

An Internationalisation Talent Solutions Map:

Developed by the International Trading Institute at
Singapore Management University in partnership
with SkillsFuture Singapore



THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In 2018, the International Trading Institute at Singapore Management University (ITI@SMU) was commissioned by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) to conduct a study on the role that human capital and skills play in the internationalisation journey of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs).

SSG recognised that while government schemes were largely financial in nature and highly effective in helping companies get a foothold into overseas markets, more support was needed in order for companies to sustain their push overseas, especially in the areas of human capital capability development.

Our study focused on one critical factor: talent. Over the course of our research, we explored the following areas:

- The internationalisation journey of companies
- The business needs, challenges faced, barriers and impetus for internationalisation
- The internationalisation job landscape
- The gaps in human capital and skills needs for internationalisation

The aim was to develop an Internationalisation Talent Solutions Map (iTalent Solutions Map) which can be applied across different industries. By applying this map as a business tool and developing talent through a structured training programme, we hope to empower Singaporean SMEs with the relevant skills, knowledge and know-how required to internationalise.

This iTalent Solutions Map is meant for employers, employees and institutes of higher learning keen on developing internationalisation programmes.

OUR APPROACH AND DESIGN

We engaged business owners, employees and domain experts¹ to identify business needs, human capital needs and skills gaps within the internationalisation process.

Qualitative data was compiled from conducting more than 100 hours of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with more than 30 Singapore based companies.

Hailing across different industries², these companies ranged from different sizes and were at various stages of internationalisation.

The study was conducted in two stages:

- Stage 1 - Employers' Perspective: In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with company owners and internationalisation domain experts.
- Stage 2 - Employees' Perspective: Ethnographic research comprising interview sessions with employees who helped in the business internationalisation process.

Based on an initial literature review, we developed the following sensitising concepts:

1. The lack of appropriate talent and internationalisation skills is one of the barriers to successful internationalisation.
2. Internationalisation skills comprise both soft and hard skills.
3. Internationalisation is a way of life, not a job.
4. The multi-tasking nature of internationalisation and the varied job roles involved in the process allows for the training of internationalisation skills through a "job blend" approach.

¹ Domain experts including academics, business consultants, business coaches and individuals with successful business internationalisation experiences were also engaged.

² Industries include: retail and manufacturing, wholesale trade, food manufacturing and services, environmental design, built environment and construction, transportation and logistics, healthcare and wellbeing, shipping and maritime, textiles, human resource, digital technology, and consulting.

For Singapore, we have always thrived on our extensive connectivity to the world. This is vital, given our smaller domestic market and reliance on trade. Notwithstanding the uncertainties surrounding global trade, we need to continue to deepen and diversify our international connections. This was clearly set out as a priority area by the Committee on the Future Economy. To do so, we need to have a pool of Singaporeans with deep knowledge of global markets as well as the skills and experiences in building international businesses to take our local enterprises international.

To build the human capital for internationalisation, SkillsFuture Singapore set out to work with partners to provide companies and their workforce with an Internationalisation Talent (iTalent) Solutions Map. Such a map should clearly identify critical internationalisation skills to enable enterprises to operate effectively in overseas markets and support them in developing a skilled workforce to tap on new overseas opportunities.

This endeavor sparked a two-year partnership with the International Trading Institute at Singapore Management University (ITI@SMU) and Enterprise Singapore to work on an applied research study and the develop the Internationalisation Talent (iTalent) Solutions Map. This iTalent Solutions Map drew from insights shared with ITI@SMU by about 60 internationalisers, experts and academia. It aims to help enterprises, individuals and Learning & Development (L&D) professionals identify and invest in the right skills needed at the different stages of internationalisation for an enterprise.

To translate the iTalent Solutions Map into action, ITI@SMU developed the pilot iSkills Talent Development Programme in partnership with Ngee Ann Polytechnic. This applied learning programme uses an immersive blend of classroom training with in-market immersion,



sharing by industry and market experts, as well as mentoring by industry coaches. Participants will work on real-life internationalisation projects as part of the curriculum and present the findings to sponsoring companies and mentors at the end of the programme.

Such intensive applied learning will help to accelerate the skills development of these individuals, who, in turn, can support their company's internationalisation plans.

Over the next year, we will be expanding the programme to more Institutes of Higher Learning, and working with industry partners to roll it out in more sectors.

We hope that these efforts will help enterprises, individuals and educators invest more effectively in the development of these iSkills and see the start of a rewarding internationalisation journey. I would also like to thank our partners ITI@SMU and Enterprise Singapore for this partnership and look forward to this programme benefiting many to come in the years ahead.

Mr Ng Cher Pong
Chief Executive
SkillsFuture Singapore

Internationalisation is a key engine of growth for Singapore. Going overseas unlocks multiple opportunities for companies, including helping them widen their customer bases and gain access to new technology and raw materials. It also boosts product and service innovation and aids companies as they adopt new models for digitalisation.

The journey of internationalisation, however, is a challenging one, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Many small companies have limited knowledge of the different types of internationalisation strategies and modes of entry. The result? Reduced confidence in their ability to tap new opportunities and networks, leading to a risk-averse attitude towards overseas expansion.

The key to success to foreign market expansion is in building a strong human capital pipeline. This pillar of support for business internationalisation strategies and opportunity making is, however, the weakest link for many businesses.

For employees, there is the fear of the unknown, which results in resistance to working overseas. Those who do venture out face immense challenges, such as having to grapple with different cultures and ways of doing business and navigating ambiguities. Many do not have relevant experience and knowledge in building international businesses and new business models for digitalisation. This is partly because their employers lack the resources to equip their staff with the right skills. These challenges are accentuated for SMEs, many of which are constrained by hiring budgets.

To help SMEs internationalise by empowering them with relevant human capital, we embarked on a multi-party collaboration between the Singapore government, SMEs and institutes of higher learning to develop the Internationalisation Talent Solutions Map (iTalent Solutions Map)

In 2018, the International Trading Institute at Singapore Management University (ITI@SMU) was commissioned by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) to embark on a research study to understand the role of human capital and skills needed for internationalisation.

The outcome of the study was the development of a talent solutions map that is applicable across industries, with the goal of empowering Singaporeans with the skills, knowledge and know-how to help SMEs succeed overseas. The iTalent Solutions Map is targeted at employers, employees and other institutes of higher learning looking to develop programmes to build internationalisation talent.

We engaged business owners, employees and domain experts to seek their perspectives, share experiences on human capital needs and identify skills gaps. One key finding of the report is that in thinking about internationalisation, it is more useful to view the challenge through the lens of the roles employees play, rather



than the jobs they are in. For instance, when overseas, employees will need to do a variety of things, including building contacts, project managing and setting up offices. These are roles that stretch across jobs.

Another key finding is the importance of the intangibles of internationalisation. Apart from the technical skills required, soft skills are critical. So too is having the right attitude. In short, both employees and employers will need to embrace the spirit of internationalisation, and see it as a way of life. We elaborate on this in the report.

Moving forward, we have developed a prototype iSkills programme to validate this research map and its application.

This programme has been designed to address pre-market, in-market, and post-market internationalisation needs. The programme takes experiential learning beyond training. It is a blended approach comprising project work, mentoring, overseas immersion, country clinics, business leaders sharing and workshops to unlock opportunities. The programme aims to prepare them for the unique challenges in bringing their companies overseas.

As Mr Kevin Lim, the corporate strategy director at ADERA Global put it: “It is not about whether we can teach internationalisation, but about best preparing them. It is like cyber security; the best way to learn is to experience a real cyber-attack. Short of that, simulations are the next best way. This programme is about internationalisation preparedness.”

We thank SSG and all the companies who have been actively engaged in our research for this wonderful opportunity to co-create this iTalent Solutions Map to take Singapore SMEs to the next level. We would also like to thank the research team at ITI@SMU for the amazing fieldwork carried out to make this project possible.

Internationalisation is a life skill. It takes hours, months, and years of learning about new markets, segments and foreign cultures. We are delighted to partner so many in this internationalisation learning journey.

Professor Annie Koh
V3 Group Professor of Family Entrepreneurship
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FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL:

TAKING YOUR BUSINESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONALISING YOUR BUSINESS

For many Singapore companies today, having a presence in a foreign market probably ranks at the top of their wishlist. This is not surprising, given that Singapore has a limited market with a population of just over 5.7 million.

Studies show that going global has never been more relevant. In 2016, International Enterprise Singapore, now Enterprise Singapore (ESG), surveyed over 700 companies, where it assessed the impact of internationalisation and tracked internationalisation trends across major sectors³. It found that these companies' overseas revenue grew faster than overall revenue. Overseas revenue also formed 53 per cent of total revenue for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and 40 per cent of total revenue for large enterprises. The onset of digitalisation and Industry 4.0 has made it faster and more cost efficient for companies to reach overseas markets.

