s country as well as a personal determination to achieve success for oneself and one’s family. Other comments related to a preference of Asian talent, particularly in China and to a slightly lesser extent in Hong Kong, to work in teams and rely on group decision-making. This was seen to be a reflection of individuals not wanting to expose themselves to risk and a preference for the collective rather than the individual.

- **Family is key**
  Asian values were also seen to be a key point of difference. This is clearly a complex and wide-ranging subject, but
a specific example mentioned through the course of this research was the family. It was highlighted that the family is seen to exert a significant influence on people in Asia – and perhaps more so than in the West. Within the context of careers this can impact the type of company an individual chooses to work for, the hunger for promotion and the importance attached to titles and status. There was said to be a greater focus on looking after the family – whether it be care responsibilities for children or ageing parents, and that such factors can impact Asian professionals decisions to travel or relocate.

- **Motivators**
  Money was identified as being a strong motivator for Asian talent in all the markets that were the focus of this study. Whilst this may be true for Western talent too, the difference with Asian talent is that it is linked to a general drive in Asians to achieve a better living standard and status in society. As many are motivated by opportunities for upward social mobility, it was highlighted that Asians also place a high value on education and training and development opportunities. As such they are looking for promotions, increased responsibility, increase in financial compensation and a continued investment in their development.

When it comes to specific strengths that local talent in China, Hong Kong and India bring to organisational success or leadership, a number of key attributes were identified. These are presented market by market.

**Key Strengths**

**China**

- **Local knowledge**
  Local knowledge about the business environment in China was highlighted as being one of the key strengths that local Chinese talent can bring to organisational success. This was referenced both in terms of general knowledge about how to do business in China, but also in terms of specific technical knowledge. Examples of understanding the legal system or banking regulations were given and it was highlighted that this can be complicated because it can vary from province to province, even city to city – so local knowledge is paramount.

- **Better understanding of local clients**
  Similarly it was observed that the ability to navigate relationships with local clients, be they state-owned enterprises or other, as well as government and regulators was a strength that Chinese talent brings. Business is not conducted in the same structured way as in the West, and understanding the local rules of the game, the importance of ‘guanxi’ (a Chinese term meaning ‘relationships’, ‘networks’ or ‘connections’) and the need for ‘creativity’ or ‘flexibility’ to get things done are very important. Interestingly, representatives from the local companies commented that whilst western business focuses a lot on ‘process and data’, in China it is based more on ‘intuition’. As such it was said that Chinese talent generally has a better understanding of how to work with local clients, does a better job in understanding and interpreting what clients want and ultimately is more successful in nurturing and building long-term customer relationships.

- **Self-motivated with the ambition to succeed**
  Chinese talent was identified as generally being highly self-motivated and persistent, with a strong desire to succeed and be promoted. Indeed, Chinese executives were seen to be more ambitious and competitive than their overseas or expatriate counterparts. One of the explanations given was that the latter may already be seen to have achieved a certain level of success and standard of living and therefore may not feel the need to prove themselves in the same way.

- **Harmony**
  It was highlighted that seeking harmony is a strong element of Chinese culture. This was seen to be a strength of Chinese talent, as it means in the workplace they seek to balance the interests of all parties and avoid direct confrontation and hostility including in discussions on benefits, ensuring all colleagues are treated fairly. Frank T Gallo explains:
"Cultural foundations of the Chinese leader are drawn from the teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and Sun Zi and lead to the following traits: collectivist, internally focused, attention to the family or small group, cautious, harmonious, courteous and respect for order."

He adds further:

“Zhong Yong (中庸) is a unique Chinese leadership trait that literally means ‘in the middle’. The business implication is not to go to extremes and to get things ‘just right’. It also leads to the strong consensus building we see in Chinese business culture. The Westerner who often goes ‘out on a limb’ is viewed with suspicion.”

- **Good analytical skills**
  Good analytical skills and the ability to work on tasks individually, such as research, was identified as another particular strength of Chinese talent. This was attributed to the fact that from an early age Chinese students are trained in preparing for and taking exams and therefore very used to working on their own to be successful. The downside of this, of course - and this was acknowledged by the participants, is that they are not so familiar or comfortable with working in teams.

**Hong Kong**

- **Language ability**
  All participants in the study generally agreed that one of the greatest strengths that Hong Kong talent brings to organisational success is language ability. Hong Kong executives working in the multinational environment are usually bi-lingual, speaking both their mother tongue, Cantonese as well as English. However many are tri-lingual too as they speak Mandarin. This was seen to give local Hong Kong talent a particular edge over their western counterparts, who rarely speak Chinese - even at the highest levels, as clients in Mainland China prefer to do business with someone who speaks Mandarin. Local Hong Kong executives’ language ability was also seen to bring an additional strength as it enables them to act as a bridge – not just between senior and junior staff, ie those who may not speak English, but also between global or regional and local offices.

- **Regional and international exposure**
  As in China, it was recognised that local Hong Kong talent brings knowledge of the local market. However, more importantly it was observed that Hong Kong, as a centre of international business and a regional hub for Asia, gives local Hong Kong executives an added advantage in terms of geographical market exposure. People in Hong Kong are exposed from an early age to international influences – be it education, access to news, or its historical legacy as a former British colony. At the same time Hong Kong’s cultural and geographical proximity to other parts of Asia, gives Hong Kong executives broad exposure to the Asia region. As such local Hong Kong executives are ideally positioned to be a great blend of East and West – becoming what is often described as ‘cultural hybrids’.

- **Highly driven and a strong will to succeed**
  Similar to China, local Hong Kong talent was recognised as being highly driven with a strong will to succeed. Hong Kong executives were described as having ‘passion, energy, commitment’ and being determined to win in competitive or difficult business situations. In addition, participants described local Hong Kong talent as having a stronger sense of urgency and a more highly competitive mindset than their Western colleagues.

- **Strong technical and implementation skills**
  Local Hong Kong talent was seen to have strong academic and technical skills. Indeed one participant cited that when it comes to a global rollout of a system, they usually start in Hong Kong because employees in Hong Kong have ‘better technical ability and are more global in their thinking process’. Participants also believed that a key
strength of local Hong Kong talent is the reputation it has built around execution and delivery of action plans. This is in part due to the timezone which allows executives in Hong Kong to work across Asia Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand), Europe and the US. However it is also due to the hard work ethic that is engrained in the culture of Hong Kong. It was further added that Hong Kong people will rarely say ‘no’ to a task. Rather they will take on whatever they are asked to and work around the clock to deliver.

- **Local network and relationships**
  Having a strong local network and knowing how to build relationships with key players in the local Hong Kong market was seen to be a specific strength that local talent is able to bring to organisational success. This was cited particularly with reference to using one’s network to build relationships with wealthy clients. Family networks clearly play a strong role in the way business works in Hong Kong.

- **Humility, loyalty and respect**
  Various personality traits described as being characteristic of Hong Kong Chinese people, were cited as specific strengths. These included being humble – both in terms of thinking through what you are going to say before you speak, as well as not ‘showing off’ or ‘taking personal pride in your achievements’. Rather accomplishments are more likely to be seen as resulting from the contribution of the whole team. It was also highlighted that Hong Kong Chinese talent tends to have a strong sense of loyalty and respect for hierarchy. This was seen as a strength as again it provides for greater harmony – ‘allowing people to execute better and faster and follow leadership to deliver goals and objectives in the most efficient way’.

**India**

- **Ability to manage ambiguity and chaos**
  One of the key strengths that Indian talent was seen to bring to organisational success was the ability to work in a ‘fluid and unstructured environment’. It was highlighted that given the current economic growth in India, businesses are faced with different needs or challenges every day. Local Indian executives have grown up in this environment. They are familiar with this evolving structure and constant change, and unlike their Western counterparts who can become overwhelmed or frustrated, Indian talent thrives in the ‘chaos’ and can manage competing and changing demands.

- **‘Thinking out of the box’ and entrepreneurial spirit**
  Similarly it was highlighted that Indians have been brought up knowing how to work in an environment of scarcity and shortage and hence people instinctively know how to do more with less. This ability to ‘think out of the box’ and improvise was seen as a key strength as constant innovation is central to India’s success. It was observed that local Indian executives have an entrepreneurial spirit and know how to capitalise on the various business opportunities to create business models and practices that are unique and locally relevant. Participants also talked about their reputation as ‘jugars’ – the Hindi term used to describe Indian’s ability to have a quick fix solution to all problems, and referenced this as a particular strength.

- **Hardworking and ‘can do’ attitude**
  Indian talent was identified as having the strength of being hardworking with an optimistic ‘can-do’ attitude. This was observed as emanating from a general understanding that doing well in life means excelling academically and professionally. It was highlighted that Indians are driven to do well for their families and their community which translates into doing well for their company and its brand.

- **Relationships**
  As elsewhere in Asia, it was highlighted that having a strong network of local relationships is a critical strength. This is particularly true in India. Indeed it was highlighted that in India people are so interconnected, that there is no concept of the ‘6 degrees of separation’ – but only ‘1 -2 degrees of separation’. It was said that if you need to
Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development

get things done in India, particularly at short notice, the key is to identify the right contact to make it happen. Local knowledge is obviously critical in this respect.

**Skilled at collaboration**
Another key strength of Indian talent was seen to be the ability to work in teams and groups. It was explained that because Indians grow up in joint or extended families, they learn how to be part of a group, understand their ‘duties’ within that group and how to navigate ‘the system’ early in life. This sets them up to be successful in a collaborative work environment, particularly when it comes to negotiations and selling. As one participant said, “my son is 14 and he already knows the rules to manage a structured deal”.

**Observations**
It is interesting and important to observe, that although there are some common themes, there are also some very distinct strengths that talent in China, Hong Kong and India are seen to bring to organisational success. For China and India it seems to be very much about the innate understanding of the local market conditions of these huge and growing economies, about the way relationships are formed and business is conducted – and the two environments are hugely different. For Hong Kong it is more about language skill and the ability to straddle the cultures and practices of East and West.

However, what is also interesting and important to observe is that many of the strengths that have been identified are not necessarily recognised and rewarded in traditional assessment models adopted by multinational companies. Is the need for ‘humility’ and ‘respect’ so critical to doing business in China for example, a core competency? Or is the ‘ability to build relationships in three languages’, as is the case for many Hong Kong executives, appropriately acknowledged?

It is not hard to see why general approaches to talent assessment and development may overlook local talent or be inherently biased towards more Western styles of leadership. Many competency models and frameworks rely on skills and approaches that do not come naturally to Asian talent. A question to ask is to what extent are these working styles, preferences and strengths taken into account as part of the talent assessment and development process in large multinational companies? This subject is explored further in Part 2: Appreciating Asian Talent.

