

# Sensitivity to and appreciation for diversity are essential in today's labor market – and the more technological, the more important

by Dieter Lingelbach



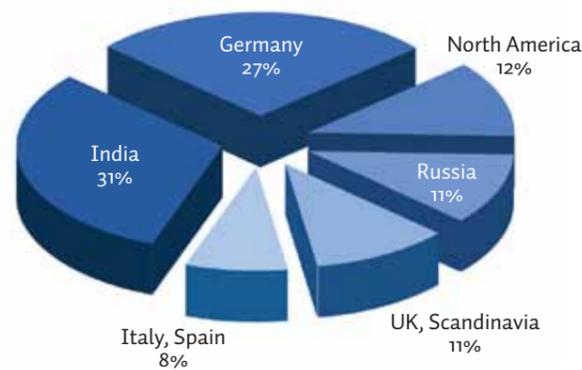
**The life sciences industry is in the forefront of national labor markets opening up to foreign employment candidates. This has rapidly changed the rules of the game and heightened competition for jobs. Just as companies have to reinvent themselves in response to changing technologies and competitive environments, so do the candidates for professional positions. A diverse workforce is no longer an option but a necessity.**

Job postings for Germany-based positions in the life sciences industry are attracting more and more applicants from countries like India or Egypt. And these applicants often have impressive international academic and industry experience. All Germany-based employers are insisting on excellent English language skills; when it comes to German they are increasingly accepting a more modest level of proficiency such as “German language skills are nice to have”. For example in the financial services industry: Deutsche Bank’s co-CEO, Anshu Jain, is of Indian origin and barely speaks German. What do these observations have in common? They are indicative of new forms of competition in not only the international but also the national labor markets.

Increasingly, candidates from overseas apply for jobs posted in Germany: a recent job opening in protein fermentation in Cologne resulted in more applicants with Indian than with German backgrounds (see figure). Russian backgrounds accounted for more than 10%.

What then does this imply for students with European roots? They will be seen and measured by international standards, including their comprehensive academic and technical qualifications. Simply earning a PhD from a school of high renown in the Western hemisphere will not be sufficient anymore.

**Applicants' home Countries, Example: protein fermentation**



Nonetheless, the standard repertoire of questions by a recruiter to an employer addresses the acceptability of overseas candidates for certain jobs. Why is that still a legitimate question if the job market has become so internationalized?

Objectively, employers expect additional expenses for relocation, language training and overcoming hurdles for the overseas candidate to get up to speed in day-to-day processes at work. Of much greater concern, though, are cultural issues like the meaning and interpretation of ‘team play’, or a common understanding of ‘leadership and control’. What does ‘strategy’ mean, how detailed does it have to be, and what does it mean in terms of directions to the reports and the peers?!

It is regarding these issues that cultural backgrounds and up-bringsings differ significantly. Within large global corporations and specifically between headquarters and country organizations, these problems are familiar. The vast majority of employers, though, are small to mid-sized companies who have had less experience with such matters, and they are sensitive to possible friction among critical employees. It is here where national candidates still have a decisive advantage; they are more ‘predictable’ in their management behavior.

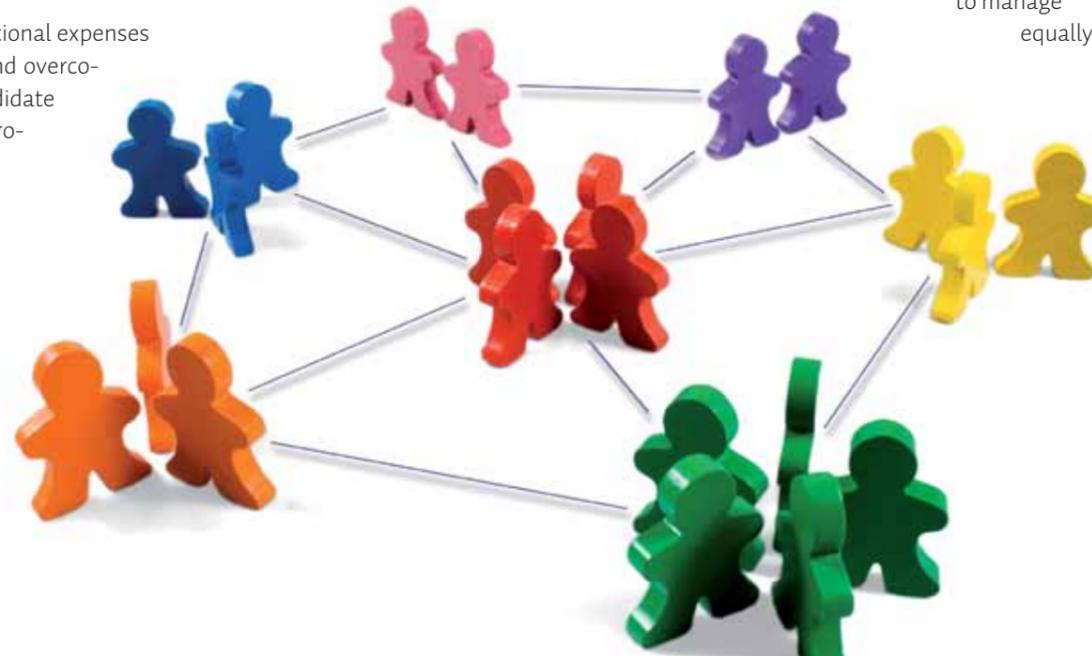
Given the overall dynamics, then, the young professional can no longer rely on just technical-academic competence, experience with conferences and post-docs at over-seas locations and good grades and references. Dr. Manfred Baier, with many years experience at Roche Diagnostics in charge of the collaboration with Japan-based Hitachi, notes: “a critical prerequisite for a professional career today is to be able to manage equally

effectively colleagues from Japan, India, the USA or France and/or work effectively for a boss from one of these countries”.

Accordingly, job candidates who expect to learn about the ‘tricks’ of leadership from a seminar or two will most likely fail. Yet there are many who believe just that, especially among European men.

What counts, according to knowledgeable human resource professionals, are ‘social competence’ and ‘emotional intelligence’. One must have a sensitivity to and appreciation for diversity. It is essential to make use of every person’s talent, no matter what their cultural background. You have to ask questions as opposed to stating opinions, otherwise you won’t be able to successfully compete in a global market. The life sciences industries provide for plenty of examples.

The author is a Fulbright scholar who was selected by Jürgen Mulert himself; still today is he grateful for the impact Jürgen Mulert has made on our thinking in general.



Dieter Lingelbach was a German Fulbright scholar at Indiana University’s School of Business, 1982 to 1984. He started work in Ohio, then transferred to Booz & Company’s Health Care Practice in Düsseldorf. Later he held senior management positions in Roche Diagnostics and MorphoSys. Together with 5 partners he offers business development and search services to the life science industries with offices in Oxford, UK, Philadelphia, Tokyo and Wellington, NZ. The partnership’s Life Science Talent Network™ describes in detail a network of over 7,000 life science professionals with whom to develop businesses.