Simply put, internationalisation is a key business strategy. Aside from creating new market opportunities, going global can also help boost an organisation's operations in several ways, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

³ Enterprise Singapore (2017, February 17). Internationalisation a key engine of growth and transformation. Retrieved from <https://ie.enterprisesg.gov.sg/Media-Centre/Media-Releases/2017/2/IE-Year-In-Review>.



Figure 1.1 The Key Benefits of Internationalisation





GROOMING TALENT AS A KEY INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGY

Whilst internationalisation is clearly an attractive proposition, venturing outside of one's home market into an unknown territory is a challenging task. New market entrants may lack the competitive advantage when they go up against local household brands, have limited business resources and poor knowledge of different types of internationalisation strategies. This leads to an inability to create new business opportunities and effective networks.

Indeed, for every company that succeeds in going overseas, there are many others that fail. What sets the successful international business apart from the others? The answer: talent, according to the insights that we gathered from interviews with companies in our study.

ARE YOU INTERNATIONALISATION READY?

For many local companies, the idea of branching out into overseas markets can seem like a daunting task. The first step towards overcoming this barrier is understanding what the internationalisation process is about. Next, companies need to be able to identify where they stand in the internationalisation journey and how they are positioned. This will allow them to understand the journey ahead and take the necessary steps required to fulfil their internationalisation goals.



There are essentially three stages in the internationalisation journey – pre-market, in-market and post-market. The business needs of different companies may differ at each stage of the process.

- **Pre-market:** Before entering a new market, companies must have the right mindset and equip staff with fundamental skills such as risk taking and management. It is also crucial to arm them with skills in areas such as deal closing and execution, and relationship building. Data analytics are also important at this stage to guide and direct companies as they develop business opportunities, especially for mid-sized SMEs.
- **In-market:** Once a company has entered the market, the focus turns to understanding the context and challenges of internationalisation. This includes the ability to navigate ambiguities, understand the business language and appreciate cultural differences in foreign markets. Strong internal communication and local market engagement are essential at this stage to ensure that the business runs smoothly.
- **Post-market:** Now that a foothold has been established overseas, the challenge is to sustain the momentum. Being able to adapt to changes through organisational learning and having transferable skills can help companies stay ahead of the game. In addition, the presence of strong leadership and the ability to capitalise on digital opportunities will help set the company apart from the competition.

As Figure 1.2 illustrates, there are key business needs that companies will have to address to ensure that they are on the right path.



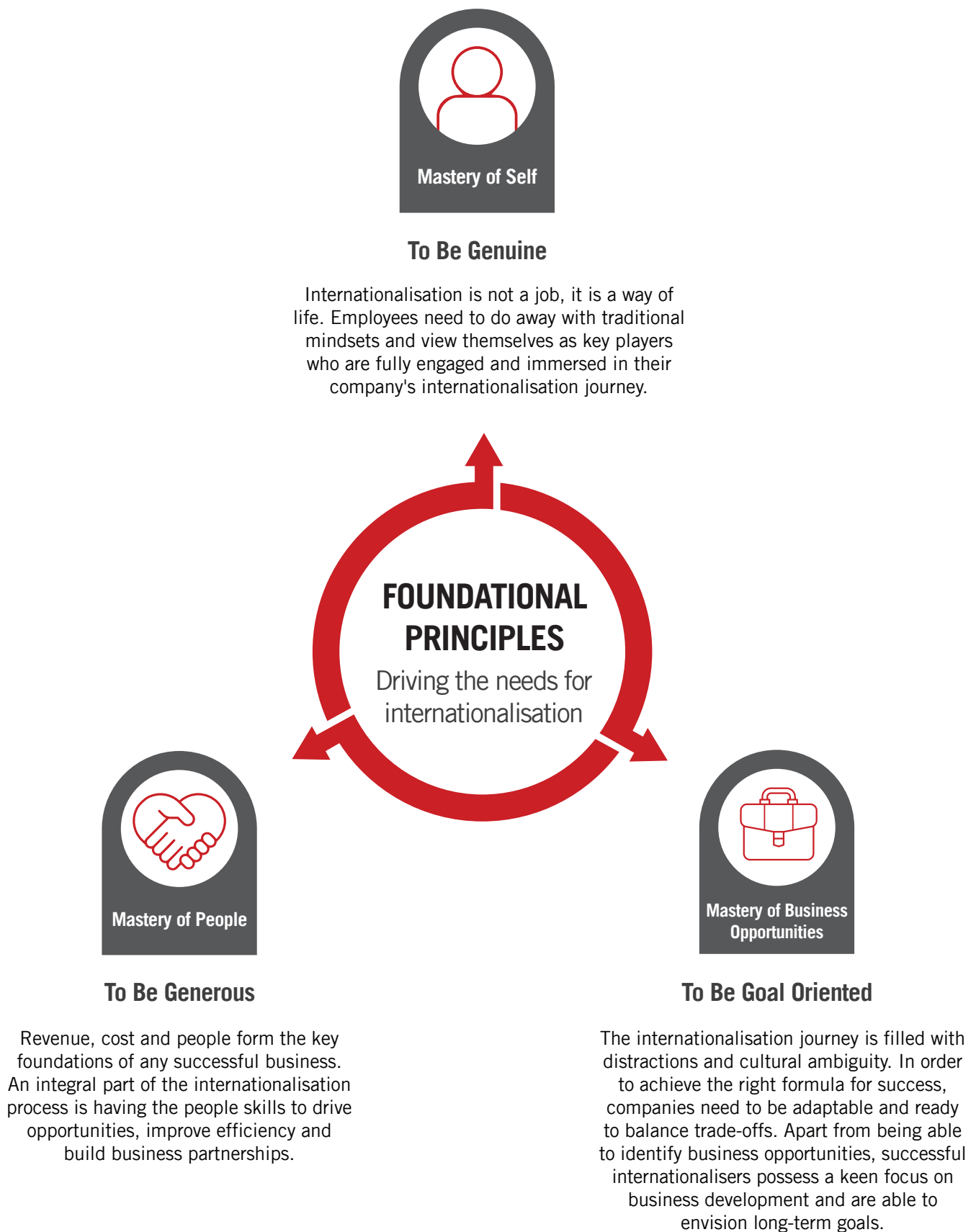
Figure 1.2 The Road to Internationalisation: Addressing Business Needs

Each internationalisation journey is unique, but what transcends across every venture overseas are the business needs and the skills required to face the challenges and opportunities that come along.

In essence, internationalisation requires the mastery of self; mastery of people; mastery of business opportunities (opportunity creation, executing these opportunities). The skill domains serve as a guiding framework for companies to establish and grow their businesses abroad. They reflect the characteristics of internationalisation and represent the key drivers in defining the business needs and skills needed to succeed. Figure 1.3 lays out the foundational principles driving the business needs and critical skills for internationalisation.

Companies need to develop their talent, such that the entire organisation internalises the same beliefs and practices as they gear up for internationalisation.

Figure 1.3 Foundational Principles driving the needs for internationalisation



CASE STUDIES OF BUSINESSES

THE TALENT CHALLENGES SHARED BY BUSINESS OWNERS

From our conversations with SMEs, it is clear that companies are in need of employees with positive mindsets towards internationalisation. In addition, the fear of the unknown has resulted in many employees preferring to stay within their comfort zones and avoiding working overseas. Of those who take up the challenge, some do not survive as they struggle to adapt to a different environment.

The problem may lie in the absence of key skills and relevant experience in building international businesses. This is partly the result of businesses lacking the time and knowledge to develop employees due to budget constraints – an issue that is particularly relevant for SMEs. They are unable to hire experienced staff with relevant experience, resulting in a skills gap for businesses.

Closing this gap means having to do things differently. For companies looking to grow overseas, they need to be focused and engaged on managing the weak points of their regional expansion strategy. What are some of the steps that they would have to take? What do they need to do?

The following case studies illustrate the business strategies that companies have adopted towards achieving their internationalisation goals.



EMBRACING THE RIGHT MIND-SET AND STRATEGY WHEN EXPANDING ABROAD

Having **the right attitude** towards internationalisation has helped Singapore-based investment company Commonwealth Capital Pte Ltd (CCPL) expand from five to 15 markets over the past five years.

The company, which specialises in the food and beverage sector with services ranging from end-to-end manufacturing to logistics and retail services, grew with a clear focus and the right mind-set towards taking their business abroad.

Apart from **identifying and validating business opportunities** in the region to launch its brands, CCPL's strong branding strategy has also been critical in attracting franchise partners. These have helped to facilitate its business expansion rapidly into relevant strategic markets in the Asia Pacific and Middle East regions.

"In the franchising model, we contribute our intellectual property, business know-how and brand equity in exchange for 'access to better human capital', 'access to expansion capital' and 'royalty contribution' from our business partners. Our partners bring relevant local market experience and financial resources to be effective operators. They will align and stay disciplined on branding guidelines, operation, promotions, marketing activities and outlet development schedule," said Mr Wilson Lim, CCPL's Executive Director of International Business.