**What Companies Can Do To Understand Asian Talent**
When it comes to ‘adopting an Asian lens’ to talent development, taking steps to understand Asian talent is clearly a critical first step. As companies seek to do this, Jane Hyun of Hyun & Associates* advises companies to take care:

> “Let us be extra mindful that we don’t apply a one-solution-for-all approach to understanding Asian talent. While it is very important to study country-specific norms, it is important that we not lose sight of the unique cultural nuances in behaviour that every individual who walks in the door of your organisation brings. Otherwise, the implications for losing our top Asian talent are too great and we miss critical opportunities to learn from their perspective. Even people from the same country in Asia share a variety of viewpoints and ethnic identities, with a unique set of preferences, communication styles, and perspectives; and a formulaic approach will simply not work. We have learned that managers who have a less monocultural orientation and more open, multicultural approach to understanding their talent (whether they sit in Chicago or Shanghai) will have a significant impact on fully engaging their global teams.”

* See profile in Appendix 1
Community Business invited its DIAN member companies to share programmes and initiatives they have introduced to better understand their talent pools in Asia. Goldman Sachs and American Express shared the work that they have done in this area and this is described in Case Study 1 and Case Study 2.

### Case Study 1

**Goldman Sachs**

Goldman Sachs wanted to ensure that its senior management teams in Asia were representative of its population in Asia and well positioned to represent the firm in meetings with local clients and regulators.

“Developing and maintaining local leadership is probably the biggest diversity challenge in the region.” said Stephen Golden, head of Global Leadership and Diversity for Asia Pacific.

Recognising that ‘Asian’ is a broad term that goes beyond ethnicity, the firm started by trying to define what it means to be ‘Asian’. It discovered that this was a more complex task than first envisaged:

“We realised that identifying as Asian could be about ethnicity, or it could be about citizenship – but it could be much more complicated than that. We had to develop a model that also takes into account cultural experiences, work experiences, ethnicity and language skills.” said Alison Bott, head of Human Capital Management for Asia Pacific.

In order to undertake this complex task, Goldman Sachs put together an ‘Asians in Asia’ advisory group, made up of senior leaders in different locations throughout the region. Over the course of a year, the firm gathered the views of managing directors, vice presidents and associates, asking questions such as “How would you define Asians?”, “Where would you place yourself?”, “What particular strengths does your group bring to the organisation?” and “What challenges does your group face?”

The result was the development of a **Cultural Spectrum** which categorises employees in Asia into eight categories. This is illustrated in Box 3 on page 16.

Goldman Sachs uses the framework to inform its people processes in Asia. With this tool, the firm is not only able to better understand its Asian populations but also get a sense of how they are doing in terms of hiring, attrition and promotions. As such the firm is able to develop targeted programmes and initiatives that meet the needs of its Asian talent.

It also uses the Cultural Spectrum in training to raise awareness on cultural diversity and facilitate discussion. This is especially critical outside of Asia, where global managers may default to looking at all Asians with one lens.

And for the first time in 2011, Goldman Sachs introduced a question in its bi-annual People Survey, asking people to self-identify where they fit best on the Cultural Spectrum.
### Box 3: Goldman Sachs’ Cultural Spectrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL LOCAL</th>
<th>BOOMERANG</th>
<th>MIGRATORY</th>
<th>2ND GEN (Some affinity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born, raised and educated in</td>
<td>Born and raised in Korea.</td>
<td>Born, raised, and</td>
<td>Born in Australia to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has only ever worked in</td>
<td>worked in New York for 5</td>
<td>Speaks fluent Mandarin and</td>
<td>Learned Cantonese from the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China but may have</td>
<td>years.</td>
<td>English.</td>
<td>family and went to visit Hong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>travelled outside the</td>
<td>Has returned to Korea.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kong frequently as a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country for vacation.</td>
<td>Speaks fluent Korean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks fluent Mandarin and</td>
<td>and English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maybe a local dialect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd GEN (No affinity)</strong></td>
<td><strong>LOCALISED EXPAT</strong></td>
<td><strong>GLOBAL NOMAD</strong></td>
<td><strong>NEW ARRIVAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in the US.</td>
<td>Born in the UK.</td>
<td>Has worked in several</td>
<td>Born in Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnically Asian.</td>
<td>Moved to Japan,</td>
<td>locations.</td>
<td>Moved to Hong Kong last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Asian language experience</td>
<td>perhaps studied there.</td>
<td>Has become culturally agile.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or cultural affinity.</td>
<td>May speak fluent Japanese.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEw ARRIVAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>GLOBAL NOMAD</strong></td>
<td><strong>NEW ARRIVAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in Germany</td>
<td>Has worked in several</td>
<td></td>
<td>Born in Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to Hong Kong</td>
<td>locations.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moved to Hong Kong last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last year.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Asian language skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The countries used in each of the categories are used as examples only and can be substituted with other countries.
Case Study 2

In 2011, American Express initiated an Asia Talent Strategy. American Express recognised that to stay competitive and meet its own aggressive plans for expansion in Asia, it needed to have a strategic approach to talent in and for the region. It has undertaken research with the following objectives:

- Better understand the organisation’s current position in the Asia talent market
- Develop a clear roadmap and talent framework to position the organisation to deliver against its growth objectives in Asia

The research includes looking at its internal landscape, conducting strategic dialogues with members of the organisation’s C suite and regional leaders, and focus group discussions with its employees in five key markets across Asia, including China, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia and Singapore. American Express has also conducted external research with search firms and other market players, as well as seeking insights and best practices from companies winning the war for talent in Asia.

The research is on-going, but from these conversations it has identified three focus areas:

1. **Strengthening the American Express Brand in Asia**: how can American Express develop a value proposition that appeals to local talent in Asia and positions the company for future business growth in the region?
2. **Developing Global Talent**: what role does Asia play globally, and how can American Express get more Asia savvy, giving talent in Asia greater visibility and exposure so that they have a greater voice?
3. **Adopting an Asia Perspective on Talent Development**: how can American Express build a pipeline of talent for the future, focusing on development and mobility issues specific to talent in Asia?

Leveraging the research to build sustainable talent solutions will be a key business priority for 2012, and will determine how the company defines its talent agenda in specific markets.
PART 2: APPRECIATING ASIAN TALENT

Challenge

Academic research on cross-cultural diversity and findings from Part 1 of this research provide evidence that Asian talent is different. Local executives in different markets in Asia have specific working styles, preferences and motivators and bring particular strengths to organisational success. A key question for companies is what impact does, or should, this have on the way they assess and develop talent in this part of the world? How can companies ensure that their assessment processes are not inherently biased towards more Western styles of leadership, and do they need to develop different competencies, leadership profiles, assessment processes and evaluation systems to make sure that they are not overlooking talent in the pipeline? This was the second line of inquiry of this DIAN research.

Approach

Community Business held a series of focus groups with local Asian HR professionals in China, Hong Kong and India, including representatives from both DIAN member companies as well as large local companies, conducted a series of telephone interviews with non-Asian global leaders and sought input from cultural experts, to explore views on whether companies should adapt their approach to the assessment of talent. Specifically we asked the following question:

In what ways, if any, do you think multinational companies need to adapt their approach to assessing Asian talent?

Key Findings

China

Participants in the focus groups in China generally agreed that multinational companies need to adapt their approach to assessing Chinese talent. They felt that Chinese talent was often disadvantaged in standard assessment processes, as models companies use tend to rely on broad competencies that are not well understood or do not come naturally to Chinese talent and rely on approaches to feedback which Chinese executives are not comfortable with. In addition, rating and measurement criteria are often not appropriate to the local market context making them difficult to achieve.

When it comes to adjusting approaches to talent development in China, participants in the wider research had these recommendations:

• Further define the specific behaviours required to demonstrate the competences

Many companies have a global set of competencies by which talent is assessed. Whilst participants in this study generally agreed that it was not appropriate to develop a different set of competencies for different markets, they did highlight that it was necessary to look at them from a local perspective and further define the specific behaviours that are required to demonstrate them. For instance, what does ‘develops and inspires others’ or ‘deliver results’ actually mean and what does this look like in terms of specific behaviours in the Chinese context? Several companies are doing work in this area, trying to further expand behaviour descriptions and be more regionally relevant. (See Case Study 3 for Coca-Cola.)
• **Consider the feedback process**  
  It was highlighted that when it comes to assessing talent in China, it is important to think through the feedback process. It was widely recognised that traditional approaches of inviting feedback – be it through self-assessment, presentations or 360 feedback, may not always do justice to the individuals concerned. This is an issue at various levels. As highlighted in Part 1 of this report, not only do Chinese executives tend to be more humble and modest in their own assessment, but they may also not feel comfortable giving open and honest feedback about colleagues, particularly superiors. In addition, feedback processes that require individuals to make presentations or express themselves in English may disadvantage Chinese talent for whom these skills may not come naturally. Whilst no easy answers were given to address all these issues, it was suggested that companies gather feedback from a number of sources and use multiple ways to assess capability rather than relying on one mode of assessment.

• **Adjust the rating criteria**  
  It was also suggested that when it comes to assessing Chinese talent, applying the same stringent global criteria and performance targets may not always be appropriate. Instead companies should consider adjusting the rating criteria to reflect the local context. For example, since English is not a mother tongue for Chinese executives, it may not be realistic to expect someone to achieve full marks in this area. Instead the standard required should be adjusted for a non-native English speaker. Likewise with regard to technical knowledge and an example from the legal sector was given.

  “A requirement to have a good knowledge of Common Law or international law may be important globally, but it may ignore the strength that a local Chinese executive brings in terms of knowledge of local Chinese law.”

• **Find more appropriate measures**  
  In line with this latter point, it was felt that it was important to think through whether measures that have been set by which to assess performance are appropriate for the local context. For instance, given the early stages of development of the market in China, it simply may not be realistic to expect a sales person in China to generate the same level of revenue for the business as his or her counterpart in the US. The sales cycle is likely to be much longer in a new market where market demand is not so strong and the company is not so well established. Rather than set sales targets in the form of absolute sales volumes – an approach that may be adopted globally, it may be more appropriate to set percentage growth targets and metrics that reflect the development of new business relationships and entries into new markets.

Hong Kong  
Likewise participants in the focus groups in Hong Kong agreed that multinational companies need to adapt their approach to assessing Hong Kong Chinese talent. They felt that Hong Kong Chinese talent was inherently disadvantaged in assessment processes, as models companies use tend to rely on self-promotion, strong communication skills, particularly in English, and a demonstration of competences in a specific way that may not be natural to people in Hong Kong.

When it comes to adjusting approaches to talent development in Hong Kong, participants in the wider research had the following recommendations:

• **Address issue of visibility of local talent**  
  Recognising that promotion discussions tend to be taken by a group of senior managers, often at regional or corporate headquarters, it was highlighted that a key issue that needs to be addressed is the visibility of local talent. Hong Kong executives are typically not good at self-promotion - and in many circles it is seen as not culturally acceptable to flaunt achievements. At the same time they may not have sponsorship at the senior levels to ensure
that they are sufficiently acknowledged for their contributions. It was felt that in Hong Kong, managers can play an important role in being vocal supporters of their local talent.

• **Find a way to look beyond English language limitations**
  A key point raised was that although being tri-lingual has been recognised as a strength of Hong Kong talent, English is not their mother tongue, this can work against Hong Kong Chinese executives. For example, leadership competences often require individuals to demonstrate their ability to think strategically or drive change at the strategic level. However, if Hong Kong executives are not good at articulating their vision or ideas in English they may be limited in their ability to demonstrate this competency. Founder and Managing Director of CSW Associates Inc, Connie Wong*, sympathises with this point:

  "Western managers show very little empathy for the brain energy it takes to be seen as an effective communicator when English is a second, third or fourth language."

