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Talent Migration

In a hyper-globalized world, business executive migration has increased. There are thousands of executives who have travelled the world looking for new business experiences or relocating to be a part of a large international corporation. While this is happening, the concept of disruptive leadership is getting stronger and is recognized as a positive strategy to enrich the business experience. This concept implies an unexpected change in conditions that have deprived companies for a while. The disruptive leader challenges the establishment and questions the traditional way of doing things. They constantly innovate and even object to what works.

The migration of executives between countries and, better yet, continents is the best multivitamin for disruptive leadership. Why? A capable leader, who is from another culture, offers an interpretation of things that differs from the idea that that culture's executives may have. When a foreign agent has the will and ability to understand the nature of their new environment, they can successfully become disruptive. They can question values, practices or objectives that are taken for granted. If this leader is the head of an organization, they can disrupt, in a positive way, the foundations of the corporate culture and the processes they use.

When analyzing the leadership of great global companies, we come to see that until the 70s, the reality was that German organizations were German, French organizations were French and American organizations were American. There was a business nationalism in which big corporations kept their best job positions for their country's citizens. Therefore, the case of Spanish citizen José Ignacio López de Arriortúa, also known as Superlópez, when he became director of global purchasing for General Motors is interesting. His successful disruptive strategy won the admiration of American executives. Even if his career was stained by the scandal and conflict between General Motors and Volkswagen for industrial espionage, he showed an enormous ability to be an agent of change, questioning established business processes that were taken for granted for years by American executives.

In the last three decades, globalization, new technologies, better communications and an open global economy have strengthened the link between talent migration and disruptive leadership. The most respectable companies know that a brilliant foreign executive has a better disruptive ability than a brilliant local executive. Their novel optics, given the lack of chains to local culture and their own image in other countries, motivate them to be different, promoting challenges and thinking of an inclusive and multicultural organization.

The evidence of a link between talent migration and disruptive leadership is indisputable. There are several examples in the most successful and renown companies in the United States. Alphabet, which owns Google, has Sundar Pichai as CEO, who migrated from India to the United States. Other Indian emigres are Satya Nadella, head of Microsoft, and Shantanu Narayen, CEO of Adobe. Even companies who are in countries that have a nationalistic business culture, like Japan, have taken similar steps. For example, Carlos Ghosn, a Brazilian–Lebanese citizen, led and revitalized Nissan for over 15 years. His fall from grace in 2018 due to corruption accusations does not diminish his legacy. Disruptive leadership led by migration is a growing reality that will continue to surprise us for years to come.

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