Developing a strong **internal communications** map has allowed the company to deliver localised experiences to customers while maintaining a consistent and uniform brand identity across its overseas markets.

The company has already placed brands like PastaMania, Gelatofix, Baker & Cook and Plank Sourdough Pizza on the world map. Other exciting home-grown brands under its portfolio like Udders Ice Cream and The Soup Spoon will debut in regional markets soon. Today, it manages over 200 retail points across 15 countries. Building a strong brand identity has played an integral part in its expansion plans.

One of the ways they have achieved this is by locating their restaurants in strategic areas with high local and tourist footfalls to boost brand awareness and increase their visibility.

Besides growing its customer base abroad, a strong brand imprint overseas also help the company to draw business partners and grow its investment opportunities.



KEY TALENT NEEDS

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

IDENTIFYING AND
VALIDATING BUSINESS
OPPORTUNITIES

INTERNAL
COMMUNICATION

STRATEGY
FORMULATION

MASTERING THE ART OF CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

When it comes to retailing its products across multiple markets, one key lesson that home-grown furniture brand Scanteak has learnt is that it pays to **master the art of cultural sensitivity**.

By paying attention to local practices, contexts and cultures, Scanteak has found continuous success overseas for the better part of the past 30 years.

“Understanding the language and the culture of the various markets have been important for us to do our business abroad,” said Ms Jamie Lim, Regional Marketing Director of Scanteak.

With the company based in multiple countries, each with its distinct culture, one challenge has been to ensure that its brand message is consistent across markets.

To overcome this challenge, the company has come up with its own unique **internal communications** solution in order to deliver localised customer experiences while retaining its brand identity: hiring people who are acquainted with the finer points of multiple cultures. Or as Ms Lim calls them: “semi-locals”.

One example is a Singaporean who loves everything Japanese. She was hired to liaise with Scanteak’s Japanese team and functions as a translator. But her knowledge of the Japanese culture has helped the company in many other ways.

For instance, when the company’s team in Japan asked the Singapore headquarters for marketing support for a “fukubukuro,” the team in Singapore had no idea what that was.



But the Singaporean Japanese liaison helped to bridge the gap in understanding. she explained that a Fukubukuro is a bag filled with random contents and sold for a substantial discount by merchants during the Japanese new year. the idea is to attract shoppers to their store during the holiday.

“We didn’t even know what that is until she explained the concept to us and the nuances to the team,” said Ms Lim.

In her role as a regional marketing director, she makes it a point to rally employees across different countries to come together and think of Scanteak as one united entity.

“I tell my managers that while we understand we have our cultural differences and we respect one another, we have to see Scanteak as a whole, and not entities from different countries,” she added.

KEY TALENT NEEDS

THE ART OF
CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH LEADERSHIP

When it comes to embracing the role of being an **international deal maker**, the leadership team at Luxasia group leads by example.

Consisting of members from more than 16 different countries like Austria, India, China and Indonesia among others, the company has built a cosmopolitan team at the top. This has helped lay the groundwork for the company's internationalisation journey.

"Diversity is important to the company in its transformation journey. It's an internationalisation approach right from the core I would say. It enables us to "Think global, Live Local"; something which is critical to running business effectively in 15 different and highly fragmented markets in Asia Pacific" said Ms Sabrina Chong, group Head of Corporate Development.

Strong **internal communication** and local market engagement have helped Luxasia group navigate cultural ambiguities.

Across their regional offices, the Luxasia Group has over 500 brand managers and product executives that understand how in-country marketing should be done effectively.

"Hiring locals with the relevant expertise and experience has helped our internationalisation efforts abroad," said Ms Chong. "Enabled by our talents, we have the necessary licenses and technical legal know-hows for efficient product registration for a fast brand start across all markets."



Coupled with trusted longstanding relationships forged with their trade and channel partners, the Luxasia group enables brands to develop a deep and wide in-market reach with speed, the result of over 30 years in the business.

Today, the Luxasia group boasts a stellar line-up of over 150 exclusive international brands that reach out to 15 Asia Pacific countries across more than over 4,500 retail touch points and a potential reach of 3 billion consumers.

The company has also embarked on a concerted e-commerce push, having recognised the **importance of being digital** in the new economy. The omni-channel approach helps Luxasia to rapidly expand its reach across new markets, while deepening its engagement with existing ones.

KEY TALENT NEEDS

THE INTERNATIONAL DEAL MAKER

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING DIGITAL

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH LEADERSHIP



THE INTERNATIONALISATION TALENT SOLUTIONS MAP

Companies looking to embark on the internationalisation journey, or deepen their engagement overseas, will need to equip their staff with the best skills required for the job. While these skills are typically picked up over time through the experience from other jobs, they can be achieved with the right approach to learning and development.

The Internationalisation Talent Solutions Map (iTalent Solutions Map) as illustrated in Figure 2.1 was developed based on the needs of the companies looking to internationalise, and employees who successfully helped open up new frontiers for their firms.

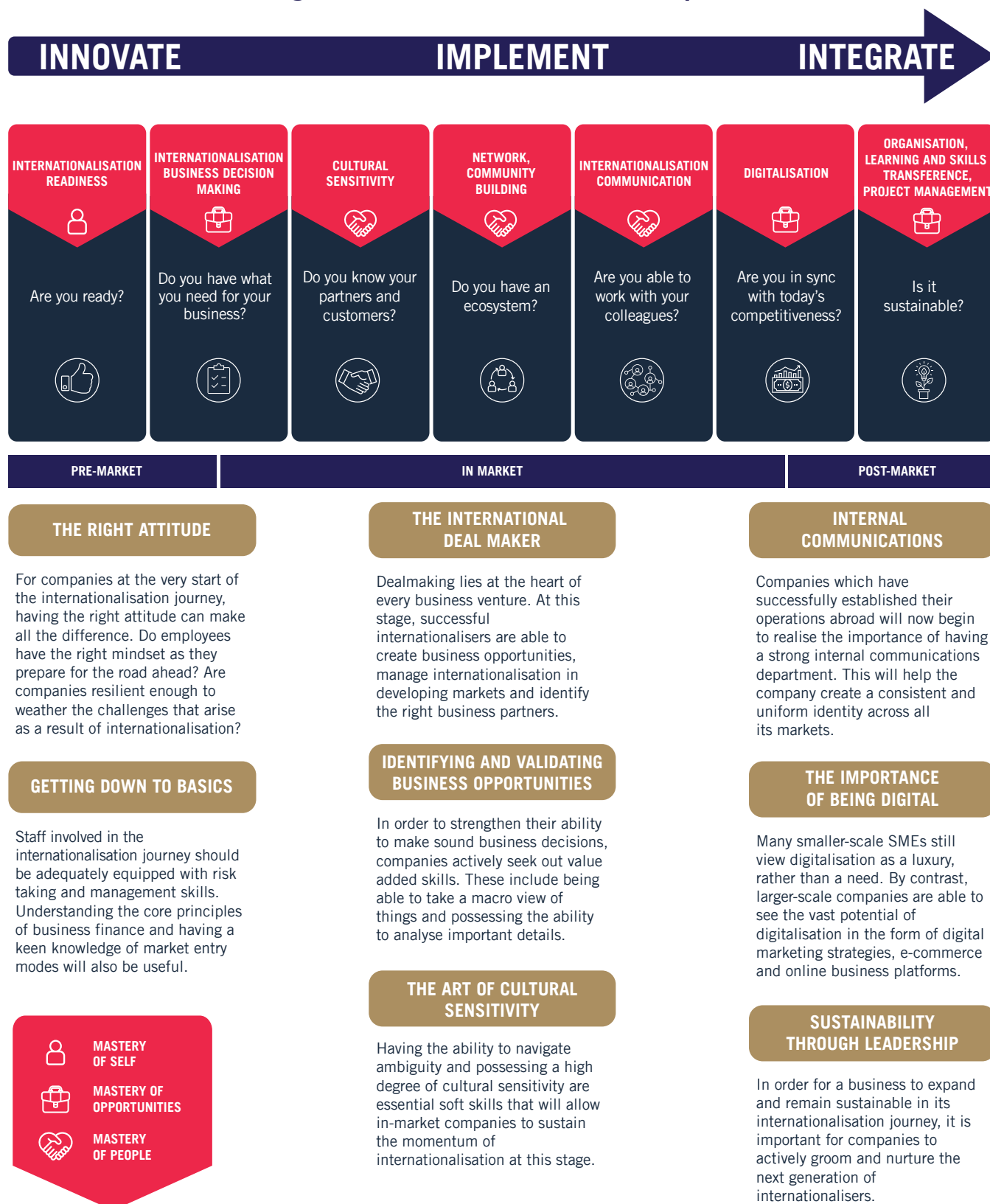
By harnessing our understanding of the business and talent needs and the job landscape of internationalisation, we highlighted the important roles of internationalisers. In addition, we illustrated what it means to embody an internationalisation spirit and emphasised the skills needed to help employees succeed overseas.