Yet more importantly English language proficiency and accents should not be seen as indicators of capability. It was felt that companies need to find a way to look beyond English language limitations and recognise the strengths that local talent brings. Indeed, as Aperian Global highlights:

  “Chinese talent recruited by MNCs on the basis of international experience and English language skills may be at a disadvantage if they lack familiarity with the Chinese market. The key question that companies must ask themselves is, ‘Are we [assessing] Asian talent for a deep understanding of complex and fast-changing Asian business environment or based on English language skills or “like me” models from HQ?’ The people who are working for foreign companies in China or Hong Kong are often the least competent in these market. They have very good English and communication skills but they cannot actually solve problems in a Chinese way or deal with the Chinese customer and they are not even encouraged to do so.”

• **Appreciate different communication styles and approaches**
  There was general recognition that the more conservative approach of Hong Kong Chinese talent does not always serve executives well when it comes to assessment of performance. As individuals may not be seen to be forthcoming with ideas and suggestions, the danger is that they are seen as less intelligent and capable. Again, companies need to find a way to see beyond this difference in style and create an environment where local talent is able to show their strengths. There are also practical ways that companies can address this. For example, companies can provide training for assessing managers, focusing on encouraging active listening and giving individuals the time to express themselves. Companies may also consider providing individuals with one-to-one coaching in advance of an appraisal meeting. Indeed several global leaders interviewed as part of this study said that they held a pre-appraisal meeting to help prepare their team members for the formal meeting.

• **Acknowledge local language skills as a key asset**
  Participants shared the view that although local language skills and Mandarin in particular, are key assets to the success of the business in Asia, they are rarely formally acknowledged – either by senior management or in the assessment process. This was contrasted with the over emphasis on English proficiency. Companies were encouraged to attach greater importance to other language skills which are so critical to global success - and reward appropriately.

• **Recognise that competences may be demonstrated in different ways**
  Although many companies may use the same set of competences globally, it was highlighted that it is important to be flexible when it comes to assessing how these competences are demonstrated. For instance the way

* See profile in Appendix 1
an individual demonstrates competency in ‘negotiation skills’ may be very different in Hong Kong to the UK. Companies were encouraged to take the time to understand the local market nuances rather than merely applying a Western standard on the way things are done.

**India**

Participants in the focus groups in India too, generally agreed that multinational companies need to adapt their approach to assessing Indian talent. Whilst the data suggests that unlike in China and Hong Kong, the majority of senior positions at the local level are held by Indian nationals, they too felt that Indian talent was often disadvantaged in standard assessment processes. They highlighted that the models companies use tend to fail to take into account the local and often challenging context of working in a fast growing, dynamic emerging market such as India.

When it comes to adjusting approaches to talent development in India, participants in the wider research had these recommendations:

- **Redefine leadership**
  Participants generally agreed that when assessing talent, this is done through a Western lens. They felt it was essential to redefine successful leadership within the Indian context and to adapt leadership competencies to include the ‘Indian style’. They cited for example that the qualities required to be a successful sales manager in India might be very different to what is required in other parts of the world. It is worth pointing out that in identifying the need to redefine leadership, participants were not calling for multinational companies to relax their standards or make allowances for deliverables in India, but instead to accept that the pace of doing business and reaching standardised goals may vary due to cultural norms and widely accepted practices. Simply stated, this is about adjusting expectations not lowering them.

- **Allow flexibility for the local context while assessing talent**
  Building on this point further, they said that when it comes to assessing talent, it is important for companies to look at the local context within which they are operating and allow a level of flexibility. It was highlighted that the rules of the game can be very different in India, and that given the wide array of sub-cultures, certain rules of accepted or best practice can vary notably even from state to state. Rather than assessing performance in line with rigid adherence to global standards and processes, flexibility of approach and a focus on outcomes are critical. Aperian Global provides this further example:

  “The typical sales cycle, or amount of time from initial contact until the deal goes through, is much longer in India than in the US or Europe. Signing off on a contract requires multiple layers of approval and necessitates deft navigation through complex organisational structures. India’s legal and financial systems are often weighed down by a complicated bureaucratic process that requires extensive paperwork and a list of external approvals. Competition in India is also fierce and profit margins are often lower than elsewhere. If business development professionals, for example, are measured by US or European sales metrics that fail to take into account the Indian reality, Indian talent will not be able to compete.”

- **Understand maturity of the business**
  A further component of looking at the local context is understanding and taking into account the maturity of the business in that market. Elaborating on this point, participants in the research said that in a growing market such as India, there are very unique leadership skills that are required that might not be important in a more mature market. For instance, qualities like ‘risk taking’ may be critical in operating in fast growing, ever changing developing market like India whilst this may not as highly valued as in a well established developed market such as UK where a focus on ‘maintaining financial stability’ might be more appropriate.
**Assess for potential versus performance**
Participants highlighted that in emerging markets such as India, it is very important for assessment models to appreciate ‘potential’ rather than merely focus on ‘performance’. The newness of the market may mean that individuals may not yet have a proven track record or may not have been given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in a particular area. It is important that this lack of experience or opportunity should not count against local executives in the assessment process.

**Further Insights from Global Leaders**
Interviews with non-Asian global leaders, provided the following additional insights and advice for companies and their managers with regards to how they can adapt their approach to assessing talent - and in particular the appraisal process.

**Include Asians on your assessment panels**
It was highlighted that part of the problem, particularly when it comes to the promotion of Asian talent, is that many of the decisions are made by committees or executive teams based out of the region – usually at corporate headquarters. In addition, these committees rarely have representation from Asia. It is therefore not surprising that qualified talent is often overlooked in the process. A challenge for companies is to think how they can ensure senior Asian executives are included in assessment panels so that they can both champion individuals as well as present an Asian perspective. This view is supported by Aperian Global:

> "If the decision-makers are not based in the region, then trying to communicate the realities to HQ is difficult; the leaders at HQ often don’t trust what is being said, or they just take HQ perspective and experience as the basis for everything. Even when expatriate managers in APAC are giving the feedback to HQ, the visibility from the region is lacking and so the perspective is not given enough weight. Companies working in the region need to ensure that the Asian perspective is given powerful champions within the leadership structure or nothing will get done."

**Provide training for assessors and examine unconscious bias**
Interviewees highlighted that companies should take the time to provide cultural training for all those involved in the assessment and appraisal process. It is important that assessing managers are made aware that everybody operates with certain ‘unconscious biases’ and that they are likely viewing things through a Western or ‘dominant culture’ lens. Connie Wong of CSW Associates Inc reinforces this point:

> "Western managers need to confront their own unconscious bias and socialization about Asian cultures. Failure to dismantle the ‘Western lens’ simply reinforces the message that Asian lack a skill set that only the West can provide."

She adds:

> "How willing are managers from the West amenable to challenging the ‘coded language’ that exists when discussing Asian talent...quiet, reserved, technically proficient, lacking presence, lacking courage, lacking soft skills, lacking creativity.... This is adopting and holding onto a Western lens of Asian talent - a losing proposition for global managers who want to build inclusive and dynamic global teams."

Although it may not be possible to eliminate such biases, managers can offer their teams training to identify and re-examine bias and its impact on productivity and performance. Gulnar Vaswani, Director of Best Foot Forward International* highlights:

* See profile in Appendix 1
“Adhering to the saying, ‘Awareness Precedes Choice’ you can coach executives to understand the impact of cognitive bias (blind spots), and how to leverage their newfound awareness to enhance relations at the workplace.”

In addition it is important that managers receive training on how to conduct the appraisal conversation with their Asian employees as the style and approach may be very different to the way it might be conducted in the West.

For individual managers, the global leaders interviewed had the following advice:

• **Build a solid and trusted relationship**
  Recognising the importance of trust in the Asian context, it is important that assessing managers take the time to build a solid and trusted relationship. This is about being transparent and consistent, being clear about your agenda and motives as well as being attentive to people’s feelings. When it comes to the assessment process, the focus should be on creating the right environment and enabling a candid appraisal conversation. Leaders talked about the need for the conversation to be more ‘nuanced and personal’ when dealing with employees in Asia.

• **Be sensitive to the issue of ‘face’**
  It has already been highlighted that ‘face’ is an important concept in Asia. It needs to be taken into account during the appraisal process too. In particular managers should avoid direct criticism as this can de-motivate and disengage employees – certainly in public, but this also applies in private too. Managers are encouraged to focus on the positive points and have a gentle discussion on the negative points, backing statements with examples and providing constructive suggestions on how to improve.

• **Think about the language you use**
  Given that for many Asian executives, English is a second language, it is important for managers to be very conscious of the language they use when managing teams in Asia - and again this applies to the appraisal process. It is important that managers make sure that they are being clearly understood during discussions and avoid using English metaphors, proverbs, humour, comedy or sarcasm, as they can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. Instead where possible managers should try and use local phrases or proverbs – ensuring that the meaning is commonly understood by all parties. In addition, managers should make every effort to speak slowly and clearly, giving employees time to articulate ideas and share their perspectives as well as avoid the temptation to finish their sentences for them.

• **Allow more time**
  Bearing in mind all that has been said about the conservative nature of Asian talent - the lack of readiness to speak out or the reticence to highlight one’s achievements, not to mention challenges with language, managers should plan to allow more time for conducting appraisal conversations. One global leader talked about consciously allowing at least twenty minutes for his employees to ‘warm-up’ before conducting the official conversation.

**Observations**

In general, the findings from this study reveal that people believe that it is important to have a global standard by which to measure and assess performance in Asia. Whilst some talked about the need for competency frameworks that better reflect the needs of the local market, for the most part they were not calling for significant adjustments or changes. Rather they were advocating for a more localised approach to how those frameworks are applied and interpreted in the local market and further definition in the specific behaviours that are to be demonstrated. This is likely to require some work and engagement with local employees at all levels.
Senior management in Asia was seen to have a key role to play in ensuring that Asian talent is more fairly assessed and rewarded. This, both in terms of highlighting the need to adopt a more localised approach to performance assessment, but also in terms of championing the achievements and visibility of their local Asian talent at senior levels. Ensuring Asian representation on key assessment panels was also seen as being important, as executives from the region will be better able to highlight key talent as well as provide a local perspective.

A strong theme too, was that assessing managers in the Asia region, particularly those who are non-local to the market they are assessing, should be made more aware of their own biases – conscious or otherwise. They need to take the time to prepare themselves for the conversations that they will have with their Asian talent to ensure that the conversations are conducted in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

Diversity Strategist, Vice President, Hyun & Associates, Audrey Lee* concurs with the findings of this study:

“If our clients want to build a company culture that will attract high-potential Asian talent globally, we challenge the management to view leadership traits through a new lens, in addition to investing in ‘soft skills’ development for their employees. The nuances of building relationships and trust are often driven by cultural values and must be re-investigated to understand what it means to be a leader. What are the behavioral traits that define intangibles like ‘executive presence,’ ‘influence’ and ‘confidence?’ Those words might mean a resolute stance and firm, direct voice in one culture, and yet evoke the image of an appropriately deferential and well-crafted indirect communicator in another. It’s time to test our own assumptions in order to be successful on the global stage.”

