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## A World of Differences

As vice president of human resources for its printing and personal systems business in the Americas region, **Elcio Barcelos** is evolving **Hewlett-Packard Co.** from "multinational" to "multicultural"

By Tina Vasquez

If you ask a seasoned world traveler the best way to navigate a foreign country, they'll tell you: ask the locals. After all, who knows better than those who live there where to find the freshest seafood, the cheapest drinks, or the best views?

For the same reasons they're useful to tourists, local citizens are valuable to multinational employers, who can utilize their cultural literacy to navigate foreign markets and stimulate global growth.

That's what Hewlett-Packard Co. (HP) does, according to Elcio Barcelos, vice president of human resources for the Americas region, serving the company's printing and personal systems division. Although it's based in Palo Alto, California, HP operates in more than 170 different countries and generates most of its revenue outside the United States. Local talent, therefore, is critical to its strategic growth.

"Multinational executives can't sit in an ivory tower in the United States and dictate how businesses should be managed globally, because localization is so critically relevant to their success," Barcelos says.

Working with native HR teams—from Canada to Argentina—has taught Barcelos a lot about both localization and globalization. Here, he shares his gleanings from three Latin American countries.

### BRAZIL

"Brazil is one of the largest markets for PC growth in the world," explains Barcelos, who was born in the United States but grew up in Brazil. "There are many competitors in the market pushing to further establish themselves there, and we're no different."

Brazil is unique from a human resources standpoint for several reasons. One, there is a significant gap between the supply and demand for talent, which means companies must pay a premium for it. Two, it's of Portuguese, not Spanish, descent.

"The Portuguese language ... creates a unique need for that market," Barcelos explains. "It's not as simple as moving someone from a Mexico office to Brazil; you actually have to recruit and develop talent locally because of language and cultural barriers."

Because there is so much competition for talent in emerging markets, HP often "cross-pollinates" young professionals, sending them to markets such as the United States for training and development before returning them home. The result—local talent with global qualifications—advances both the employee and the company, not to mention the local economy, which benefits from the investments that developed nations make in the local labor force.

### ARGENTINA

Argentina's unique trade regulations have created an environment that forces multinationals to adapt their operations to local demands. "Argentineans have developed an international profile of talent that is highly bilingual and highly adaptable to multicountry roles," explains Barcelos, who says HP often deploys its Argentinean employees across its Latin American footprint. "That allows us to leverage our talent in a more flexible way across the region."

And yet, Argentina has a very distinct culture. "It's important for our employees in Argentina who are supporting other areas of Latin America to understand that although their neighbors speak Spanish, their values and customs could be quite different," Barcelos says.

In fact, values and customs in Argentina are an employers' biggest challenge and also their biggest opportunity. "In Argentina you have a population that is very passionate, driven, and focused on family values," explains Barcelos, who says Argentineans' passion translates into their work—provided their employer engages their culture and celebrates their values. "There's much more that matters to [Argentineans] in their lives than just their jobs. There's family, for instance, faith, and their social environment. That affects how we create a career path for someone."

### CHILE

Although it's a smaller market, Chile is developing quickly, which makes it an exciting place to do business. "Chile is probably one of the most dynamic emerging countries that we operate in," Barcelos says. "Socially and economically speaking they're more stable than neighboring countries, and they also have significant diversity in their economic footprint."

From an HR perspective, what stands out most about Chile is its young and energetic workforce. "In Chile we have a really rich Gen Y talent pool that wants to grow," Barcelos says. "Gen Y has a tendency to want rapid growth ... so providing a career path in an accelerated way is absolutely critical."

Equally important is providing a local career path. While HP typically imports and exports talent across many Latin American countries, in Chile it strives to recruit and develop talent within Chilean borders. "What we find is that Chilean talent wants to grow, expand, and evolve in Chile—their country matters," Barcelos says. "Providing a diverse career path for one to be able to grow within [their] geography, without having to move or transition to another area of Latin America, is important."

His work across the Americas recently prepared Barcelos for an entirely different kind of cultural integration: that of HP's printing and personal systems groups. "The cultures of these divisions were quite different," Barcelos says. "One, our printing business, is more stable and mature. The other, our PC business, is more dynamic, and highly competitive. It's been a great learning experience to drive this cultural integration."

Whether he's integrating business units or global employees, a former mentor's words ring true. "A leader of mine once said you should always approach business with the following view: common where possible, custom where it counts," Barcelos concludes. "We want to create a common, consistent, and predictable experience for our employees and customers. However, at times you have to create a customized local solution. Balancing those two has been absolutely critical for HP."

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