We asked successful internationalisers one simple question: What are the key internationalisation skills (iSkills) required?

This study has identified **10 critical iSkills domains**.

Comprising key areas namely the mastery of self; mastery of people; mastery of business opportunities (opportunity creation, executing these opportunities). The skill domains serve as a guiding framework for companies to establish and grow their businesses abroad.

Figure 2.1 The iTalent Solutions Map



The conclusion is clear: companies looking to internationalise must have the requisite skills, or talent with skills, at each stage of the journey to go global. Understanding where they stand in the internationalisation journey will help companies maximise their talents' potential and focus their attention on improving and developing their existing skillsets.

The internationalisation journey varies from organisation to organisation so companies need to understand that they may be in different stages depending on the industry or country they are in. This applies to employees looking to sharpen their skills and knowledge to support companies' internationalisation efforts.

SKILL DOMAIN 1: ATTITUDE AND MINDSET

The surest way to fail in any venture is to go in with a closed mind. Entering a new environment means having to do things differently from what one is often accustomed to. With a positive attitude and open mindset, it will be easier to confront and overcome hurdles and roadblocks along the way. Character traits like patience, respect, adopting a non-judgmental mindset, compassion, humility, and gratitude can help cultivate an openness towards internationalisation and build cultural empathy.

SKILL DOMAIN 2: LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Having a clear goal and purpose allows for more streamlined planning when setting up overseas operations. This minimises wrong turns as the business grows. As important as it is to be agile to adapt to changes in the market, it is also important to have perseverance as it takes time to grow a business.

SKILL DOMAIN 3: CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Understanding the business language and culture of the country you are expanding into protects you from making a bad first impression. From understanding which business approach to take to analysing key opportunities for growth, having local market knowledge can help open doors. This includes understanding customer motivations, needs and cultural nuances from different markets to customise relevant products and services.

SKILL DOMAIN 4: RELATIONAL SKILLS

In some countries, the deal is not necessarily cemented in the boardroom. It is about relationship building and gaining the trust of a client, and forming a tight network of business partners.

SKILL DOMAIN 5: BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY SKILLS

In order to seize business opportunities, an individual tasked to take his company's business overseas needs to be able to manage and take risks, and be well-versed in areas such as ways and modes to enter a market and understanding risk and value management strategies.

SKILL DOMAIN 6: MORALS, JUDGEMENT, DECISION MAKING SKILLS

To keep the business on the right path, internationalisers have to be able to assess a given situation and make informed decisions. Apart from being able to navigate ambiguity, successful internationalisers will need to understand the importance of trade-offs. Employees will need to be empowered enough to make key decisions in order to achieve the right representation for their organisations.

SKILL DOMAIN 7: DIGITALISATION SKILLS

As digital technology permeates into more aspects of everyday life, digital marketing, branding and new retail avenues will grow in prominence. Being able to analyse customer insights garnered from data analytics will be an important skill.

SKILL DOMAIN 8: PROJECT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

As companies expand their operations abroad, employees will need to be able to fulfil client expectations by crafting country-specific business solutions that incorporate cross-cultural nuances and diverse working styles. This will enable the organisation to create a consistent brand image and identity regardless of where they might choose to operate overseas.

SKILL DOMAIN 9: INTERNAL ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS

In order to ensure that all employees are on the same page, organisations need to be able to plan, prioritise and achieve company goals in an efficient and productive manner. Organisational learning and sharing skills are also critical.

SKILL DOMAIN 10: BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY SKILLS

Expertise in these areas includes: the ability to innovate processes, design change management, facilitate skills transference, perform cost benefit analyses, as well as coach and mentor staff.

FROM INTERNATIONAL DEAL MAKER TO INTERNATIONALISER

Consider this: the CEO of a multinational corporation wants to expand the business overseas, but has difficulties managing the diverse working styles and cultural expectations of clients from different parts of the world.

Despite this, Ms Patricia Chia, General Manager, Lifestyle & e-Commerce of YCH Group, who takes charge of the business development of the company's fast moving consumer group was well-prepared to handle the challenges.

She cited the importance of entrepreneurial ability, relationship building, negotiation and project management as critical skills. This helped her **identify**

and validate business opportunities for YCH, Singapore's largest supply chain and logistics company.

As an **international deal maker**, a large part of her job scope involves building trust with overseas clients and growing her company's global footprint abroad. Having the **right attitude and mindset** is important but Ms Chia also shares the importance of having strong **morals, judgement and decision making skills** in order to navigate cultural ambiguities.

"One has to be a person of integrity, possessing the flexibility to balance the understanding of local culture with the ability to push and maintain the international business standards promised to clients," said Ms Chia.



These were attributes that served her well in her previous role as YCH Group's South China General Manager (GM). During the four years she was based in China, Ms Chia mastered the **art of cultural sensitivity** by developing an in-depth understanding of the local market, government regulations, and cultural nuances.

These were honed while she ran day-to-day operations such as building YCH's businesses from scratch, managing local office finance and sales, and acquiring new clients.

On top of this, she cited the **importance of being digital** as a means of improving productivity and helping to spur innovation within the company.

Embracing digitalisation helped YCH Group streamline its business operations so that work could be done effectively and efficiently.

Critical iSkills needed for Successful Internationalisation

**SKILL DOMAIN 1:
ATTITUDE AND
MINDSET**

**SKILL DOMAIN 3:
CULTURAL AND
LANGUAGE SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 5:
BUSINESS
OPPORTUNITY
SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 6:
MORALS, JUDGEMENT,
DECISION MAKING
SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 7:
DIGITALISATION
SKILLS**

MAKING WAVES ABROAD, THANKS TO A STRONG REGIONAL MARKETING AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS MAP

When security company Ademco was focused primarily on the Singapore market, reaching out to its customers was a simple task of using local marketing channels.

But when it went international, the job of selling its products became a lot more complex. It suddenly had to deal with multiple markets, different cultures and new digital channels, a move that necessitated a transition to a broader marketing strategy, said Mr Patrick Lim, the company's Group Strategy Director.

"We had to take marketing to a higher level to deal with the complexity of seven markets. we moved from just local marketing to engage in advertising, branding, channel marketing. we also had to develop marketing and product strategies," said Mr Lim, who has been with the company for 18 years.

Expanding abroad also meant developing a strong **internal communications** department to help create a consistent and uniform brand identity across its overseas markets.

"When you are in multiple markets, a brand becomes a multiplier tool to the business, and that is vital in internationalising any business."

This was where mastering the **art of cultural sensitivity** played a critical role in helping the overseas team understand the needs of their customers intimately, a process which takes time and effort.

On his part, Mr Lim would visit and speak with the right people within and outside the industry to obtain

feedback, before customising its services and products for each country.

Having the **right attitude and mindset** towards internationalisation plays a key role in helping him perform his day-to-day duties. He keeps abreast of the latest trends and attend both official and non-official meetings in the various markets. This helped him generate additional insights on market mechanisms, people, and their cultures.

Also of importance to the company's operations: **going digital**. Embracing digital technologies like digital customer relationship management systems has helped Ademco harness the power of customer data more efficiently.



Critical iSkills needed for Successful Internationalisation

**SKILL DOMAIN 1:
ATTITUDE AND
MINDSET**

**SKILL DOMAIN 3:
CULTURAL AND
LANGUAGE SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 7:
DIGITALISATION
SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 8:
PROJECT
MANAGEMENT
SKILLS**

CASE STUDIES

HMI GROUP

ADOPTING A HANDS-ON APPROACH AND BUILDING STRONG TIES AT THE WORKPLACE FOR FURTHER EXPANSION ABROAD

Some people think that being in a C-suite entails chairing meetings and sitting at the desk all day going through long, tedious reports.

For Mr John Ang, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Regency Specialist Hospital (RSH) in Johor, this cannot be further from the truth.

The private hospital is owned by Health Management International Ltd (HMI Group), a private regional healthcare provider based in Singapore. Apart from overseeing the management of a day surgery medical centre and training institute in Singapore, HMI group also owns and manages two hospitals in Malaysia.

As COO, Mr Ang is expected to have a broad and strategic overview of the organisation to support hospital operations.

In fact, the Singaporean makes it a point to travel daily from Singapore to Johor for work in order to get an on-the-ground perspective of the company's operations.

From profit-and-loss management to resource optimisation, Mr Ang juggles various responsibilities on a day-to-day basis.

"I may walk into the kitchen to understand how things are doing, or go to the wards to see if we have enough beds and are turning over on time."

This style of management is critical in his regional role because he has to ensure that people from different cultures work together towards a common purpose.