Aperian Global offers this additional advice:

“Companies working in Asia must address the following common pitfalls when recruiting and evaluating leadership talent:

- Tendency to evaluate most highly those who are most like us
- Overestimation of general capabilities based upon language skill level
- Evaluation of performance based on behaviours, not results (different, acceptable ways of getting the job done vs. doing it my way)”

**What Companies Can Do To Appreciate Asian Talent**

Community Business invited its DIAN member companies to share approaches they have adopted to better appreciate their Asian talent with a particular focus on the assessment process. Examples from Coca-Cola and Herbert Smith are described in Case Study 3 and Case Study 4.

* See profile in Appendix 1
Case Study 3

Coca-Cola has taken a proactive approach to adopting an Asian lens to talent development. With ambitious growth targets in China, this fast-growing consumer brand needs to ensure it has a strong pipeline of local talent to drive and grow the business. In 2009, the company observed that its Leadership Team in China was not sufficiently diverse or representative of the Chinese market and decided that steps needed to be taken to fast-track the development of local Chinese talent.

The company began by trying to understand the core competences required to be a successful leader in China. Through structured interviews with key stakeholders, including the Leadership Team and high potential Chinese talent, the company examined the key business and leadership challenges in China in order to answer the important question: “What are the critical few success factors to be a competent functional leader in Coca-Cola China?” From this process the company identified 7 Key Success Factors – which although closely aligned to the global competencies, were made more specific to the China context. They included for example, elements such as ‘Voicing Opinions’, ‘Leading Diverse Teams’ and ‘Making Quick and Tough Decisions’.

At the same time it sought to better understand the profile of its Chinese talent. It did this by leveraging five years of data from its Assessment Centres in China and compared the results of personality preferences and values of local Chinese talent with those of their European and American counterparts. The results revealed some very different ratings - particularly in areas related to leadership – with many common themes to findings of Part 1 of this report.

With both sets of information - a picture of what is required to be a successful leader in China and a better understanding of the profile of its Chinese talent, Coca-Cola has been able to identify the gaps and target specific areas for development. These include developing Chinese talent to:
- Speak up; have opinions to present; be willing to influence.
- Display ownership; believe in the organisation’s mission; take responsibility for other’s performance; demonstrate energy and passion.
- Take a stand on controversial issues; have the courage to make difficult decisions.
- Build strong networks; be visible; build internal reputation; connect with others.
- Gain broader early career experience.

In response to these key development needs, Coca-Cola is currently focusing its development programmes around 4 main areas:
- **Formal training** and workshops on subject areas where the findings of the research highlighted that Chinese talent need further development (eg influencing, cross-cultural leadership, etc).
- **Action Learning Projects** where participants are given the opportunity to put specific skills into practice by working in cross-cultural teams on a business project which has to be presented back to senior leadership after 6 months.
- **Active Leadership Role** where individuals are encouraged to take on a senior role that typically their manager might do, for example, conduct a senior level presentation on their behalf as a way to build their confidence and exposure.

At the same time Coca-Cola is working with its senior leaders to provide training on this subject. This includes sharing the findings of the study as well as providing specific recommendations and workshops to enable senior leaders to further support the development of their Asian teams. Coca-Cola has leveraged this approach to other countries in the Asia Pacific region, including ASEAN and Japan and it is now one of the key talent strategies to develop Asian talent in the Coca-Cola Pacific Region.
Case Study 4

Herbert Smith

Recognising the significant growth of business and operations outside its corporate headquarters in UK, the global law firm, Herbert Smith, has sought to ensure a more balanced approach to the way it develops talent and identifies future leaders to align with its market strategy.

Until recently its ‘Future of the Partnership Committee’ (FPC), the body responsible for determining those eligible for partnership, was populated from corporate headquarters in London. As the firm expands, the Firm has broadened the representation of the Committee so that it now includes partners from London, Europe, Middle East and Asia; it is also supported in its determinations by senior HR leaders from London and Asia. In 2011, two out of the 13 Committee members represented Asia to ensure perspectives from this high priority market were also included in the discussion on partnership decisions.

In addition, the Firm sends partners from Asia to help run its Potential Partner Development Centre (PPDC), which candidates must attend before they can be considered for promotion to partner. The partners talk with potential candidates, identifying their development needs and providing them with coaching. This approach ensures that Asian perspectives are included in the talent development process.

With the high potential growth in Asia, the firm recognises that nurturing talent in Asia is critical for its business and therefore the Firm has committed to make an investment in continuing developing talent in Asia.
PART 3: LEVERAGING ASIAN TALENT

Challenge

For companies committed to growing their businesses in Asia, it is not only important to better understand and appreciate Asian talent as explored in Parts 1 and 2, it is also important to find ways to leverage that talent across the entire organisation. This requires offering training and development programmes that are targeted to the needs of Asian talent in the region, in terms of both content and delivery as well as providing ample opportunity for Asian talent to contribute to the success of the organisation – both locally and globally. Recognising the importance of leveraging Asian talent, this DIAN study sought to explore what companies are doing to develop talent in Asia – particularly for global roles.

Approach

Through a series of focus groups with local Asian HR professionals in China, Hong Kong and India, including representatives from both DIAN member companies as well as large local companies and via telephone interviews with non-Asian global leaders, we sought to explore what companies can do in this area. Specifically, Community Business as the facilitator and interviewer, asked the following question:

What kind of development programmes or opportunities do you think multinational companies should offer to put more Asian talent into the pipeline for global growth?

Key Findings

There were three clear themes that emerged from discussions in each of the three geographies. As participants talked about what companies can do to leverage Asian talent they encouraged companies to invest in Asian talent for the long-term, give Asian talent greater global exposure and provide targeted training and development opportunities.

1. Invest in Asian talent for the long-term

The first key point that came out of the discussions in each of the locations, is that if companies are going to put more Asian talent into the pipeline for global growth, it is important to adopt a long-term, strategic approach.

- Proactively manage careers
  It was recommended that companies proactively manage the careers of their top talent. This involves looking ahead and identifying the right people for the right roles and ‘stage managing’ the careers of top talent over a period of three to five years. This needs to be a systematic plan and not just an ‘on the job’ support structure. This approach was reinforced by conversations with local companies who highlighted that they have a long term approach to the development of their high potential staff.

- Assign coaches, mentors and sponsors
  It was further suggested that coaches, mentors and sponsors be assigned to Asian talent to work with them on their career plans. Ideally these are international executives who can work with them specifically on how to increase their global impact. However, it was highlighted that these development programmes need to be ‘process oriented’ rather than ‘people oriented’ so that if a mentor or sponsor leaves the organisation it does not have a detrimental impact on the career development of the individual concerned.
2. Give Asian talent greater global exposure

The second key point that participants highlighted would help build the pipeline of Asian talent was to give Asian talent greater exposure globally. A number of approaches were suggested to achieve this.

- Assign local talent to lead regional or global projects

In particular it was suggested that companies consciously assign local talent to lead regional or global projects or client relationships. This approach fulfills several objectives - it raises visibility within the global organisation, gives a greater level of responsibility and exposes individuals to different ways of thinking and operating. In promoting this approach it was highlighted that local talent in Asia should be able to take on these global roles without needing to relocate to corporate headquarters – a concept that seems increasingly unpopular given the enormous growth opportunities at home. As one global leader said:

“Global roles emanating from headquarters or other key hubs are no longer required – one way to build the opportunity for Asian talent to become more embedded in the leadership of the organisation and have more influence in the strategic conversation – is by considering them for global roles without relocating them.”

- Offer global rotations or job swaps

Although overseas assignments are not always popular, it was suggested that companies consider offering global rotation programmes for high potential talent in Asia. This was seen to be particularly beneficial for talent in China and India who typically have not had opportunities for overseas exposure. Many participants were realistic in acknowledging that this type of approach is not always feasible in the fast growing markets of Asia. There is so much work to be done that many companies simply cannot afford to export people out of the region. Instead companies have adopted alternative approaches such as job swaps, where a role is automatically back-filled with an individual from another market.

In contrast, Meena Thuraisingham of TalentInvest offers an opposing view on assignments to global headquarters and highlights the need for ‘hub based in-region development’:

“Companies that bemoan emerging Asian talent not having the experience to operate in a globalised environment need to do more to deploy Asian talent between ‘Asian hubs’. Companies need to be more deliberate about moving talent for example from North Asia to South East Asia or from South East Asia to South Asia and so on to expose them to cross cultural fluency within the region and better leverage the experience of working across the diverse and multiple speed Asian economies. There is a tendency by MNCs to view a stint in head office as the only way to expose and grow talent. As head offices contract in size there is the practical issue of the difficulty of offering assignments there. Diverse and stretching experiences can be found within the region.”

- Provide opportunities to share ideas at the global or corporate level

Participants encouraged companies to find ways to provide opportunities for Asian talent to share their ideas at the global or corporate level – either by being part of global teams, or being given access to senior executives. Tracy Ann Curtis of TAC Global shares this perspective:
Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development

“One way companies can accelerate the development of their next generation of top Asian talent is to prioritise (and budget) engaging opportunities for greater exposure and inclusion - more opportunities to be visible and known, especially at headquarters. These opportunities can take the shape of leading a global team, having a senior executive as a trusted advocate, attendance at key meetings etc. Without focused efforts for true inclusion, organisations run the risk of having top talent feeling invisible – a voice in another time zone half way around the world (that may also sound different) and these leaders begin to believe they do not have an effect on the work world in which they spend so much time. This is catastrophic – for everyone. It’s imperative that we provide more frequent opportunities for Asian talent to share and influence at the corporate headquarters level. Top Asian leaders already know how to manage the incredibly complex local realities, what they need are bridges back to corporate where they can share their knowledge and expertise and have an impact on business strategies and execution plans.”

• Hold global meetings in Asia
  It was suggested that from time to time global committees hold their meetings in the region. In shifting the focus from corporate headquarters, a company can send a very clear message about its commitment to the Asia business and its readiness to engage with local stakeholders. With senior executives present in the market there is an opportunity to proactively market local Asian talent and raise their visibility at the most senior levels.

• Facilitate ‘face-to-face’ meetings with visiting global executives
  It was suggested that when global leaders visit different markets in Asia, a conscious effort should be made to facilitate face-to-face meetings with local executives and invite them to exchange ideas and share their views. This not only gives local executives ‘face’ and demonstrates respect, but also provides a valuable opportunity for raising their personal profile.

• Profile the Asia business
  A couple of suggestions were made regarding proactively profiling the Asia business to global colleagues. In China, participants suggested the idea of organising a ‘China Roadshow’ where a team of executives from China would go to corporate headquarters to present or market the China business – including raising the profile of its key people. In Hong Kong it was suggested that local executives be given air time to talk about the Hong Kong business in town hall type meetings or other employee communications.

