



**Roger Trapp** Contributor

*I write about management issues, with a special focus on leadership.*

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

LEADERSHIP 5/30/2017 @ 10:35AM | 521 views

## Future Global Leaders Need To Do More Than Just Speak A Foreign Language



Leaders of the G7 and leaders of some African countries that have been invited for the two-day talks, wait for the arrival of US President Donald Trump for a family photo on the second day of the G7 summit of Heads of State and of Government. (Photo credit should read TIZIANA FABI/AFP/Getty Images)

In these days of Brexit, there is much concern among young people in the U.K. and elsewhere in Europe about how whatever deal emerges will affect their ability to move between countries. Often described as “digital natives” on account of having grown up with technology, the Millennial generation is also completely unfamiliar with a world of fettered travel. Famously footloose, the better-educated members of this cohort particularly see travelling and even living outside their native lands as thoroughly natural. It is little surprise, then, that a new survey finds that nearly all of the undergraduates questioned were keen to work abroad in the early stages of their careers.

However, it appears that — even in this age of mass travel and interest in different places — some of the old problems remain. The same

survey, by Universum and CEMS, the Global Alliance in Management Education that includes 30 schools across five continents, found that HR managers see adapting to new cultures and speaking foreign languages as the two biggest barriers for employees wanting to work abroad.

In addition, only one in five of HR managers responding to the research in the report *[Going Global](#)* rated the geographic mobility of their young employees as strong. This means the majority of hiring executives think there is more their new hires can do to develop the skills or levels of self-confidence to work internationally.

Nearly two-thirds of hiring executives recommended that working outside comfort zones was a key career driver for new hires, while just over a third said that taking on international assignments helped to boost the career growth of young professionals.

Sunita Malhotra is a professor at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) where she teaches the CEMS Masters in International Management. As part of this she lectures on international business, with a focus on HR, and cross-cultural management and her course was recently chosen as CEMS Course of Year out of the 31 courses offered across the CEMS network.

With extensive experience of working in sales and marketing and HR in a variety of corporations and as a consultant around the world in addition to her academic career, she is well-placed to identify the issues facing would-be international managers. She says that for the 21st century global leader languages and technological ability are both givens. To succeed in organizations that are increasingly set up on a matrix and team basis, executives need to distinguish themselves in several areas. These include:

1. Change agility — they have to be able to make decisions fast and be adaptable.
2. Cross-cultural sensitivity — especially in a matrix organization where there is often a lot of remote leadership executives need to be aware of cultural issues.
3. Managing diversity — often organizations have diversity but they don't know how to use it.

4. Networking — this can be both formal and informal and, again, is especially important in a matrix situation.

5. Integrity and compliance — Younger leaders need to understand that what is good in one market may not be so in another.

6. Innovation — where organizations are changing how they work executives need to be aware of what this means and how they can make the most of it.

Malhotra stresses that aspiring global leaders do not have to have all the skills she mentions before they apply for a role. But she does point out that success tends to depend on knowing “how to manage a matrix and a network”, adding: “It’s not just what you know, it’s who you know”.

CEMS was founded in 1988 and the network includes 30 Schools across 5 continents, working with 73 multinational companies and seven NGOs. There are currently 1,264 MIM CEMS students of 70 nationalities and 12,029 alumni of 85 nationalities, working in 75 countries.

*I am a journalist with a special interest in all aspects of management, but especially leadership.*

#### **RECOMMENDED BY FORBES**

[The Richest Person In Every State](#)

[Shari'ah-Compliant Crypto Gold: Could Islam Be Preparing for a New World Reserve...](#)

---

This article is available online at:

2017 Forbes.com LLC™ All Rights Reserved