Given the cross-border nature of operations, having a strong **internal communications** department helps to bring together the employees from different countries

and encourage them to work together a shared goal. He also makes it a point to boost his **cultural and language skills** by understanding different cultural nuances and practices. At the end of the day, he stresses the importance of **having the right attitude and mindset** as a vital part of the internationalisation journey.

"Immersing myself in the culture and being on the ground also allow us to identify need gaps for service delivery and business opportunities, product innovation, and the improvement of process flow," said Mr Ang, Chief Operating Officer.

At HMI Group, the company practices **sustainability through leadership** thanks to support from the Group CEO and senior management team who encourage and support staff to take on regional roles.

Apart from helping improve their skillsets, this helps to ensure continuous growth for the organisation.



Critical iSkills needed for Successful Internationalisation

**SKILL DOMAIN 1:
ATTITUDE AND
MINDSET**

**SKILL DOMAIN 3:
CULTURAL AND
LANGUAGE SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 4:
RELATIONAL
SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 8:
PROJECT
MANAGEMENT
SKILLS**

**SKILL DOMAIN 10:
BUSINESS
SUSTAINABILITY
SKILLS**

GLOBALISING OPERATIONS BY LOCALISING EXPERIENCES

As the Business Development Manager of Commune lifestyle, Mr Andy Jeremiah Lam has one key goal in mind: to grow the company's brand overseas.

Despite having already established over 64 concept stores in countries like Australia, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, the brand is not planning to slow down its expansion plans abroad.

As an organisation that is constantly looking to internationalise its operations, Mr Lam and his team adopt the role of **international deal makers** by actively pursuing deals with potential dealers and distributors in other countries.

The skill-sets required to achieve internationalisation, however, are broad and multi-faceted.

Besides business-specific skills, such as being marketing savvy and adept at working with facts and figures, mastering the **art of cultural sensitivity** and emotional intelligence has helped him build a strong rapport with his clients.

Commune Lifestyle, which prides itself on creating uniquely Singapore designs with an international appeal for millennial homeowners, certainly walks the talk.

It noticed that this younger segment prefers a more personalised way of shopping for their homes – considering the latest international design trends while remaining sensitive to the constraints of urban apartment space.

“**Experiential marketing is the new frontier of marketing,**” noted Mr Lam, Business Development Manager.



“Consumers don’t just want to purchase a product, they want to be able to know where the product is from, the story behind the design and lives of craftsmen involved in the making of the product.”

In order to successfully **identify and validate business opportunities** abroad, Mr Lam makes it a point to localise the customer’s shopping experience by adapting to their country’s culture using Commune’s marketing campaigns.

“What works in the US may not work in China. Being able to understand cultural nuances is probably the first step towards understanding consumer habits and patterns,” said Mr Lam.

Critical iSkills needed for Successful Internationalisation

SKILL DOMAIN2:
LEADERSHIP
SKILLS

SKILL DOMAIN 3:
CULTURAL AND
LANGUAGE SKILLS

SKILL DOMAIN 5:
BUSINESS
OPPORTUNITY
SKILLS

From understanding cultural nuances to navigating across different business climates, the internationalisation journey requires companies to embrace a diverse range of iSkills as they expand their businesses overseas. Essentially, internationalisation can be thought of as an important and all-rounded lifeskill as represented below in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Internationalisation is a Life Skill

(A combination of technical and soft skills)



EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES

For employees, the prospect of heading to a foreign land to break new ground is both daunting and exciting. As Mr Gideon Teo, General Manager, Commercial & Corporate Development of JR group of companies, an international manufacturing and F&B operator, puts it: “It is a highly independent role, sometimes a one-man team, especially in SMEs.” Hence, companies need to empower their employees with the right attitude and mindset for them to navigate across the different situations that might arise in the internationalisation journey.

INTERNATIONALISATION: THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AND MINDSET MATTER

The diverse nature of internationalisation means that the work of internationaliser cuts across job roles and seniority levels. In order to become successful internationalisers, employees need to venture out of their comfort zones, adopt an innovative approach towards problem-solving and take on new responsibilities.

“What makes the skills landscape ever more complex is that soft skills, such as communication and trust building, matter as much as technical knowledge,” said Mr Kevin Lim, Corporate Strategy Director, ADERA Global.

That’s because when a company chooses to internationalise, it needs to build its overseas office and operations from scratch. The employee tasked to lead this effort will have to multi-task and be multi-skilled at the same time.

Taking on new responsibilities will allow employees to expand their professional skills set and encourage them to adopt a lifelong learning approach at the workplace. “From finding business opportunity, to assessing the right business partner, prospecting for business,

actualising and managing, to actual delivery of the business contract products and services, and provision of training,” said Mr Wilson Lim, Executive Director, International Business & China, Commonwealth Capital.

Apart from specific technical skills, employees will also need to embrace a positive mindset towards internationalisation, be adaptable, humble and culturally sensitive to thrive in an unfamiliar environment. A resilient attitude is critical, including having a long-term view and an openness to take calculated risks.

In order to successfully embrace the internationalisation spirit, employees will have to align their heart, head, actions and habits. This includes identifying their personal career goals and matching them with the organisation’s overall ambitions. In many ways, it is a way of life rather than a job function. Mr John Ang, Chief Operating Office, Regency Specialist Hospital, summed it up: “As I contribute to my organisation’s goals to globalise, I see myself as a change agent getting out of my comfort zone to do something different. It is purpose driven with a goal to bring my organisation’s footprints high and far in today’s global market.”

ROLES, NOT JOBS, DEFINE INTERNATIONALISATION

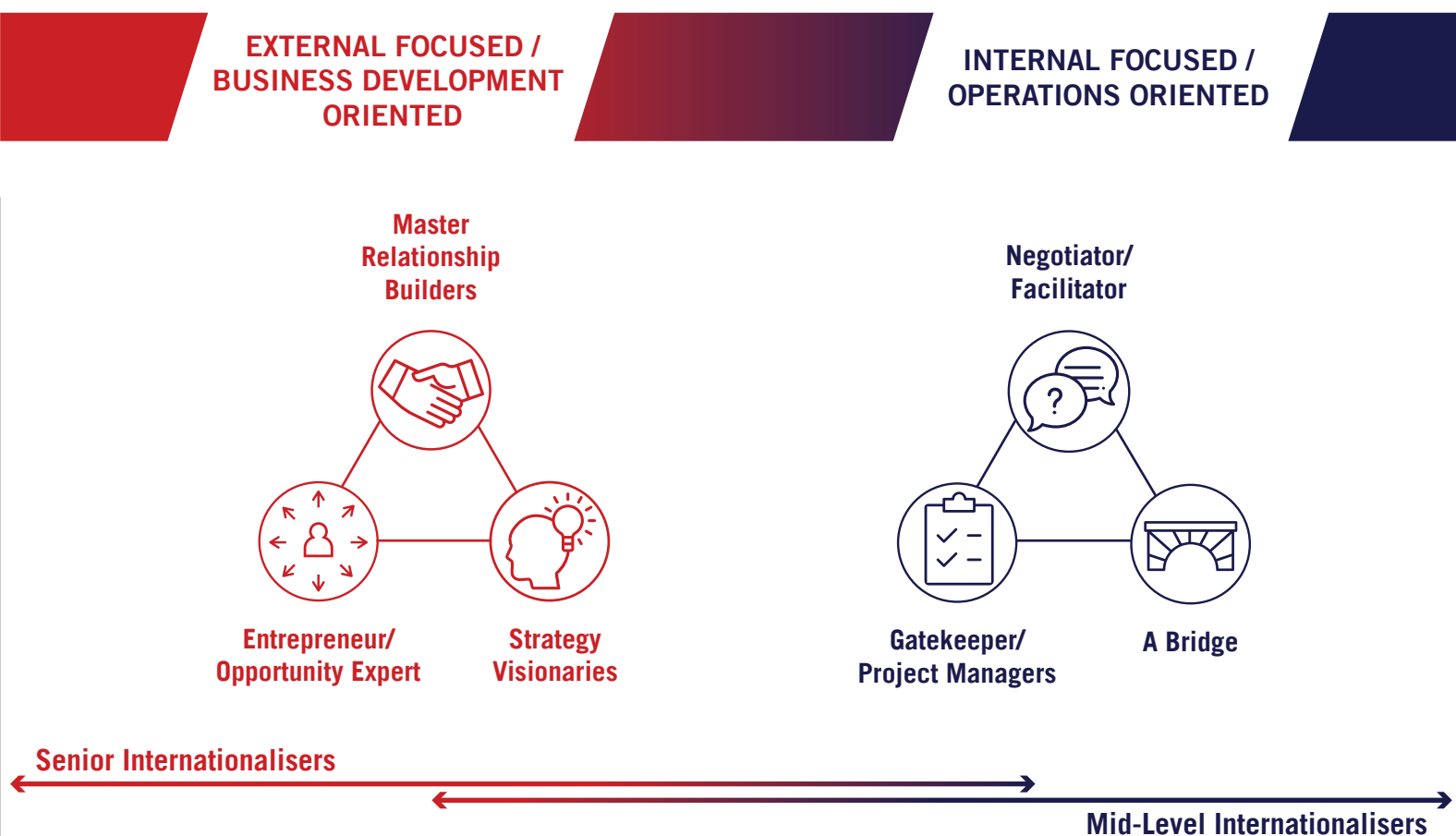
Instead of job designations, a better way to describe the work these internationalisers do is in terms of the roles they play. On this front, based on our research, there are six key roles that “internationalising” employees adopt.