3. Provide targeted training and development opportunities
   The third key point that emerged from discussions in each of the markets, was that companies can strengthen the Asian talent pipeline by taking proactive steps to provide targeted training and development programmes for local Asian executives.

• Provide formal development opportunities
  It was highlighted that there is a need in Asia for more formal global development programmes for Asian talent. It was observed that these tend to be reserved for senior individuals based at corporate headquarters. However recognising the leadership challenge and skills gaps, the priority now needs to be assigned to fast-growing markets in Asia.

• Customise training and development programmes
  Participants were keen to point out that training and development programmes should not simply be exported from corporate headquarters, but that time and effort should be taken to customise to the local context. Course content should be validated from a local perspective and case studies and examples need to
be rooted in local situations. Training programmes that fail to do this, it was observed, run the risk of being irrelevant and having minimal impact. Connie Wong of CSW Associates Inc offers this further note of caution:

“Global organizations often commit to ‘expanding the leadership profile to be more global’ when actually they just recycle the Western profile with more training programs so the Asian can learn to be more westernized.”

• **Offer shorter mobility assignments**
Assignments in different locations were seen as a valuable learning opportunity for Asian talent. However, participants encouraged companies to take into account the cultural context in different countries and to adjust their programmes accordingly. For example in India, given the responsibilities at home and the interdependency of family relationships it can be hard for both men and women to be away from their families for extended periods of time, and so companies were encouraged to offer shorter mobility assignments.

• **Expand strategic capability**
As identified in Part 1 of this report, Asian executives have a reputation for having high execution power, but not being strong in strategic thinking. The way many multinational companies are structured can reinforce this stereotype. Often, for example, executives in China or India are charged with implementing strategies that have been developed at corporate headquarters, but they are seldom actually involved in that strategy development process. It was identified that there is therefore a need to expand, or provide more opportunities, for Asian talent to show their strategic capability. This could be done through formal training courses, but the more impactful opportunities are recognised to be projects and initiatives where individuals are given the chance to directly contribute to the strategic process.

**Further Insights from Global Leaders**

Interviews with non-Asian global leaders, provided the following additional insights and advice for companies and their managers with regard to how they can better leverage and develop Asian talent.

• **Align talent strategies with business plan**
Companies should take the time to map out market priorities and align their talent development strategies with their overall business plan. As part of this strategic approach companies should set goals for including local talent in leadership, making a concerted effort to conduct succession planning at regional and global levels.

• **Ensure Asian representation on global committees**
It was also recommended that companies look at the make-up of their global committees and ensure that Asians are represented. As highlighted in the earlier section of this report, this is particularly important for panels and committees that are responsible for developing and promoting talent.

• **Offer formal development**
Several companies offer their high-potential talent the opportunity to take part in formal leadership programmes, often running for an extended period of time and structured to give participants the key skills required to take on a more senior and global role. The challenge is to get more Asian based executives to be included on these programmes. Interestingly local companies, particularly in Hong Kong and India, seem to put a greater emphasis on working with external business schools in this respect. These courses usually have a focus on international markets and it was said that ‘these programmes equip functional managers with the advanced decision-making and execution skills they need to excel as multifaceted leaders’. Particular institutions mentioned were Harvard Business School and INSEAD.
• **Focus on developing soft skills of Asian talent**
  
  At a more tactical level, it was recommended that companies put in time and resources to develop soft skills of local Asian talent. As highlighted in earlier sections of this report, Asians tend to perform well in technical areas in terms of content and knowledge, but are often seen to be not so strong when it comes to aspects such as presentation skills, communications skills, executive presence, social skills and strategic thinking. As Gulnar Vaswani of Best Foot Forward International points out:

  > “These skills are critical to managing results in a multicultural workplace, and have not been the primary focus of education in schools or homes across Asia where success is generally perceived as linear and tangibly measured or quantified.”

  
  Frank T Gallo also highlights the need for Asians to develop skills that will enable them to be successful in a global environment:

  > "While companies should not 'penalise' Asians for not holding certain Western competencies, there are still things that many Asians must develop to be successful in a global leadership position. For example, Asians are not known to be very extroverted and are often not quick to voice their opinions to top leaders, especially if the opinion might contradict something the leader has said. However, global firms need people on the ground who are able to tell Headquarters what is important, no matter how contradictory the message.”

**Observations**

The insights from these discussions are interesting as they point to some of the areas where companies might want to focus their development efforts to leverage their Asian talent more fully. For example, the focus on expanding strategic capability and the development of soft skills of Asian talent.

They also highlight where global companies are not doing enough to support their Asian employees, in terms of giving them sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their ability or potential. In all countries, participants suggested that companies give their Asian talent greater visibility globally and identify more opportunities for Asian executives to lead and contribute to global projects.

A number of programmes and initiatives to achieve these goals were suggested and a couple of specific examples are given in the next section. However, if companies are to truly leverage their Asian talent it goes beyond just thinking about specific programmes and initiatives. Companies should think more broadly about the environment their Asian employees are working in, the prevailing culture and leadership style and consider to what extent they are positioning themselves to bring out the best in their local talent. This of course, was the theme of Community Business’ earlier study *Bringing out the Best in Asian Talent*. Ultimately, companies should be focused on creating inclusive workplaces that enable all to contribute and be the very best that they can be – and considering this from a cultural perspective is critical. Raising the cultural intelligence or cross-cultural competency of the organisation and key managers is key in this respect and is the focus of Part 4 of this report.
What Companies Can Do To Leverage Asian Talent

Community Business invited its DIAN member companies to share programmes and initiatives they have to develop and leverage Asian talent. Examples from Accenture and PwC are described in Case Study 5 and Case Study 6. Aperian Global, also offers additional advice about what makes programmes successful in Box 4.

**Box 4: Successful Components of Leadership Development Assignments - Aperian Global**

- **Boundary-Spanning Opportunities**: Create opportunities for assignees to gain experience in as many aspects of the business as possible. Examples could include cross-functional project roles, lateral role movement, work shadowing, and open meetings that provide critical insight into global strategy.

- **Cultural Training**: Provide opportunities to build awareness and skills for working across cultures, accelerate learning, and ensure success in completing assignment objectives.

- **Mentoring**: Assign a mentor to answer questions, give advice and act as a role model and champion. Focus on transferring people management skills for a diverse workforce.

- **Networking, Visibility and Access to Decision Makers**: Provide venues and structured opportunities for assignees to build relationships and gain visibility that can later be leveraged towards producing strategic global alignment, such networking is almost always cited as the most valuable part of the assignment.

**What Doesn’t Work**

Some factors that can undermine assignment success and sabotage the value of the substantial investment involved are:

- Lack of clarity around selection criteria for development assignments
- Lack of structured learning process
- Role not positioned well with local team
- Limited opportunities to contribute critical knowledge about the local Asian market
- Lack of skills development particularly skills such as running a multicultural team, feedback and performance management, and ‘influencing without authority’
For global management consultancy firm Accenture, leadership growth in China has been identified as a strategic priority. Recognising the significant market opportunities that China offers and the need to accelerate its talent development process, it has recently introduced a ‘High Potential Programme’ for its top talent in the Greater China region.

Each year, the firm now takes a group of its top 30% of managers in Greater China and puts them on an 8-month leadership programme. This comprises face-to-face workshops where participants come together and address subjects related to leadership. The programme has sponsorship at the highest level, and global leaders (including Bill Green, Accenture’s former CEO and sponsor of the programme) fly into China to take part in the sessions. The firm also brings in external speakers and industry leaders to talk about Accenture’s strategy in China – giving senior managers in China exposure to some of the best people. Whilst there is some formal course content, the main focus of the approach is using ‘leaders to teach leaders’ – having senior executives share their insights and stories.

The most extensive part of the programme is the action learning component. Participants are divided into leadership teams and tasked to address a number of business problems facing Accenture in China. Each team is assigned a coach who is a senior leader at Accenture and members have to organise themselves to come together to frame the problem and propose a solution. At various stages, the teams are expected to present their work to the broader leadership in China. This ensures that they move along in their thinking, gives them exposure to leadership and builds their confidence in presenting their thoughts and ideas. The programme culminates with a presentation to both senior local and global leaders and global leaders.

Recognising that providing the opportunity to learn and grow is one of its most important employee value propositions – particularly in fast-growing markets such as China and India, Accenture has been pleased with the prestigious reputation this programme has earned. In terms of impact, Accenture has seen that the programme has led to a higher engagement level among participants and an increasing number of them being considered as successors for regional leadership roles.
PwC began significantly investing in its Asian talent - and Chinese talent in particular, five years ago. The key driver was to solve a fundamental talent sourcing problem. As one of the world’s leading professional services firms, the firm relies on highly qualified and credentialed professionals. However, given that the accountancy profession continues to develop in China, a ready pipeline of local talent with the right qualifications and experience can be scarce.

To meet this challenge, PwC introduced the China Sourcing Initiative (CSI). Through this programme PwC seeks to identify Chinese nationals who have left China to study abroad (primarily in the US, UK and Australia), with a view to recruiting them and relocating them back to China. In the early days, campus hires were trained for 2 years in the overseas PwC firm before repatriating to PwC China / Hong Kong. However, due to the growing need to have new hires acquire the local qualification (CICPA), PwC has adjusted its sourcing approach. Candidates are now sourced directly from campus and brought on board immediately in China or Hong Kong. In targeting Chinese or Hong Kong nationals who have studied abroad, PwC believes it is tapping into a pool of talent that not only inherently understands the local market and has the necessary local language skills, but that also has invaluable international experience. The experience has been successful so far and today 10% of PwC’s annual graduate intake in China and Hong Kong is sourced through the CSI programme.

PwC has also introduced a number of initiatives designed to address some of the specific challenges around developing and leveraging talent in China. These include:

- **English language assessment.** The firm recognises that a lack of proficiency in English can hold many Chinese nationals back – undermining their impact and influence in the international environment. It has sought to proactively address this, putting employees through business language assessment training so that the areas of weakness can be identified and a programme put in place to address them.

- **Towards Leadership Programme.** For those high potential Chinese and Hong Kong employees who are on the partnership track, the firm has also introduced the Towards Leadership Programme. This 2½ day development experience is specifically designed to build up and strengthen areas of improvement in its high performing Senior Managers. Modules include: executive presence, social contact, client contact, group presentation, people engagement etc. The impact of the programme extends beyond the course itself. To ensure individuals remain on track for partnership, time is spent with a career coach who helps map out a plan for ongoing development needs.

- **Global Mobility.** Professionals at PwC have the opportunity to further develop their skills, expand their horizons, and gain international experience through the Global Mobility programme which is run in over 100 countries in the PwC network. Global Mobility looks to identify and move key talent across different territories to encourage staff to gain work experience in the ever-changing and demanding global economy. Staff have the opportunity to enrich their client portfolios and experience the joys and challenges of being immersed in a new overseas culture. PwC accepts international talent into its Asian markets and send its own Chinese & Hong Kong professionals overseas as well with the most popular destinations being the US, UK, and Australia.

