

Giving back to get back

IBM: Corporate Service Corps



In a bid to foster a new generation of truly global leaders, IBM took leadership training out of the classroom and into the field by creating a highly innovative development programme for its staff. The technology solutions provider has taken advantage of its global reach to create a workforce that is not only international, but one that truly thinks and acts in accordance with IBM's globalisation strategy.



BECOMING GLOBALLY INTEGRATED: IBM HR LEADER, GARY KILDARE OFFERS HIS TOP TIPS

The theory of the 'globally integrated enterprise' rejects the idea of a multi-national organisation with carbon copies of the parent company in each country. This was introduced in 2006 by IBM CEO and Chairman Samuel Palmisano and takes advantage of breakthroughs in communications technology, innovation and decreased barriers of entry to create a truly global company, one that doesn't respect borders and creates pockets of talent the world over.

Preparing an organisation for such an endeavour is not simple. **Gary Kildare**, Vice President, Human Resources, Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific, shares his tips on how to foster a globally integrated culture in your company.

- **Leadership** Not only is good quality leadership needed, but also an understanding by leadership of the company's direction, so that they can help lead staff and get the required traction.
- **Skills** (and the ability to secure them) Have an understanding of the skills and level of skills that exist within your organisation. Know the areas where the holes are and what is needed to fill them. This can require investment in basic education and training programmes as well as excellent management skills.
- **Cultural awareness** As different cultures can impact a business' operations and communication, two personal qualities are needed:
 1. Humility - Recognise it's not the same everywhere and that you may be exceptionally capable, but it's important sometimes to be humble in the application of all of your capabilities.
 2. Curiosity for the world around you.
- **Regulation** Be strict about your approach to intellectual property. When people are working more collaboratively around the world, especially with other organisations, with integrated technologies and business models, there must be a common understanding about how these things are protected.
- **Organisational culture** The leadership must be long-term, as a global strategy will involve a lot of shift and change within the culture. This change in the organisation's style will include new forms of partnerships among enterprises, working within different segments of society and establishing new standards for managing complex markets.



THE NETWORK
OF LEADERS

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Left: IBM's Kate Robinson poses with friends and colleagues in front of a well built for locals in the Carmen Municipality in the Philippines. (above) Kate enjoys her Philippines-style commute to work

Corporate social responsibility has become increasingly important to organisations with many looking to give back to the local and international communities in which they operate. IBM's new development programme, the Corporate Service Corps, has revealed that giving back to communities in which they work, not only raises the brand profile but provides a great stepping stone in the development of future leaders.

Criticaleye's Andrew Minton spoke to Celia Moore, Andy McFarlane, and Jonathan Ferrar at IBM about this new initiative within the Global Citizen's Portfolio (an umbrella programme designed to help employees enhance skills and expertise).

"The Corporate Service Corps (CSC) is one of our global community programmes that focuses on how our people and our skills can contribute not only to the globalisation of our business, but helping organisations in developing countries make progress. All this while helping develop our people at the same time," says Celia Moore, who manages Corporate Community Relations for Europe, Middle East and Africa.

Launched in 2008, CSC was created to increase IBM's global influence, improve employees' leadership skills, help local communities and foster the economies

of emerging markets. The programme gathers teams of IBMers with diverse skills, from different countries and business units to work on four-week projects of significant value in developing countries. "The Corporate Service Corps meets an internal need for our business to develop new leadership competencies, particularly around cultural diversity and understanding the different global markets," says Celia.

IBM has been working at changing the direction of its leadership development. "Our aim is to allow people to develop skills that complement our new globalisation strategy," says Jonathan Ferrar, who is the Director of Human Resources, UK and Ireland. "It allows people from different cultures, countries and business areas to come together and learn from each other, as well as learning from facilitators and other executives about the direction of the business."

With this new direction in mind, IBM not only engages in country-based leadership programmes, but also allocates resources to the Global Leadership Centre in New York.

"We've invested in the CSC because we believe that it's another way of bringing people together to learn some of our leadership competencies, especially around cultural awareness, and bring the global dynamics of our firm together," explains Jonathan.

The programme was an immediate success among employees: “There was huge interest. The opportunity to go to a developing country and work on a project is enormously attractive. We had close to 2,800 applicants for 100 places,” adds Celia.

There has been so much interest in the programme that the company expanded the project before the first phase was fully implemented. They planned to send 500 new candidates in 2009 on top of the 300 that were accepted in 2008.

“We saw immediate success in terms of both employee interest and tangible benefits. From the moment people set their foot on the ground in these locations, it was quite overwhelming,” Celia asserts.

“We are bringing together a global team,” she says. “The whole thing about building cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity is really stunning.

“It was perhaps very naïve on my part to think the team going to Romania, the first team I worked with, was going to learn primarily about European culture, Romania and the country’s transition from communism.

“But actually their greater cultural awareness development came from working with people from Japan, India, and North America. We put them in a modest hotel where they lived very communally. They were sharing their lives for a whole month and talking about their families and life at home, and learning about one another’s customs and traditions,” reflects Celia.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

IBM’s leadership has seen notable differences in participants upon returning to their home countries.