1. Entrepreneur/ Opportunity expert
2. Strategy visionaries
3. Master relationship builders
4. Gatekeeper/ Project managers
5. A bridge (between head office and local office)
6. Negotiator/ Facilitator

Figure 3.1 illustrates the many job roles available for internationalising.

Figure 3.1 What do the Internationalisers do?

Given the multi-faceted nature of internationalisation, employees will need to possess diverse skillsets in order to help their companies navigate across uncharted business terrain. From both an operational and a business focused standpoint, employees across both mid and senior-levels play integral roles in a company's internationalisation journey.



Entrepreneur/Opportunity Expert

Identifying gaps in needs and opportunities for growth while overseeing the entire business development process. This ranges from prospecting for new business opportunities and conducting market assessments, to creating and presenting concrete plan of action to stakeholders and eventually executing them. Meanwhile, they also need to manage day-to-day interactions with clients and partners. These include conceptualising and negotiating plans of action with key stakeholders and accomplishing them successfully.



Strategy Visionaries

Analysing the current business map and recognising key areas for growth and expansion. This includes having a keen knowledge of the ins and outs of the industry and being able to chart the company's overall business strategy for the future ahead.



Master Relationship Builders

Aside from being able to negotiate and manage conflicts, they will need to possess a natural ability to persuade and positively influence those around them. Most importantly, they will need to be able to garner support in order to implement their strategies and ideas.



Gatekeeper/Project Manager

Serve as the key link between the headquarters and the overseas offices in order to ensure that everyone is on the same page and that operations across all markets run smoothly and in tandem with one another.



A Bridge

Responsible for ensuring that the headquarters and local offices are well integrated with one another. Ability to understand the needs and perspectives of different players in the internationalisation journey and improve communication channels between them.

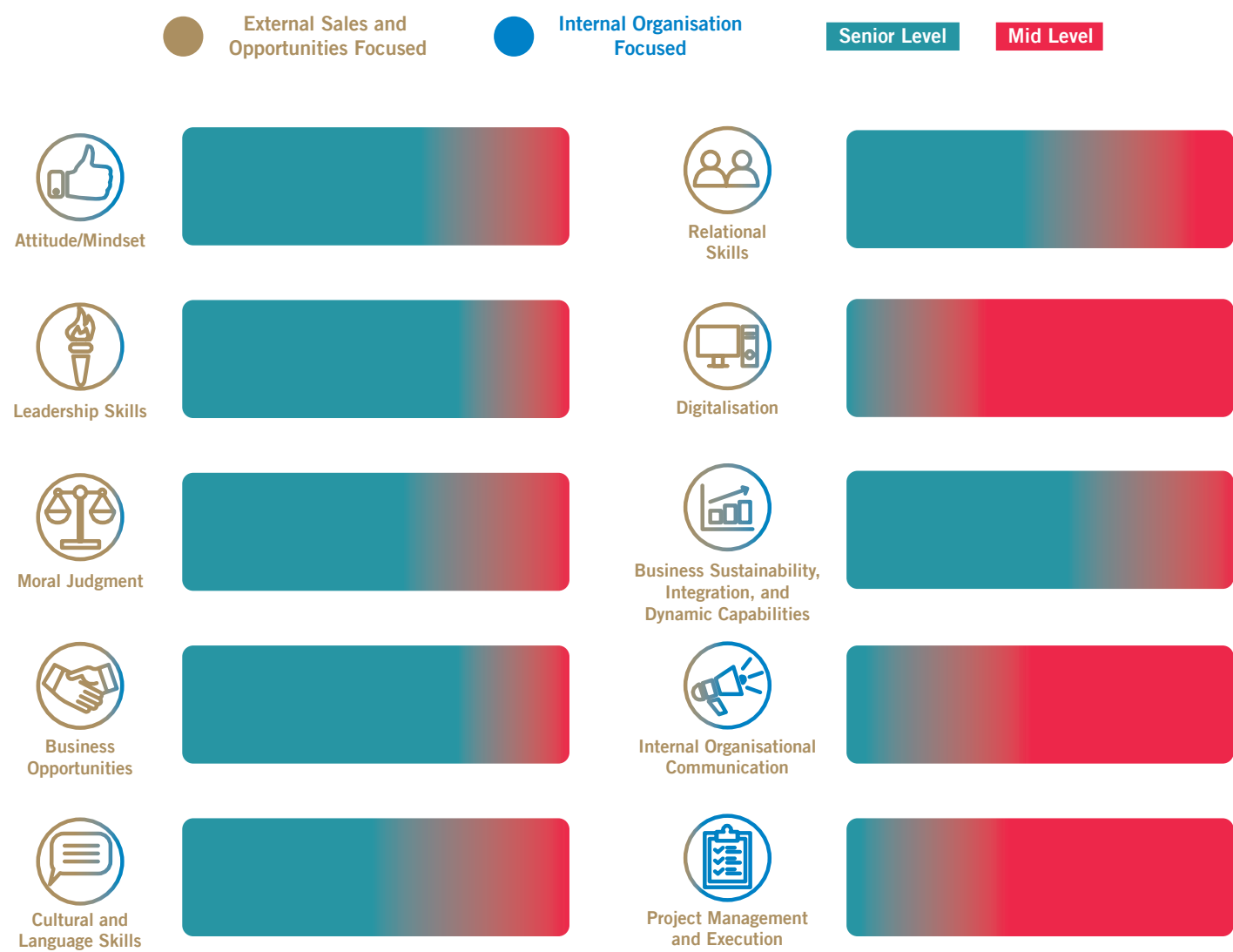


Negotiator/Facilitator

They reconcile conflicts, solve problems and negotiate with internal and external stakeholders, to ensure projects and contracts are successfully executed.

We further broke down these skills and categorised them across the different levels of seniority in a company, and whether these skills are more inclined towards client facing or entail engaging internal stakeholders. This is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 10 Critical Skill Domains for Internationalisation



From both an operational and a business focused standpoint, employees across both mid and senior levels play integral roles in a company's internationalisation journey.

- As **senior-level internationalisers**, employees will primarily embrace the roles of being an **entrepreneur**, a **strategy visionary** and a **master relationship builder**.
- As **mid-level internationalisers**, employees will primarily adopt the roles of being a **gatekeeper/project manager**, a **bridge**, and **facilitator**.
- As **junior-level internationalisers**, employees will **support** both mid and senior level internationalisers, to be exposed to the various internationaliser roles.

Employees will need to embody the right attitude towards helping their compaines go global. This involves ensuring employees align and adopt a whole person approach to develop an internationalisation spirit as in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 Mastery of the Internationalisation Spirit