Developing a pipeline of top local talent in China is critical to the continued growth of PwC in Asia. It is early days, but ultimately PwC hopes that the impact of these programmes will be a faster progression of local talent, development of well-rounded and global-minded professionals, and an increase in the number of high quality Chinese nationals making partnership.
PART 4: EXPANDING CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Challenge

Multinational companies that better understand, appreciate and leverage their Asian talent are more likely to reap the benefits of their investment in the region and be successful in the long-term. However, focusing efforts on the Asia region is not enough. Ultimately to operate effectively as a global organisation, steps need to be taken to increase the cross-cultural competency, or cultural intelligence, of the whole organisation and particularly those in the most senior levels at corporate headquarters.

Approach

Through a series of focus groups with local Asian HR professionals in China, Hong Kong and India, including representatives from both DIAN member companies as well as large local companies and via telephone interviews with non-Asian global leaders, this DIAN study sought to identify how companies address this. Specifically, Community Business as the facilitator and interviewer, asked the following question:

“How can companies expand the cross-cultural competency of their global leaders – particularly with regard to operating in Asia?”

Key Findings

Many of the global leaders interviewed highlighted the importance of understanding and respecting different cultures as the first and most important step to building and strengthening one’s cross cultural competency. Below is the summary of some of the key recommendations.

• Send global leaders to spend time in Asia

The most effective way companies can expand the cross-cultural competency of their global leaders is by giving them direct exposure to the Asia market. It was suggested that as far as possible global leaders should be encouraged to spend time in Asia, so they can experience for themselves the local market environment. It was highlighted that this should be a significant amount of time – weeks or months, rather than merely days or hours, which is so often the case as senior executives fly in and fly out for important meetings. It is important that global leaders are given the opportunity to experience day-to-day operations, interacting and building relationships with local clients, employees and other key stakeholders, so they get first-hand experience of the challenges and opportunities in running businesses and managing people in the specific markets in Asia.

Recognising that it is not possible to send everyone from senior levels at corporate headquarters to spend extensive time in Asia, companies should prioritise and target those who have critical business in Asia. Meena Thuraisingham of TalentInvest goes further:
“Culturally challenged managers should not be posted to Asian markets, however great they are as market leaders. Sadly this happens more often than not. This is because the way in which multinational companies often choose managers for Asian postings is based almost exclusively on two factors: track record (proven performance in home markets) and expediency (who is available to go). Until this changes we will not see ‘talent developers’ on the ground in Asia committed to challenging their own perspectives of who is talent and who is not, who is worth investing and who is not, and even who is performing and who is not.”

• **Hold global events and meetings in Asia**
  It was suggested that companies consider holding more of their global events and meetings in Asia – rather than merely at corporate headquarters. This not only gives international executives the chance to ‘experience’ Asia for themselves, meeting their Asian colleagues in their home environment, it also signals to all employees that Asia is seen as a strategic priority for the company. This is critical in raising awareness and moving the shift of thinking from a purely Western-centric approach.

• **Offer mentoring relationships between global and local**
  Setting up mentoring relationships between non-Asian global leaders and local talent in Asia was also seen as a valuable way to enhance global leaders’ understanding of Asia. This is a win-win situation as it provides opportunity for learning on both sides - the global leader gains personal insight into the local Asian market, whilst the Asian individual is exposed to global thinking and gains greater visibility at the global level. This can be particularly powerful when combined with a generational perspective - for example, inviting a Gen Y executive from India or China for example to mentor a Gen X or Baby Boomer at corporate headquarters.

• **Provide cultural awareness training**
  Many also mentioned the importance of ensuring global leaders and managers go through cultural awareness training sessions to develop their cross-cultural capabilities. Formal training was seen as critical to not only raising general awareness about the need for cultural sensitivity from a business perspective, but also to make individuals more self-aware of their own cultural frameworks, personal preferences and ‘unconscious biases’. There are various tools and programmes that exist to help companies with this, the most frequently cited are ‘GlobeSmart’ and ‘Cultural Navigator’, outlined in Box 7 and Box 8. There are a growing number of programmes designed to increase cultural intelligence or intercultural literacy – see Box 9 and Box 10. Some companies have also had success in running scenario-based or drama-based cross-cultural training – see Box 11.

• **Provide practical tips to guide behaviours**
  Some companies also provide practical tips for leaders and managers managing multi-cultural teams or working abroad to highlight the specific behaviours that are required. A couple of examples can be found in Box 5 and Box 6.
Box 5: Building Global Savvy with Culturally Diverse Colleagues

In our increasingly globalized world, it is essential to know how to collaborate with people from different cultures. But it’s not enough to take a class or read a book. Here are three tips for building your global savvy with culturally-diverse colleagues:

• **Be aware of your actions.** Be cognizant of how people receive and interpret your behavior. Recognize that you have a different worldview and therefore a different approach to getting work done.

• **Prototype instead of stereotype.** It goes without saying that stereotyping can be offensive and ineffective. Develop prototypes instead. Research the culture you’ll be working with to understand typical responses or approaches, but remember there is nuance.

• **Be curious.** The best way to learn is to ask questions. Invite your counterpart out for coffee or lunch and ask what it means to be a successful leader in his country.

Box 6: Communication Tips
Goldman Sachs University: Voices from Asia

**Communication**

• **Make an extra effort to capture the contributions of all** when communicating in a multilingual/cultural environment. Ask for input from all individuals in group settings. If necessary, coach people beforehand on what and how they can best contribute.

• **Put Asia first.** For late night calls, let your Asian colleagues post and give their updates first. Offer to host meetings during Asia-friendly times to share the burden of differing time zones.

• **Get comfortable with silence.** Give your colleagues time to formulate their thoughts before responding to questions and allow extra time for debate.

• **Language proficiency and accent are not indicators of capability.** For some, English is a second, third or fourth language. Think about your audience before using humour, idioms and analogies.

• **Read between the lines.** Asian culture is characterized by indirect communication styles, where less is more and meaning is often implied. Those who have more indirect styles may find it difficult to publicly disagree. Actively seek their input and perspectives and follow up one-on-one for any clarification, if required. If your communication style is more direct, be aware that others may not speak out to show their engagement.

• **Create an equal voice.** For every meeting (conference call / video-conference, etc.) ensure you have asked for agenda items beforehand and created space for Asia on the agenda.

Observations

Participants in this research overwhelmingly agreed that increasingly cross-cultural competency – of global leaders and the whole organisation, is critical to the success of companies operating in a global environment. This requires not only increasing understanding of different cultures but finding ways to deepen levels of trust between people from different cultural backgrounds so that they can work effectively together. Aperian Global highlights that devolving power from the centre and ‘expanding ownership’ is critical for continued growth in Asia and increasing cross-cultural competency is clearly important in this respect:
“There is a real need to expand ownership by establishing a culture of trust between HQ and Asian operations. Many companies operating in Asia actually have a negative perspective about Asia and they make decisions based on these false paradigms, not on the facts. The companies currently doing very well in Asia are those that really localise talent and devolve decision-making.”

What Companies Can Do To Expand Cross-Cultural Competency

Community Business invited its DIAN member companies to share details of programmes and initiatives they have introduced to expand cross-cultural competency. Many companies talked about specific tools such as GlobeSmart and Cultural Navigator. These are outlined in Boxes 7 and 8.

Box 7: GlobeSmart

GlobeSmart is a web-based tool developed by Aperian Global. It provides business executives with quick and easy access to extensive knowledge on how to conduct business effectively with people from over 60 countries around the world, including Asia. For each of the countries featured, GlobeSmart covers over 50 topics in-depth including:

- **Business Skills**: Understand how to manage and motivate talent, how to negotiate and communicate effectively and much more.
- **Culture and Customs**: Learn about core values and the business environment.
- **Travel and General Info**: Be prepared and know what to expect.
- **Names and Phrases**: Learn and practice proper pronunciation of key phrases and earn the respect of global colleagues.

A key feature is the online assessment tool, the GlobeSmart Assessment Profile (GAP) where individuals can discover their personal profile on five dimensions of culture (see page 7) and then compare their working styles and preferences with any other culture or colleague that they select. It also includes various functions to further enhance cultural awareness, such as a Calendar of Holidays around the world and a forum for posting questions to GlobeSmart Advisor Experts. For more information see: [www.aperianglobal.com/web_tools_demos_globesmart.asp](http://www.aperianglobal.com/web_tools_demos_globesmart.asp)

Box 8: Cultural Navigator™

The Cultural Navigator™ web platform is developed by Training Management Corporate (TMC) and is designed to enable organizations prepare their employees for global markets. It provides cultural and business intelligence on 107 countries to enable companies:

- Prepare employees to do business in global markets
- Scan the world for management and business practices across cultures
- Develop cultural competence to build and manage global alliances, partnerships and value networks
- Obtain critical market knowledge to conduct business across cultures and geographies
- Enhance cultural understanding and bridge cultural differences

For more information see: [www.culturalnavigator.com](http://www.culturalnavigator.com)
Other companies in Asia have worked with external consultants to run programmes designed to raise the cross-cultural competency of their teams. Boxes 9, 10 and 11 provide examples of consultants that DIAN member companies have worked with in Asia.

**Box 9: The Cultural Intelligence Centre**

David Livermore, author of *Leading with Cultural Intelligence*, describes cultural intelligence as follows:

“Cultural intelligence, or CQ, is a globally recognized way of measuring and improving the way individuals live and work in culturally diverse situations. It’s proven to be a consistent predictor of how individuals perform across borders.”

He has set up the Cultural Intelligence Center to improve the understanding of CQ. The Center offers the first academically validated instrument to measure CQ and sponsors research, conducts training, and presents workshops and information sessions on CQ to audiences around the world. It also offers personalized cultural intelligence multi-rater feedback reports as well as cultural intelligence workshops that emphasize experiential learning.

Recognising that a growing number of organizations and executives are seeking assessment, training, and coaching in cultural intelligence and that certified consultants and trainers are needed, particularly throughout the Asian region – the CQC has launched a certification programme in Asia. For more information see: http://www.culturalq.com

**Box 10: Intercultural Literacy Training**

Best Foot Forward International, a Hong Kong based consultancy, offers diversity and communication solutions in association with globally recognized institutions. Intercultural Literacy is one of the programmes on offer and is part of a 4-step programme by The Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute (www.EIDI-results.org) in Los Angeles, CA.

The emphasis of this programme is to acquire the ability to read others accurately, which according to the EIDI, is the biggest block to communication. Despite popular sentiment that differences in language or culture lead to conflict at the multicultural workplace, it is more to do with people’s inability to correctly interpret one another’s behaviour and therefore react appropriately.

Intercultural Literacy training is about being able to decode a wide variety of behaviours so you can deal with them effectively, and has three components:

1) Understanding the cultural ‘WHYS’ behind behaviour;
2) Seeing the upside and downside of all cultural norms; and
3) Transcending your own perspective and reacting with empathy.
Box 11: CSW Associates Inc – Interactive Theatre

CSW Associates Inc is a training and consulting firm established in 1990 by Managing Director, Connie Wong. Connie and her team use interactive theatre based on workplace scenarios to tackle workforce issues and, in particular, global diversity and inclusion and cross-cultural awareness. CSW’s programs in Asia are designed to address the issues confronting global organizations with a significant presence in Asia. Many of CSW’s clients have identified the development of Asian talent locally, regionally and globally as a priority issue for their business. CSW’s programs facilitate an important dialogue essential to understanding how Asian cultural values impact teams within and outside the region.