“On a personal front, I felt that the one month in CSC gave me the learning equivalent to two years in normal work! It was a thrilling and eye opening experience,” says Praveen Haiharan, a Managing Consultant in the Strategy and Change area of IBM India.

Praveen took part in the first round of CSC, working on projects in Timisoara, Romania. He provided consulting advice to Advocacy Academy, an organisation that encourages the participation of private entrepreneurs in policymaking.

Praveen helped with their long-term strategy and ideas for self sustenance,



IBM CSC Philippines Team 2 in front of VEST Pension House

while his teammates provided advice to other organisations in the area.

“This kind of programme - one that involves working with a totally new team in a totally new country to deliver results in a relatively short timeframe - provided all the ingredients for grooming talented individuals to be future global leaders. Some of the best resources of the company get to learn from each other while contributing to causes that will benefit societies at large,” Praveen adds.

Another participant, Kate Robinson, IT Management Consultant, Global Technology Services at IBM UK, worked in the Philippines within the Human Resources Management and Development Office of the Provincial Government of Bohol (PGBh). She introduced new HR practices and trained staff.

“This experience presented me with a unique opportunity to lead and be part of a truly global team in a new environment,” says Kate. “My confidence has grown as a result of successfully achieving objectives in an area which I did not consider my expertise and in a completely new and unstructured environment.”

Being involved in CSC also changed Kate’s perception of her employer. She says: “Before this experience I felt like I was an employee of IBM UK. This experience reminded me that I belong to a truly global IBM Corporation and that I have career opportunities which span the world.

“I am proud that IBM invests in programmes such as Corporate Services Corps and understands the importance of Corporate

Citizenship combined with leadership development. All of these aspects lead to me feeling more satisfied with my career at IBM and I feel more committed to the organisation.”

Not only did Kate and nine others work on their individual projects in the community, they also helped provide a well for villagers in the Carmen Municipality, who had no access to clean water and were forced to either drink rain water or travel long distances to purchase it from neighbouring communities.

“We discovered that a well had been half-built but, during the course of two years, was never finished due to poor management, lack of skills, and lack of money,” says Kate. The group facilitated a meeting between the relevant parties and managed to gain a commitment from them to finish the well. The IBM volunteers then provided monetary support for the project.

“The well was finished in just two and a half weeks and, before we left, was providing clean water to the village for the very first time. We learned that small acts lead to great things!” asserts Kate.

GOOD FOR IBM

The programme, which comes with a minimal cost of just 20 working days and the living costs per individual, provides tremendous benefits to the company. It improves the brand image of IBM and forms relationships with organisations that may be beneficial in the future.

“[Kate] opened our eyes to new ways of working,” says a representative from PGBh. “Her work ethic provided us with

new perspectives that our clients will be happy to see put into practice.”

Kate’s efforts also helped change PGBh’s perception of IBM. It went from being an abstract organisation, removed from their world to one that employs real people who are willing to work together to solve problems.

“The fact that IBM can integrate with these communities and leave a lasting legacy through these initiatives around the world is just really positive,” says Andy McFarlane, Director of Marketing, UK, Ireland and South Africa.

Jonathan says, “There may be business benefits that IBM can capture from it, including opening new markets, opportunities in government, government relations, as well as opportunities in mid-markets in some of these countries.

We set it up for brand reputation, initiative development and community effort, not pure business dynamics. It has shown that investing in these types of things can really make a difference to our reputation.”

Celia believes they are seeing huge benefits within the countries they are working, “We are looking to capture what we’re learning about doing business in these markets.”

She continues: “On one hand, the volunteers are drawing from IBM’s global business experience to deliver the best they can for the client, on the other; they are obviously learning new things about doing business in these markets. In the longer-term, there may be innovative approaches and a better understanding.”

This programme makes a lasting impact on the lives of not only the communities involved but those of the IBMers as well. Kate concludes: “There seems no better time to develop such cultural awareness and flexible leadership skills than in the present global financial crisis. [Participants] are all eager to apply the skills learned to assist our clients in their challenges and to ensure that IBM continues to succeed in such difficult times.”

WORDS OF ADVICE

If you are planning to implement a programme like this in your company Jonathan advises that it should only be rolled out if it is aligned with the strategic direction of the company.

He says: “If your strategy is around globalisation, creating cultural sensitivity

and bringing your people together for leadership development activities across different geographies, then I think something like this can absolutely help.

“If you’ve then got additional strategic goals around brand and reputation, around community and CSR-type agendas that specifically look for the types of projects that we’ve done, then I think it’s the sort of programme that I’d encourage any company to think about setting up.”

One point that Andy emphasises is that you cannot put a ‘dollar’ value on such a programme, “Jonathan and I don’t want this to come across in any way that you have to look for the ROI. Having subliminal benefits from it is great. A good piece of advice: don’t plan for it.”

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Editor’s note: At time of print, Andy McFarlane was transitioning to a new role at Vodafone.

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