THE INTERNATIONALISATION JOB LANDSCAPE

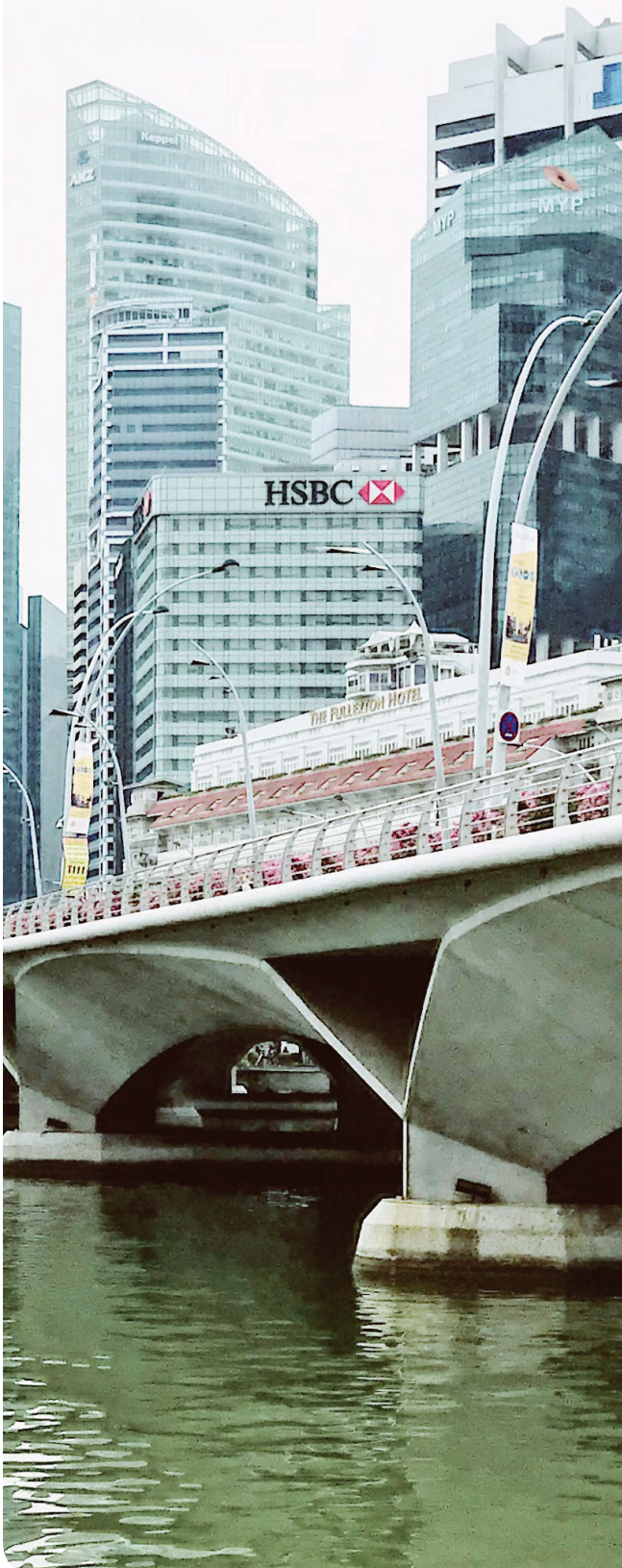
Mastering the necessary job skills help employees perform their internationalisation roles more effectively and encourage them to embrace the internationalisation spirit as they lead their companies' overseas expansion. This was backed up by our research and the input of employees who had played key roles in their companies' internationalisation process. From marketing consultants to operations managers, conversing with employees across different departments and roles have provided us with a holistic view of the internationalisation process. Once employees embrace the internationalisation spirit and master the key skills necessary for internationalisation, they can then look forward to taking on new roles within the organisation to help their companies grow in overseas markets, as illustrated in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Future Job Opportunities in Internationalisation



Every job role can be involved in the internationalisation journey!

BEYOND VERTICALS



A BLENDED JOB SKILLS APPROACH

Human resource professionals and institutes of higher learning will find this report useful as they set out to craft their own internationalisation curriculums.

By tapping on the research and key insights provided in this report, companies will be able to devise organisation-specific maps as they set out in their journey towards internationalisation.

Given the interspersed nature of job roles when it comes to going global, there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

From both an operational and a business focused perspective, employees across both mid and senior levels are involved in all stages of a company's internationalisation journey, albeit in different capacities.

To reflect this, SMEs should incorporate a “job blend” of mid and senior-level internationaliser roles when designing their iSkills development programmes.

Not only will this approach discourage the idea of working in silos, but it will also empower staff to learn new skills and take on responsibilities beyond their job scope.

To equip employees with the right iSkills, companies should consider the following factors when designing these development programmes.

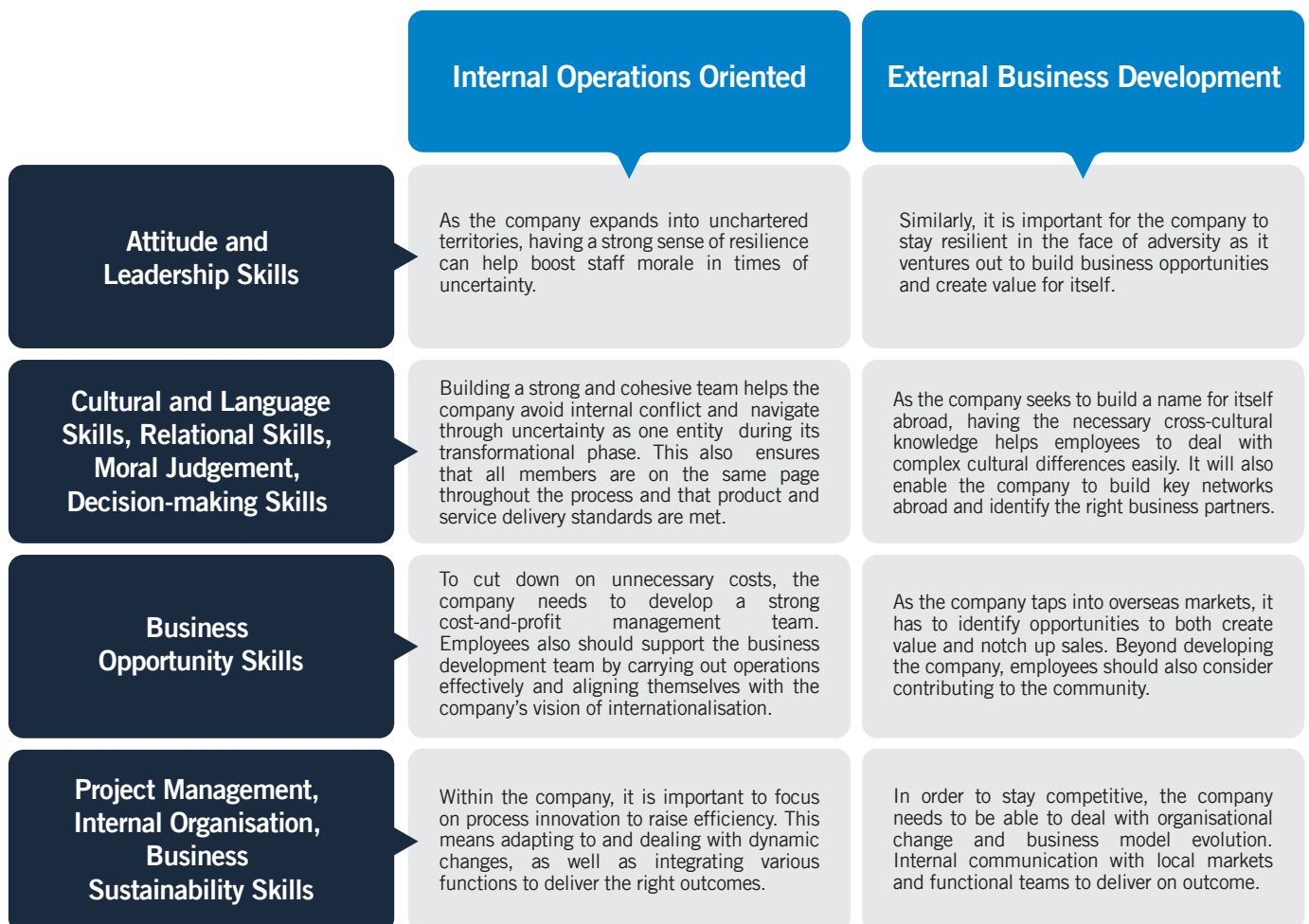
1. CREATING A BLENDED SKILLS APPROACH FOR BOTH SENIOR AND MID LEVEL EMPLOYEES

Successful internationalisers are able to multitask and embrace the concept of “job blends” – the idea of working across different levels and job functions.

Introducing the concept of “job blends” allows companies to expand overly specialised job roles and help employees move out of their comfort zones to pick up new skills and adapt to different business scenarios. They also should be equipped with a much broader and deeper range of skill sets necessary for internationalisation.

2. WORK OPPORTUNITIES THAT FOCUSES ON BOTH EXTERNAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNAL OPERATIONS FUNCTION

There are four key elements in developing a programme that addresses both the Internal Operations Oriented and External Business Development aspects of internationalisation.



3. CONSTANT RESKILLING AND UPSKILLING FOR ALL INTERNATIONALISATION JOB ROLES

Given the fluid nature of job roles when a company branches out, internationalising employees need to equip themselves with the critical iSkills for successful internationalisation, by tapping on the iSkills Talent Development Programme.

4. EMPOWER EMPLOYEES TO FULFIL 6 KEY ROLES IN INTERNATIONALISATION

The iSkills Talent Development Programme should act as a confidence booster to inspire and motivate employees to carry out their six key roles effectively.