Using CSW’s interactive theatre methodology, CSW programs provide participants with the opportunity to examine and understand the broad set of diverse cultural values associated with Asian professionals working within the region or globally. The program focuses on the importance of recognizing the diversity of Asian cultures and the critical need to leverage these different cultural assets in creating and sustaining competitive teams in order to meet the challenges of working in a global marketplace today. CSW programs emphasize the need to develop manager competency when leading diverse teams with a broad representation of Asian professionals. It also addresses the importance of engaging with employees, sustaining a culture of meritocracy and driving a culture of inclusion globally to ensure the retention of talent within and outside of Asia.

The interactive training sessions generally work as follows:

• In partnership with the company’s project team, the needs or key issues are identified to establish a program goal.
• A live case will then be developed based on information and data acquired from the company.
• At the presentation of the program, a facilitator guides the proceedings throughout.
• Following the presentation of the live case, an interactive dialogue occurs between the participants and the actors, who remain in character.

Under the guidance of the facilitator, the interactive segment of the program allows a safe but vigorous dialogue that Connie, in her own words, says “never fails to raise the awareness of the participants on both an intellectual and emotional level”.

This methodology is ideally suited to:

• Identifying existing beliefs of employees and managers
• Observing real life models of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
• Examining the consequences of these behaviours
• Exploring ways to resolve them

Examples of some program objectives of CSW’s clients are:

• Understand the diversity of Asian professionals working in the organization
• Increase awareness of the diversity of Asian cultural values
• Identify how cultural values impact team communication and productivity
• Challenge narrow perceptions of effective leadership and communication
• Create an inclusive environment to leverage differences and maximize the contributions of Asian employees regionally and globally

The firm delivers the training with regional teams of highly skilled, experienced and committed associated artists based out of New York, Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore and Mumbai. For more information see: www.cswglobal.com
In seeking to increase the cross-cultural competency of their people however, companies largely adopt a combined approach, pulling in a variety of the above tools and approaches to develop their own curriculum targeted at the needs of their organisations. Case Study 7 showcases an example from Deutsche Bank.

**Case Study 7**

Deutsche Bank recognises that in this growing global environment, executives across the organisation need to have an understanding of different cultures. In partnership with an external vendor it has developed its own Global Core Curriculum. Importantly this curriculum goes beyond just looking at differences between cultures. It examines the complexities and challenges of working in a global environment, and equips executives with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful.

Specifically within this curriculum there is a programme for managers called 'Managing in a Global Environment'. To design this programme, Deutsche Bank engaged with business leaders from around the world, interviewing them to identify challenges and successful approaches to working in global environment. The course content is structured around the following 4 main areas:

1. Global Environment  
2. Matrix Culture  
3. Working Virtually  
4. Cross Cultural Competency Skills

The course is delivered through what is described as a 'blended learning path'. First individuals enroll via an online portal and go through two personal profiling exercises: the Global Team Navigator and Country Team Navigator to understand their own preferences. They then attend a one-day classroom session which addresses the four main areas outlined above, using practical case studies and workplace scenarios as the basis of discussion and learning.

Managers have ongoing access to the online portal where they can review materials from the course. This includes downloading a Flight Pack before they travel on business to a different country so they can prepare themselves from a cultural perspective and better understand how their preferences align with the working culture of the country they are travelling to. There is also the facility to interact in a live forum with the instructor from the classroom training, either to ask questions or to get tips on how to handle different situations.

Having rolled out this tool for managers, Deutsche Bank is now working on a programme targeted at the general population called simply 'Working in the Global Environment'. This will leverage similar tools, ensuring that employees across the organisation and around the world have a common approach and language to use around this subject.
CONCLUDING REMARKS: ADOPTING AN ASIAN LENS TO TALENT DEVELOPMENT

As the quotes from global leaders in the introduction to this report highlight, the Asia market is critical to the growth strategies of many multinational companies at this time. To be successful in this highly competitive environment companies need to identify top local talent to lead their Asian operations and drive their global market strategies. Looking at the leadership of these companies today, it is clear that we are not there – Asian views are poorly represented and much needs to be done to build the pipeline of Asian talent to take on more senior roles, locally, regionally and globally.

The premise of this research has been that many of the obstacles are rooted in traditional ways of operating, and an over-reliance on ‘Western approaches’ that may no longer be appropriate to the expanding global context. This study has sought to challenge that, calling for companies to ‘adopt an Asian lens’ by examining the strengths that Asian talent can bring to organisational success, scrutinising their talent assessment processes to ensure they are not inherently biased and developing targeted approaches to development that meet the needs of talent in this region.

The responsibility for these changes is global. The challenge for multinational companies, if they are to grow their business in Asia - and anywhere else in the world, is to expand ownership of leadership – relinquishing power from the centre and empowering talent from all regions to contribute to global success. Building cross-cultural competency of senior leadership and indeed, all employees, is critical in this respect.

By way of summary and concluding remarks, Community Business offers these final words of advice for companies seeking to ‘adopt an Asian lens’ to talent development:

1. Demonstrate long-term corporate commitment to Asia
   Many multinational companies openly state that the Asia market is critical to their growth strategies. Yet it seems that many of these statements are not backed by the appropriate level of corporate commitment to the region. There needs to be true commitment to embracing Asian perspectives in the way the business operates and a willingness to make changes accordingly. It also requires a long-term approach, developing a long-term vision for the growth of the company – and its people in the region.

2. Recognise the need for a targeted approach to talent development for Asia
   Given the strategic significance of Asia and the challenges the enormous growth poses when it comes to talent, it is critical that companies recognise the need to develop a targeted talent development strategy for Asia. The speed of growth in markets such as China and India, makes this both more challenging and more of a business imperative – as companies struggle to get the best people on board and develop a strong pipeline of talent to drive the company forward.

3. Examine the data
   As companies seek to ‘adopt an Asian lens’, they are encouraged to start by gathering and examining representation data within their own organisations. This exercise is important to uncover where the challenges around Asian talent development lie, and the very process itself is likely to spark interesting debate about what it means to be ‘Asian’ and why this subject is important. Gathering the data can be an important first step in building the business case and highlighting the need for change.
Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development

4. Take steps to understand Asian talent
   Whilst various cultural frameworks exist, these do not replace the value gained from actually engaging with employees in different markets in Asia. Companies should be wary of adopting a broadbrush definition of ‘Asians’. Not only are there very real differences between people from different countries in Asia, but defining what it means to be ‘Asian’ is complex and goes far beyond ethnicity. Companies are encouraged to take the time to engage and learn from their different populations - understand the various strengths and needs of each group so that the most appropriate programmes and initiatives can be developed. As companies listen to what their key stakeholders in the region have to say, it is likely that the feedback will not always be positive. However, as one participant in this research said “companies should not dismiss the complaints as ‘whining’ but listen for the intent behind the dialogue so that progress can be made”.

5. Uncover and reduce bias in the system
   As this study has uncovered, there may be approaches to talent assessment and development that are inherently biased against Asian talent. Whilst achieving certain standards and ensuring a certain level of consistency across the globe is important, the challenge is to make sure that talent in different markets is not unduly disadvantaged in the process. When it comes to competency frameworks, work can be done to reinterpret the different competences within the local context, identifying what appropriate behaviours might look like in the local market. In terms of feedback and rating mechanisms, adjustments can likely be made that enable people to demonstrate their true capability in a way that does not compromise the overall process.

6. Identify targeted development programmes
   With a better understanding of local Asian talent, companies are better able to identify the leadership gaps and target specific areas for development. Many great examples of development programmes have been showcased through this study. In developing targeted interventions, companies should be mindful of the cultural context and develop programmes that are likely to be seen as attractive and beneficial to the individuals involved. They also need to be careful to avoid the mistake of developing training programmes simply designed to make Asians more Westernised.

7. Increase the cross-cultural competency of the whole organisation
   It is not enough to focus efforts purely in Asia. If companies are to maximise the benefits of leveraging global talent, they also need to increase the cultural intelligence and cross-cultural competency of the whole organisation. For people in a global company to work effectively together there needs to be a move from a tolerance of different values to true acceptance and respect.

8. Raise awareness and facilitate discussion
   Finally, raising awareness and facilitating open discussion on this topic is critical. For too long cultural issues – and in particular the lack of Asian leadership and appreciation and respect for the contribution that Asian talent can make to organisational success – is a subject that has not received due attention. Only through willing engagement on this subject, can companies begin to understand the issues involved and develop strategies to address. It is hoped that this research will play a key role in this process, providing companies with a catalyst for initiating discussions and driving change within their organisations.

As multinational companies restructure to reflect the highly integrated global marketplace and Asia’s leadership role within it, they need Asian global leadership talent who can spearhead this strategy. Companies who invest intelligently in developing such high calibre Asian leaders will be ahead of the game.
APPENDIX 1: PROFILE OF CONTRIBUTORS (CULTURAL EXPERTS)

Christie Caldwell
Manager of Intellectual Property Research and Development and Senior Consultant, Aperian Global

Christie Caldwell is Manager of Intellectual Property Research and Development and a Senior Consultant for Aperian Global. She is responsible for the creation of intellectual property to maintain thought leadership in the areas of global leadership, global teams, and global diversity and inclusion. Currently based in Bangalore, India, Christie works with clients across the world to provide global talent development solutions. Originally from Boston, U.S.A., Christie has spent over 12 years as an expatriate in Asia and Europe, living and working in Taiwan, China, Mongolia, Bangladesh, India and the UK. She is fluent in Mandarin.

Anita Zanchettin
Managing Director, Global Talent Strategy, Aperian Global

Anita Zanchettin is the Managing Director of Global Talent Strategy at Aperian Global, responsible for ensuring delivery of high quality client solutions worldwide. She has more than twenty-five years of experience providing a blended solution of consulting, training and web tools to achieve business results linked to global diversity and inclusion. Anita co-authored a book with Dr. Ernest Gundling on the subject of Global Diversity: Winning Customers and Engaging Employees within World Markets. She has lived in France, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Spain and the U.S. and currently resides in Singapore.

