



WorldLink

Linking people management professionals around the globe

HR Shifts Gears in the Middle East

By Pooja Mohan and Radhika Punshi

The impact of the global financial crisis was felt to varying degrees by all economies in the Middle East region. Dropping oil prices and production levels, plummeting equity markets, virtual collapse of key export markets, falling remittances and declining tourism revenues resulted in an average GDP growth rate of 2.9 percent in 2009, according to 2010 World Bank figures, down from 4.3 percent in 2008 and 5.9 percent in 2007.

As organizations in the Middle East go through these tough times, they are also refining their business models in an attempt to make growth more sustainable in the future. Human resources has traditionally absorbed more dollars than most other departments and is now under the scanner like never before. In response, HR departments are practicing newer, more effective ways to meet strategic objectives and are going through a real point of inflection in their evolution.

Evolution of HR

In the last half-decade, we have traced the journey of HR across various organizations in the Middle East region and can broadly classify this journey into three distinct stages:

- The era of talent acquisition saw HR trying to rapidly scale up organizational size and abilities while trying to hire the required quantity and quality of talent. HR strategies in this era were primarily compensation- and recruitment-driven.
- The era of talent retention and urgent system development saw organizations focusing on retaining and developing the right talent. Simultaneously, HR leaders also began to be questioned on the credibility of HR processes and organizational systems. This process came to an abrupt halt with the global crisis.
- The era of HR metrics was ushered in as HR increasingly was asked to look inside the organization. As this era unfolds, we have observed some key trends in the region:

Workforce management. For the past three to five years, the focus in the region had largely been around expansion and growth; this led to large-scale and sometimes illogical recruitment. However, in recent times, many organizations have changed gears from simple hiring to managing their existing workforce with enhanced focus on

productivity, efficiency, flexibility and employment practices.

Manpower rationalization has also been zealously adopted by many organizations, especially in the absence of strong, labor-protective employment laws in the Middle East. Hewitt's 2009 Salary Increase Survey of 235 companies in Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates found that 21 percent had laid off employees in 2009 and 42 percent had implemented a hiring freeze. In Hewitt's June 2009 Market Survey of organizations in the Middle East region, more than half the participating organizations said that improving employee efficiencies/productivity will be the most critical people management issue that they will face in the next one to three years.

Building performance differentiation. In prior years of growth and abundance, performance management was considered more of a process adherence than a business necessity. In contrast, in the current landscape, goal setting and performance appraisals have become critical as they help differentiate talent. Hewitt's 2009 Best Employers in Middle East Study also highlights a high correlation between employee motivation and an effective performance management system.

Increasingly, HR needs to make sure business takes ownership of this system to ensure a culture where performance goals are clearly articulated and tracked, and achievement is rewarded. In our view, the most significant cultural transformation occurs in organizations where performance becomes the basis for all decision-making.

Focus on leadership development. As organizations revise their business models to become more competitive, they are also realizing the importance of building leaders at every level in the organization.

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Developing a leadership pipeline is critical to ensuring the short-term and long-term success of any organization.

Many organizations have responded by strengthening their systems around career growth, succession planning, and training and development. This is evident in the fact that the 12 companies cited as Best Employers by Hewitt have about three times more training days per employee and invest much more time in internal coaching, on-the-job training and mentoring in comparison to time spent on external courses and training programs. Hewitt's Market Survey also reveals that a majority of the participating organizations are going to spend most of their resources on leadership development and implementing an effective learning and development system.

The Arab national agenda. There is a renewed need to focus on the coaching and development of nationals to take on current and future challenges. In the wake of rampant workforce reduction, many governments have placed restrictions on laying off locals from private sectors, and in certain industries, jobs have been reserved for nationals only.

Organizations need to develop a strong channel for assimilating talented nationals into their workforce. Job enrichment and learning and development of nationals have become essential for long-term competitiveness. As a case in point, we found that most firms cited as Best Employers by Hewitt have developed exclusive strategies for attracting, developing and retaining the top talent among nationals for key jobs in the organization. This clearly gives them a competitive advantage over the rest of the organizations in the region.

Compensation management. Compensation decisions had been fairly unstructured and sometimes generous in many organizations in the Middle East in the last half-decade. This trend took a dramatic turn in 2009 when Hewitt's Salary Increase Survey found that around 42 percent of organizations froze salaries in 2009, while the rest gave an average salary increase of 5.4 percent with a forecast of 6.5 percent for 2010, roughly half that of previous years' averages.

