

How to Make Your Company More Creative? Hire a Senior Executive Who Worked Abroad



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Creativity is an important driver of competitive advantage for companies. One way your company can be more creative is to hire executives who worked abroad. These people are likely to offer non traditional solutions to your problems.

I recently did a study with Frederic Godart, Will Maddux and Adam Galinsky. We looked at how foreign working experience of fashion designers affected creativity of their collections. We found that fashion critics and buyers were more likely to view a designer's fashion collection as creative, if this designer worked (or is currently working) abroad.

Apparently, working outside of your home country changes the way you think: by looking at how different people in different cultures solve problems

differently, your brain learns to think about how to approach any business problem differently. If a problem is solved in France in one way, perhaps the Italians solve it in a different way. And you can perhaps think of the third way to solve the same problem—by combining the French and the Italian approach. Karl Lagerfeld is even reputed to work in Italy and France during the same day!

Working abroad also shapes your personal network. If you work in one country and then go work to another country, you become a bridge between professional communities in both countries. For example, a fashion designer who works in France gets to know other French designers and when she moves to work to Japan, she can get to know Japanese designers. If she still stays in touch with her French friends, she will know what is going on in French fashion world while she is working in Japan. And this knowledge will help her combine French and Japanese fashion influences in the future collections. Our study shows that such collections are seen as being very creative.

So, next time you are looking for a senior executive to fill a job that requires creativity and ability to innovate, look up their Linked-In profile. Does it indicate that the person worked in several different countries? If so, she or he is worth looking at, as this person is likely to be indeed creative.

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