Gulnar Vaswani
Director, Best Foot Forward International

Over the last 15 years Gulnar Vaswani has built up extensive global experience in a wide array of organizations across a range of disciplines. Early in her career, she worked on the business and financial side of multinationals, non-government organizations, private enterprise, education, and government sectors as a consultant in various leadership roles. Since 2008 Gulnar has transitioned into full time consulting work to pursue her passion – people development. She is an accomplished advisor, facilitator, trainer and executive coach. Gulnar is engaged both by multinational corporations and by professional groups such as the Young President’s Organization. She has a particular interest in working with diversity and inclusion issues with an emphasis on cross cultural dynamics at the workplace. Other areas of focus include gender initiatives, Emotional Intelligence and Diversity, and Corporate Social Responsibility. For more information see: [www.bestfootforwardintl.com](http://www.bestfootforwardintl.com)
Connie Wong  
*Founder and Managing Director, CSW Associates Inc*

Connie Wong is the Founder and Managing Director of CSW Associates Inc., a leading global consulting firm on workforce issues. Connie is frequently called upon to support business strategies, facilitate diversity initiatives, and administer executive coaching. She is often asked by media to identify and comment on workplace diversity challenges. Connie is an accomplished public speaker and facilitator and has appeared on ABC’s 20/20 and NBC’s Dateline, and was a panelist for a UN Global conference. She has been quoted in print and online outlets including Fortune Magazine, The New York Times, and Gannett newspapers and has been interviewed on radio outlets such as NPR. In addition to holding a Masters Degree in Human Resources and Organizational Development, Connie has completed training with the Harvard Negotiation Project and serves on the National Board of Governors of the Equality Forum. Prior to founding CSW Associates Inc. Connie held executive positions in the financial services and airline industries.

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Dana Chan  
*Managing Director, Global Talent Development Center*

Dana Chan is the Managing Director of the Global Talent Development Center (GTDC). Dana has 25 years of experience as a consultant and business executive in Hong Kong, the USA, Indonesia, Singapore, and China. She has worked with a variety of organizational types, from multinational firms to family businesses to startup companies. Ms. Chan’s specific management experience includes post M&A business process integration, large scale IT management and implementation, and corporate human resource management in China and the Asia Pacific region. In 2006 and 2007, Ms. Chan spent nine months conducting extensive interviews and surveys with senior Chinese executives on the challenges of managing in China and the effectiveness of their expatriate bosses and colleagues. GTDC’s courses for foreign business leaders in China are based largely on the results of these interviews, along with Ms. Chan’s own international management experiences and her extensive coaching of Chinese and foreign leaders managing in multi-national organizations operating China.
Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development

Frank T. Gallo, Ph.D.
Chief Leadership Consultant, Greater China for Aon Hewitt
Frank Gallo is the Chief Leadership Consultant, Greater China for Aon Hewitt. He is one of the foremost executive coaches in China. With over 30 years of management and human resources experience, he works with both Chinese and Western executives helping them to be successful leaders in China. Frank has lived in China for eleven years and is the retired president of Watson Wyatt China. He is the founder and president of Calypso Consulting, a firm dedicated to improving the level of leadership in China. Frank is the author of the highly acclaimed Business Leadership in China: How to Blend Best Western Practice with Chinese Wisdom, Revised Edition (John Wiley & Sons, 2010). He writes monthly columns on HR for CHO-Zhaojin Magazine in China, Forbes China and Harvard Business Review China on leadership. From 2003 to 2007 he was the Chair of the HR Forum of the American Chamber of Commerce in China. He is currently the Chair, Emeritus. Frank holds a Bachelor’s Degree from Hofstra University and a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from the Center for Applied Social Science at Boston University.

Jane Hyun
Asian Leadership Strategist, Founder & President, Hyun & Associates
Jane Hyun, Author of Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling, is a global leadership strategist and management consultant to Fortune 500 companies, MBA programs & nonprofits. Prior to starting this consulting firm, she has held a variety of business and HR roles, including VP of HR/Talent at JP Morgan, and Director of Recruiting at Deloitte & Touche and Resources Global. The firm’s signature programs (Bamboo Ceiling® Leadership Series/The Art of Cultural Fluency™) help organizations leverage the cultural capital of their talent pool to win in today’s global marketplace. She serves as advisor to senior management teams and diversity councils about their Asian talent strategy. Hyun appears regularly on CNN, CNBC, National Public Radio, Marketwatch, Time, Fortune, and various other media. A graduate of Cornell University with a degree in Economics/International Studies, she has a passion for helping individuals realize their fullest potential in the workplace and community. For more information see: www.hyunassociates.com

Audrey S Lee
Vice President, Hyun & Associates
Executive Coach, Leadership and Diversity Strategist
Audrey Lee, Vice President of Hyun & Associates, is a leadership and diversity strategist, bringing nearly 20 years of business experience and cultural expertise to her consulting practice with Fortune 500 companies. A seasoned stage performer, she also translates her on-stage experiences to programs that focus on effective communications and executive presence. She is a frequent speaker at international conferences, corporate initiatives, and community events. Prior to joining Hyun & Associates, she managed key marketing initiatives in high technology companies such as Adaptec, Fujitsu, Philips and Raychem. Ms. Lee is a graduate of Georgetown University’s Leadership Coaching Program, and also holds dual degrees in Spanish and Music from Indiana University. She currently serves on the Advisory Board for the New York Asian Women’s Center (NYAWC), and is an adjunct faculty member at Cornell University, ILR School and the Conference Board. For more information see: www.hyunassociates.com
Adopting an Asian Lens to Talent Development

Tracy Ann Curtis  
*Founder and Principal Consultant, TAC Global*

Tracy Ann Curtis has over 20 years of experience working with high potential managers and executives in organizations in India, Greater China, South East Asia, Japan, Europe and North America. Her expertise is in leading large-scale organizational development; designing and facilitating talent management strategies; building innovative and inclusive cultures; and coaching the next generation of top talent. Tracy Ann relocated to Bangalore, India in 2004 to help set up Cisco’s Global IT Development Center. She then transitioned into a regional role where she formulated a Talent Management strategy for the region and directed work and staff across 14 countries. Tracy Ann is passionate about developing high performing cross-cultural and virtual teams while ensuring regional goals are aligned with headquarters and there is consistency in delivery. Encouraging talent development and advancing women and diversity in the workplace is the strong base upon which Tracy Ann builds cultures, strategies and leaders. Tracy Ann has worked as an employee and a consultant with a number of organizations, including Cisco, Gap Inc., Sun Microsystems, Thomson Reuters, Providian Financial Corporation, California Casualty, Marconi Medical, India’s NASSCOM and Community Business. Tracy Ann holds a Masters Degree in Organizational Development & Analysis from the Weatherhead School of Management (USA), and Bachelor Degrees in Psychology & Philosophy from Ohio Wesleyan and University College London (USA & United Kingdom), as well as a number of certifications for programs related to talent assessment, people development and executive coaching.

Meena Thuraisingham  
*Director and Principal, TalentInvest*

Meena Thuraisingham has more than 30 years experience in succession planning, talent management and culture change in Australia, Asia and the UK. She works with CEOs, investors and top teams in management assessment, succession, culture change and specifically the role leaders play in creating high performance teams. She also works with clients to develop the leadership and talent implications of their growth plans, assessing ‘fit for purpose’ leadership, and actioning identified vulnerabilities in order to strengthen succession for C-Suite roles. Meena has worked with and consults for global companies such as Intel Corporation, Exxon, HSBC, Credit Suisse, Westpac Banking Corporation, Ernst and Young, MARS, John Lewis Partnership, Telstra, AMP and many others. She has also undertaken a range of projects across Asia, South Asia and the Middle East, building her experience and understanding of cross cultural challenges. Meena is an accredited Executive Coach (accreditation from the US based Center for Creative Leadership) and is on the Executive Coaching panel of several publically listed companies. For more information see: [www.talentinvest.com.au](http://www.talentinvest.com.au)
APPENDIX 2: HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS THEORY

Geert Hofstede has operated in an international environment since 1965, and his curiosity as a social psychologist led him to the comparison of nations, first as a travelling international staff member of a multinational company (IBM) and later as a visiting professor at an international business school in Switzerland. His 1980 book Culture’s Consequences combined his personal experiences with the statistical analysis of two unique data bases. The first and largest comprised answers of matched employee samples from 40 different countries to the same attitude survey questions. The second consisted of answers to some of these same questions by his executive students who came from 15 countries and from a variety of companies and industries. Systematic differences between nations in these two data bases occurred in particular for questions dealing with values. Values, in this case, are “broad preferences for one state of affairs over others”, and they are mostly unconscious.

The first four dimensions
The values that distinguished countries (rather than individuals) from each other grouped themselves statistically into four clusters. They dealt with four anthropological problem areas that different national societies handle differently: ways of coping with inequality, ways of coping with uncertainty, the relationship of the individual with her or his primary group, and the emotional implications of having been born as a girl or as a boy. These became the Hofstede dimensions of national culture: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, and Masculinity versus Femininity. Between 1990 and 2002, these dimensions were largely replicated in six other cross-national studies on very different populations from consumers to airline pilots, covering between 14 and 28 countries. In the 2010 third edition of the book Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, scores on the dimensions are listed for 76 countries.

Power Distance
Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society’s level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. Power and inequality, of course, are extremely fundamental facts of any society and anybody with some international experience will be aware that “all societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others”.

Uncertainty Avoidance
Uncertainty avoidance deals with a society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, different from usual. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth: “there can only be one Truth and we have it”. People in uncertainty avoiding countries are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. The opposite type, uncertainty accepting cultures, are more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to; they try to have as few rules as possible, and on the philosophical and religious level they are relativist and allow many currents to flow side by side. People within these cultures are more phlegmatic and contemplative, and not expected by their environment to express emotions.

Individualism
Individualism on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism, is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone
is expected to look after her/himself and her/his immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. The word collectivism in this sense has no political meaning: it refers to the group, not to the state. Again, the issue addressed by this dimension is an extremely fundamental one, regarding all societies in the world.

Masculinity
Masculinity versus its opposite, femininity, refers to the distribution of emotional roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found. The IBM studies revealed that (a) women’s values differ less among societies than men’s values; (b) men’s values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women’s values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women’s values on the other. The assertive pole has been called masculine and the modest, caring pole feminine. The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are more assertive and more competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men’s values and women’s values.

The fifth dimension: Long-Term Orientation
Research by Michael Bond and colleagues among students in 23 countries led him in 1991 to adding a fifth dimension called Long-versus Short-Term Orientation. In 2010, research by Michael Minkov allowed to extend the number of country scores for this dimension to 93, using recent World Values Survey data from representative samples of national populations. Long-term oriented societies foster pragmatic virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular saving, persistence, and adapting to changing circumstances. Short-term oriented societies foster virtues related to the past and present such as national pride, respect for tradition, preservation of ‘face’ and fulfilling social obligations.

The sixth dimension: Indulgence versus Restraint
In the same book a sixth dimension, also based on Minkov’s World Values Survey data analysis for 93 countries, has been added, called Indulgence versus Restraint. Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.

Dimension scores are relative
The country scores on these dimensions are relative - societies are compared to other societies. These relative scores have been proven to be quite stable over decades. The forces that cause cultures to shift tend to be global or continent-wide - they affect many countries at the same time, so that if their cultures shift, they shift together, and their relative positions remain the same.

Box 11: Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions in Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term orientation</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulgence versus restraint</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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5. ibid

6. See: http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/face


8. Content taken from the website of Geert and Gert Jan Hofstede. See:
   http://www.geerthofstede.nl/culture/dimensions-of-national-cultures.aspx

9. Scores taken from: http://www.geerthofstede.com/media/651/6%20dimensions%20for%20website.xls
Other research initiated by the Diversity & Inclusion in Asia Network (DIAN) includes:

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