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The Global Competition for Talented People

Industry Speaks

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Abstract

This article discusses “people challenges,” and is gathered from the authors own research working with both public and private sector businesses. It is divided in two sections: the first addresses the new environment of “doing more with less” and how this affects labor. The second part focuses on the personal and professional characteristics valued by public and private organizations. These characteristics include: tuned, simplified, adaptive, innovative, investor, related, broad, dreamer, results-driven and communicative. A brief description follows.

Keywords: talents, labor, self-improvement, education

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Introduction

The business of agriculture is entering a new era which requires a different type of human resource management and skill development. To meet the challenge, how do we attract people who possess the talents needed to fill the food and agribusiness jobs of the future?

Several factors are driving growth in the food and agro sector. It's forecasted that the world population will reach 9 billion people by 2050. As urbanization in Asia and Africa rise, economic development and income distribution in highly populated countries is creating new tensions on finite resources. This coupled with new public policies for food distribution and competing interests for land usage for other non- food items such as: fuel, plastics and electricity are providing a setting for a perfect storm.

If 1.27 billion tons of grains and 258 million tons of meat were produced in 2006, its projected we will need almost 1.6 billion tons of grains and 460 million tons of meat to feed the world population by 2050 (Mano and Ikeda 2013).

As consumption rises, more pressure will strain local and regional governments as they seek to manage land (soil) use, water usage, energy (sun and power), and agricultural inputs. These decisions made by local institutions and governments, require manpower, new technologies, education, credit, storage capacity, transport, connectivity, logistics, and finally, management capabilities.

Societies that are better able to manage their resources now will be better able to capture this food and agro related market growth and promote its development in the future.

In the last five years, we've seen a dramatic change in two of these resources: people and management. In Brazil, we've moved from a period of unemployment with plentiful labor for the food and agribusiness production to an era where there is a shortage of available workers. Additionally, they are both expensive and low-skilled. This is threatening the ability of food and agribusiness to thrive and is one of the biggest challenges in Brazil—a country that has greatly benefited from of this demand-growth period due to the richness of resources.

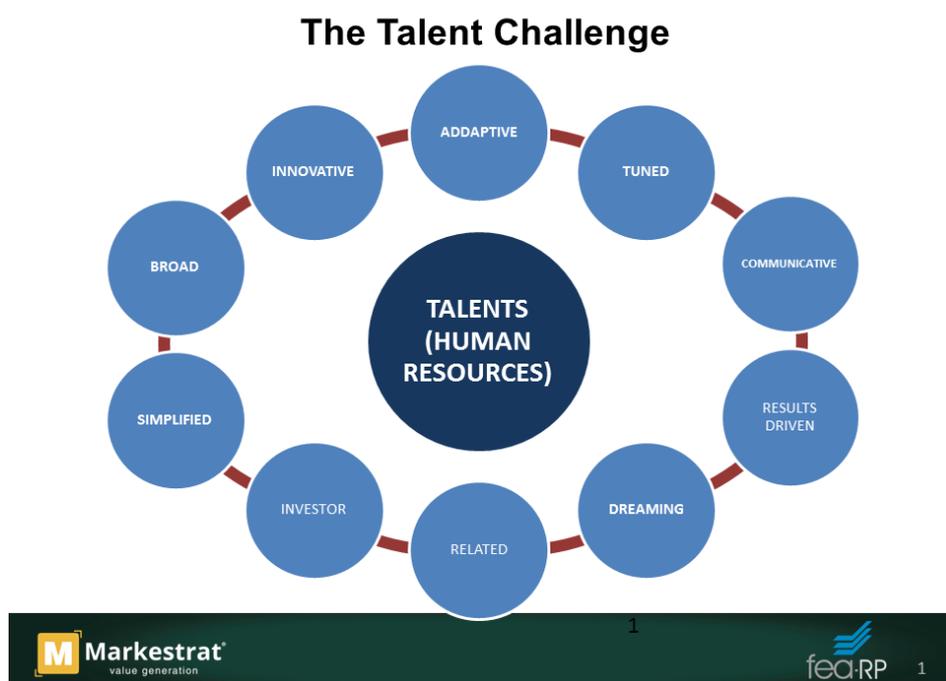
Massive education is necessary in order to create the talent necessary for the future. This is something that takes time and is not easily solved. Countries which have made a strategic investment in education are now reaping the rewards. For example, in Russia and Chile, 24% of the population between ages 25 to 34 years have attended universities, while in Brazil and South Africa its remains closer to 7% (Mano and Ikeda 2013).