These challenges imply that organizations need to manage their compensation programs in a more structured and prudent manner. As a best practice, we found that many Best Employers accord much more importance to the entire rewards package rather than the take-home salary, and also communicate the overall benefits structures much more effectively.

Building the HR team. HR has become an expert people administrator and an emerging business and strategic partner in recent years. Best Employers have moved more rapidly on this journey by displaying agility around evolving business needs, instituting a more mature framework of effective people practices. They have been able to achieve positive outcomes from systems that have impacted employees' careers, rewards, learning and development, and delivery of employment promise.

While economic recovery in the region takes its own course in the coming months, organizations need to rise to the challenge through more agile, competitive and strategically aligned HR systems. While this awareness and capability has been observed in small pockets, it clearly needs to become the order of the day for organizations to thrive and win in these tough times. [WL](#)

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GCC Firms Could Employ More Women Through Telecommuting

By William Scott-Jackson

Female workforce participation rates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states—Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman—lag behind the rates in all other regions in the world. Latest figures from 2006 show a GCC population of around 36 million, of which 48 percent are women. However, the rate of female workforce participation across the states stands at 19.2 percent, according to government statistics, compared with global averages of nearly 50 percent.

Meanwhile, the GCC states have been investing in economic stimulus plans to rebound from an anemic 0.9 percent GDP growth rate in 2009, down from an average 6 percent from 2004 to 2008, according to the International Monetary Fund. Governments also have made nationalization of local labor a priority to reduce the region's dependence on expatriate labor. We believe these two goals would be furthered by the increase of female labor participation through at-home working options.

In 2008, Oxford Strategic Consulting (OSC), an HR consulting firm with offices in the Middle East, embarked on a project to increase the rate of female labor force participation through at-home working across the GCC states. Named Shurouq, which means "sunrise" in Arabic, this initiative aims to help create a brighter and more prosperous future for the GCC states.

GCC governments have rapidly improved female access to higher education, and in many states, female graduates now outnumber males. The International Computer Driving License GCC Foundation, a governing body and certification authority, states that technology initiatives implemented by GCC governments to increase IT literacy among women will "create entrepreneurial opportunities for women and positively influence their country's socio-economic growth." It will also empower women to "work in various areas and encourage them to take up e-learning and to establish home-based businesses, in areas such as design, translation and financial market investments."

With a vision of a brighter future across the GCC states, initiatives are needed to address the various factors that hinder these women from being a flourishing and valuable part of the workforce in their countries.

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	Hiring Freeze	Headcount Freeze	Strategic Hiring	Layoffs	Salary Freeze 2009	Planned Salary Freeze 2010
Unsure	9.0%	12.1%	16.3%	17.5%	1.3%	15.3%
No	48.7%	52.2%	23.6%	61.5%	56.9%	70.6%
Yes	42.3%	35.7%	60.1%	20.9%	41.8%	14.0%

Source: Hewitt's Salary Increase Survey conducted across Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, October 2009.

Barriers to Women Working

We interviewed 49 public- and private-sector employers in the GCC states as well as 124 female and senior male employees to identify the barriers and solutions for more women to work.

Obstacles to Women Working from Home	
Commitment/responsibility	53%
Trust and management style	53%
Salaries too high	48%
Right personalities	45%
Distractions	42%
Security of confidential information	30%
Women don't want/need to work full-time	24%
IT access	15%
Face-to-face culture	15%

Source: OSC's Maximizing Women's Participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council survey of employers and employees, 2009.

Although more than 60 percent of employers thought that women were poorly trained for the work environment and that career guidance was inadequate, less than 20 percent thought that women's level of education was a barrier to employment. This suggests the need for tailored training and career goal setting for women in the GCC states.

The barrier mentioned most often by employers and employees is that women wish to care for, and be with, their children and their families. The second factor is that there are inadequate facilities to allow women to work effectively. This does not just include the obvious child care facilities but also flexible working practices (to allow women to carry out domestic and work roles) and more basic facilities such as separate bathrooms and prayer rooms. Both of these barriers could be sufficiently overcome by establishing at-home working options for women.

A Mind-set Change

Cultural attitudes against women working from home did not show up in our interviews. More than 99 percent of all respondents believed that women would be qualified for home-working roles. Similarly, very few respondents believed there to be family restrictions on home-working, which indicated a positive socio-cultural framework that

home-working would not be considered socially unacceptable in the GCC states.