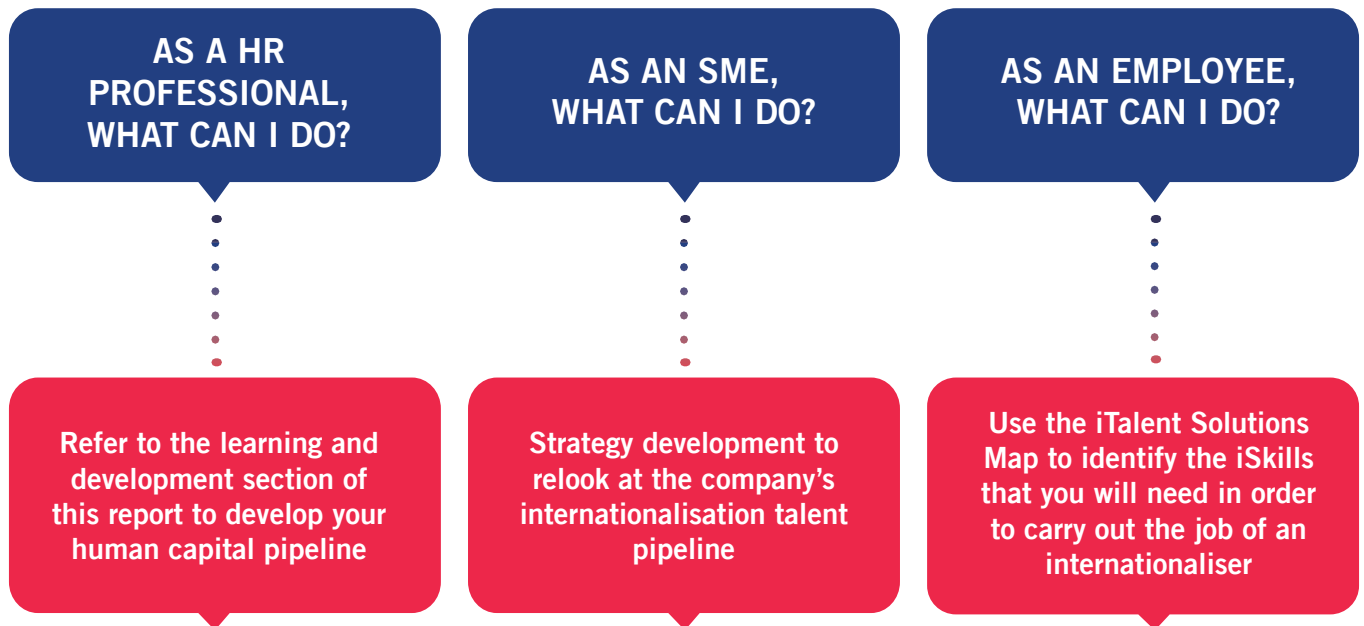
- a. Entrepreneur/Opportunity expert
- b. Strategy visionaries
- c. Master relationship builders
- d. Gatekeeper/Project manager
- e. A bridge (between HQ and local office)
- f. Negotiator/Facilitator



WHAT'S NEXT?

Contact us now to help you understand what you can do to deepen your Internationalisation skills or develop your talent to support your business in your internationalisation journey. Get in touch with us here:

- **ITI@SMU:** Sign up for the iSkills Talent Development Programme at <https://iti.smu.edu.sg>
- **SSG:** Go to MySkillsFuture portal at <https://www.myskillsfuture.sg>



- Use the iTalent Solutions Map to identify the skills and training suitable for your talent at different stages of internationalisation
- Send employees for the iSkills Talent Development Programme
- Understand what skills an employee with internationalisation-related job scope should possess
- Make reference to the iTalent Solutions Map to identify the stage of internationalisation that the company is at and the type of skilled talent needed to support the company in Internationalisation
- Use the iSkills Talent Development Programme to pre-skill and prepare talent before venturing into new overseas markets
- Seek management's support to develop your skills in the area of internationalisation by going for the iSkills talent development programme

Figure 4.1
Benefits of the
iTalent Solutions Map



RATION

partners in the internationalisation process.
 employers, employees and institutes of higher learning.

EMPLOYERS

Incorporate a robust skills development strategy to cultivate all-rounded change agents and thought leaders who drive internationalisation

- An overview of iSkills market needs required from both the demand and supply perspective
- Build an internationalisation talent pipeline for the business
- An experiential skills development strategy which focuses on areas that usually difficult to address or impart

INSTITUTE OF HIGHER LEARNING

Develop industry-specific programmes that incorporate the iTalent Solutions Map that will help Singapore businesses fulfill their human capital needs

- A robust training programme that will help Institutes of Higher Learning develop and deliver internationalisation skills training curriculum
- Help businesses internationalise with critical skills that are aligned to the iTalent Solutions Map
- Improve the quality of Singapore's workforce and build a sustainable internationalisation pipeline

SIVITY

tively impact the local economy. Apart from
 local market is able to benefit largely from
 ed by internationalised companies.

In order to stay competitive, companies will need to create innovative ideas and business solutions to stay relevant.

INNOVATIVE



GROOMING TALENTS TO SUPPORT LOCAL ENTERPRISES GO GLOBAL: USING THE iTALENT SOLUTIONS MAP

This booklet is a starting guide to understanding the need for talent in going global and how to use human capital as an internationalisation strategy to achieve the goal.

From helping a company set its internationalisation goals to guiding it to identify key human capital needs, this booklet serves as a checklist for firms hoping to head overseas. Besides helping to lay the groundwork for an internationalisation human capital pipeline, this is also a useful handbook for employees looking to identify the type of iSkills they require and the range of job roles they can expect to fill.

In addition, human resource managers and institutes of higher learning that want to develop internationalisation programmes will value the key insights into the various maps and skills required.

By expanding their businesses abroad, companies will be able to build a future-ready workforce that is able to develop country-specific business solutions and adapt to the ever evolving nature of the global economy.

Adopting the 4I approach of Integration, Innovative, Inclusivity and Impact towards internationalisation also empowers employees to develop a global mind-set and venture beyond their comfort zones as they steer their company ahead.

Adopting the benefits of the iTalent Solutions Map can help impact businesses, employers, employees and institutes of higher learning.



As a company expands and grows overseas, it will have to constantly innovate and develop new business solutions while creating and capturing value. Taking the first step is often the hardest, but it gets easier if there is a compass to help guide the way.

We have put together a map that attempts to illustrate the entire journey ahead for companies looking to internationalise, the questions they must ask, and the skills their staff should have.

At the outset, the most important task for companies is to understand what the journey will entail for them. It also means having to shift mindsets and adopting an open-mind to the challenges ahead. This must necessarily mean making assessments on the company's preparedness for regional growth, planning the path ahead and executing the plan.

The most critical part, however, is empowering staff to plan, implement and execute the strategy ahead. Talent, as we have shown in this report, is the key pillar supporting growth overseas.

Employees are a company's greatest assets. By developing future-ready employees, companies will be able to grow their brand identity abroad and scale new heights.

In developing talent for internationalisation, business leaders will not only transform their company, but also the industry they are in, and eventually the country they represent. It's a virtuous cycle that benefits the entire community, a win-win proposition.

THE 4I APPROACH TO INTERNATIONALISATION

INTEGRATION

Aligning both the front end and back end partners in the internationalisation process. This involves integrating efforts between employers, employees and institutes of higher learning.

INNOVATE

In order for companies to stay competitive, companies will need to create innovative ideas and business solutions to stay relevant.

INCLUSIVITY

Internationalisation has the ability to positively impact the local economy. Apart from helping to create job opportunities, local markets also engage in cross-cultural exchange in their interaction with international companies.

IMPACT

Internationalisation is an integrated business approach that possesses the ability to impact the country, business, industry and individual.

THE BENEFITS OF GOING GLOBAL FOR COMPANY AND COUNTRY

In an ever-evolving economic landscape where adaptability is key to survival, being able to internationalise successfully can help companies build global networks and harness the potential of an international consumer base.

By tapping into the potential of foreign markets, companies both large and small can diversify their operations and increase their brand exposure beyond local shores.

Having a strong core of internationalisers not only helps companies to stay globally competitive, it also motivates them to embrace innovation.

Internationalisation benefits not just the organisation and its employees. In landscarce Singapore where human resources are its greatest asset, internationalisation also empowers the population to think globally and adapt to an unpredictable economic climate.

Figure 5.1
Using the iTalent
Solutions Map

1. Are you ready?

2. Do you have
what you need for
your business?

3. Do you know
your partners
and customers?

		Most important		
CRITICAL SKILL DOMAIN	Business needs	The right mindset and attitude to internationalisation	Basic know-how on market entry and international business; deal making and opportunity creation	The art of cultural right business partnership and delivery
	Attitude and mindset			
	Leadership skills			
	Language and cultural skills			
	Relational skills			
	Business opportunity skills			
	Morals judgement, decision making skills			
	Digitalization skills			
	Project management skills			
	Internal organization skills			
	Business sustainability skills			

..... USING THE iTALENT SOLUTIONS MAP

In developing talent for internationalisation, business leaders can transform company, industry and country. As a company expands and grows overseas, it will have to constantly innovate and develop new business solutions while creating and capturing value.

As illustrated in Fig 5.1 below, the first step that companies need to take in the internationalisation journey is to understand the journey that lies ahead for them. This will allow them to

understand their core strengths and capabilities and recognise where they stand in the internationalisation journey.

By developing their talent needs, companies will be better placed to take their businesses abroad. At the end of the day, employees are a company's greatest assets. By developing future-ready employees, companies will be able to grow their brand identity abroad and scale new heights.





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