China has 194,000 people currently studying in US universities, while India has 107,000 and Brazil has only 9,000. Forty percent of the researchers working in the US are foreigners. In Brazil, only 7% are foreigners. Brazil has 9% of its researchers living abroad while India has 40%. It's estimated that today, Brazil lacks 150,000 engineers for its companies (Mano and Ikeda 2013).

In the past, 12% of the jobs in developed countries required a university degree, today its 25%. In emerging economies, this figure grew from 4 to 10% in the same period. McKinsey & Company estimates that we will have a deficit of 40 million professionals with a university degree in the world by 2020 (Baily and Manyka 2013).

We are moving to an era of talent scarcity—urgency even more pronounced in the food and agribusiness sector because highly skilled young people often find other industries more exciting. The task of finding, localizing and attracting qualified people is becoming increasingly important to each country's operating policy. Some countries are actively pursuing this strategy, while others, like Brazil, have bureaucratic processes that make it extremely difficult to simply secure a work visa.

The second part of this article reflects discussions we've had with employers, farmers, and government agencies in several countries. It also reflects our own feelings as employers. Based on these discussions, we offer a list of special characteristics needed by governmental officials and food and agribusiness corporations to become and remain competitive:



TUNED TALENTS: stay tuned to the macro-environment (politics, economics, socio-cultural and technology), by reading, watching, listening and paying attention. Develop a global view, with cultural sensitivity.

SIMPLIFIED TALENTS: learn how to simplify processes, be practical, search for basic and faster solutions to problems.

ADAPTIVE TALENTS: the capacity to adapt in a fast changing environment is one of the most important characteristics and solutions for change.

INNOVATIVE TALENTS: innovate and create your own businesses and find your own solutions, differentiating, getting away from the basic.

INVESTOR TALENTS: never stop studying, advancing your knowledge and desire to learn more. Status quo is one of the worst characteristics in a workforce.

RELATED TALENTS: interact well with others, build teams, work in groups, and; share knowledge and solutions. Respect differences and assign people to duties that best use their skill-sets. Motivate and encourage them to be competitive. By including them in the process they take ownership and feel valued. It improves confidence.

BROAD TALENTS: provide feedback and respect differing opinions. Have constructive arguments and reflect as to why opinions vary. Read editorials, opinion pieces and learn always to see the facts through different lens.

DREAMING TALENTS: keep dreaming that the targets, results and desired outcomes are possible. Search for excellence, dream more. People that don't dream tend also to flatten out.

RESULTS DRIVEN TALENT: deliver results. Manage your head, health and happiness. Develop a passion for efficient planning and become results oriented. Stay present and available.

COMMUNICATIVE TALENTS: communicate efficiently. Not excessively, trying to sell yourself, but neither remaining silent towards the tasks at-hand. Search for balance and elegance by sharing the major achievements with your team.

For those of us involved in education, it's imperative that our universities provide dense theory founded on global business models and methods, while strongly linking to markets, and practical application. Our roles as educators are not only to produce good technicians, but also instill strong character and further global citizenship, through promoting social and environmental causes as well as community development.

People are probably the most challenging resource for the food and agricultural sector in the coming years. But when a challenge exists, it is followed by an opportunity, and this is the way we like to treat it.

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