



# Act Global - Think Local



**F**or years the cliché in HR management used to be “Act local – Think global”. However, in the current networked world, this needs revision. No longer should the HR community be working in an old-fashioned way, it is time for a change: “Act global – Think local”.

### What’s happening on the global labour market?

Driven by increasingly linked markets and economies and supported by rapid developments of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), globalisation has produced an array of fundamental changes in the way we work, conduct business and in the ‘career demands’ made by the global workforce.

Compared to the booming global economy of the 1990s, the global economic climate has now drastically changed the world in which HR professionals need to operate. ‘9/11’ proved to be the final push for the

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global economy to rush into a downturn. Globalisation - and as a consequence expatriation - took some serious blows. However, even though extensive compensation and benefits packages are no longer among the standard features for expatriates, international exposure is among the career expectations of the generation currently entering the labour market.

### Is virtual expatriation the new reality?

In order to attract, motivate and retain the right workers, HR managers need to understand the dynamics of today’s global workforce. Globalisation, fuelled by ICT, has turned the world into a smaller place and virtual expatriation will become the reality of the 21st century. As a result short-term globe hoppers will most likely replace traditional expatriates.

The near future in expatriation will be people working in – virtual – multinational teams and ‘commuter assignments’ (i.e. expatriates who return to their home country in the weekends). The traditional three to five year

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assignments are about to become history. The impact of globalisation is that we are living in a networked environment, where the main HR challenge will be the way in which companies support the networked-enabled – or virtual – knowledge worker.

### What about cultural differences in a networked world?

As virtual expatriation becomes more common, will cultural differences become less important? No, in a global networked world these differences will become even more important than before. The fact that cultural differences may not be as easy to decipher in e-mail as in face-to-face communication does not mean they have ceased to exist. We probably need to be more alert to them to overcome serious problems in an interlinked and networked world. Just think of the implications of the words, “You should better” in an e-mail conversation. To an American this would mean ‘you have to’, whereas a Dutch person will most likely interpret it as, ‘that is also an option’. HR people need to be aware of the implications of cultural differences in a changing world. To succeed nowadays, “Act global – Think local” is their key to successful new forms of expatriation.

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