

Feature: Consultants in Asia

Our special sixteen page feature on consultants in Asia creates awareness of the challenges associated with hiring and managing consultants in this relatively new frontier for the consulting industry and suggests approaches to address such challenges.

Why Worry About Consulting in Asia?

In the twenty-first century, Asia has emerged as the region with the most significant economic growth opportunities. Its average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates are well above those of North America or Western Europe. This shift in focus of economic activity away from North America and Europe toward Asia will continue throughout this century. At the start of the century, Asia accounted for 26 percent of global GDP. The International Monetary Fund forecasts this will grow to 36 percent by 2014 while the United States' share of global GDP which was 25 percent in the year 2000 will fall to 18 percent.

For businesses based in Asia, as well as for global multinationals whose home offices are based outside Asia, the region represents a key strategic area for future growth in revenues and profits. Given this rapid economic growth and the current scarcity of management talent, demand for consulting services in Asia has exploded. Yet, finding consulting firms to support Asian operations presents some unique challenges. Companies in Asia that are seeking value from consultants must be aware of these challenges in order to make the best choice when hiring a consultant.

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Buyer Beware

Given the challenges of diverse educational foundations, naïve and transitory Western partners, senior managers in Asia who do not have the necessary depth of skills, the difficulty in developing and retaining junior consultants, the lack of appropriate training courses from the global head office, and the fragmented character of the region conspiring against achieving critical mass, it should be no surprise that very few of the "global" consulting firms have been able to build sustainable practices with the necessary breadth and depth of consultants to provide value for their clients.

If you are part of an organization with interests in Asia, you will have to exert far more effort to assure yourself that value is available from prospective consulting firms than you would have to from their more established Western-based practices.