

Your People and the EC

Learning to be Open to Other Cultures

Subtle shades of difference in the social and corporate structures of Canada and the EC can present real problems.

Some companies have already launched intensive programs to prepare their managers. Honeywell Europe, for example, has an intensive program to teach several hundred managers about European culture, values, and ethics.

The new Ontario Centre of International Business at Toronto's York University offers an enhanced MBA program – the first of its kind in Canada – that requires students to learn one foreign language, study other cultures and spend one work term in another country.

Entering European markets involves learning a whole new set of skills. The subtleties of European social and corporate structures can be a major stumbling block.

You may find it difficult to get managers and staff to cooperate productively across cultural and political borders. Carefully assess the linguistic skills of your employees, their familiarity and openness towards other cultures, and their attitudes towards the new business challenge.

Your people may also need to develop new skills in marketing, distribution, export and import procedures, quality control, and stock control.

Position people to smooth the transition. Your top management positions might best be filled with people who have foreign language ability and experience in European countries.

You will want to share your company's business objectives in the EC with your Canadian employees at all levels. Their cooperation with EC counterparts will be vital. And your European personnel may need guidance on how to obtain information and help from their Canadian counterparts. Prepare written guidelines for both operations, and include clear directions, names, job functions, and phone numbers. Remember to take the time to keep communication open.

Providing the New Skills

Once you have identified what new skills your managers and workers will need, you will want to consider how they can be provided:

- ☐ in-house training
- ☐ external training
- ☐ new recruitment
- ☐ joint ventures or cooperative arrangements with EC firms
- ☐ staff incentives
- ☐ educational institutions
- ☐ correspondence courses