A December 2009 survey, Telecommuting in the Middle East Workplace, by jobs site Bayt.com of nearly 10,000 job seekers across the Middle East, found that 72 percent of professionals think that working from home would be a good idea for both employees and employers. The main benefits cited for employees were increased time with family, reduced costs and time in commuting, and flexibility in working hours. Benefits to the employer included better employee motivation, retention, loyalty and greater productivity.

A change in mind-set about the ability to manage people from afar is also needed. In our survey, 53 percent voiced concerns about commitment/responsibility and trust and management style. More than 40 percent of respondents in our survey believed distractions were also a major challenge to the success of at-home working initiatives. The Bayt survey also suggested that the most suitable at-home workers would have to be self-disciplined and in roles with low levels of face-to-face interaction required. More than one-quarter said that the main concern was underperformance due to lack of close monitoring.

Initiatives are needed to address the factors that hinder women from being a flourishing and valuable part of the GCC workforce.

While these are valid concerns, employers can monitor progress through productivity checks to ensure they are satisfied with the quality and quantity of work provided by the women.

These obstacles are common in all countries where companies have introduced at-home working options and are largely overcome through a combination of training (for both workers and managers) and familiarity over time.

Economic Payoff

Increasing the current level of female economic participation across the GCC states by 12 percent to 3.2 million would result in extensive economic and social benefits for the GCC states, allowing more than 2 million additional highly qualified women to enter the workforce and potentially contribute up to 30 percent (\$363 billion) to GCC GDP (given a total GDP of \$1.2 trillion). It also would reduce dependency on expatriates by providing more jobs for GCC nationals, which has been an underlying goal of the governments. It is evident that by encouraging female participation in the workforce through at-home working arrangements, every GCC state has the potential to make it happen. [WL](#)

William Scott-Jackson is chairman of Oxford Strategic Consulting (OSC) in Oxford, England. Andrew Porteous, director of OSC, Bashar Kariem, senior researcher at OSC, Amira Harb researcher at OSC, and Chris Rowley, principal research fellow at OSC, also contributed.

FIDAGH President Leverages Strong Relationships



Leovigildo Canto Pérez

Leovigildo Canto Pérez became president of the Interamerican Federation of People Management Associations (FIDAGH) in November 2009 after more than a decade of leadership positions in the federation, having previously served as vice president of the Central Caribbean area, secretary/treasurer and first vice president. He believes his time working with representatives from other member countries and building relationships will help guide his two-year term as president.

Canto is currently an HR consultant in Panama and professor of HR management at the Interamerican University of Panama. He previously led HR at local companies and in the Panama subsidiaries of multinational conglomerates. He holds an undergraduate degree in accounting and a master's in industrial management and business administration with a concentration in HR. Canto spoke to *WorldLink* about his new role.

WorldLink: What are the current HR challenges in the FIDAGH member countries?

Canto: FIDAGH's member countries have a lot of differences united by a common language. We are a region with great challenges. We have to be creative and innovative in the management of human resources to add value to our organizations and to keep the best people working on it. One challenge for all of us is that employees want to increase their professional skills and abilities, but many HR professionals don't have the necessary means to invest in employee development. And if HR can't offer employees the opportunity to learn and develop, then they leave for other organizations that can. Learning and development is a critical piece to remaining competitive in our countries.

WorldLink: What is your priority and approach as president of FIDAGH?

Canto: I have been blessed with the opportunity to work in different roles on the FIDAGH Board of Directors for more than nine years. This time allows me to acquire knowledge about the aspirations, projects and needs of the national HR associations that form the federation. It has been an inspiration for me to get together with the people of Latin America. To know about their dreams, what they desire, the goals they want to reach, the position they

want to engage in their own countries and their expectations about FIDAGH. All of this shapes my approach and goals as president.

WorldLink: What are your goals for FIDAGH?

Canto: Our main goal is to strengthen the institutionalism of each one of our associations. To reach this and the other objectives in our strategic plan, we count on the teamwork and commitment of each person on the FIDAGH board.

We have to work together in favor of our associations and be capable and resourceful to exceed their expectations. [WL](#)

Global Survey Reveals Top HR Qualities

Strategy and communication are the most important competencies for senior HR leaders, according to a survey of more than 2,000 HR professionals in four countries/regions. HR professionals in the United States, India, the Middle East and North Africa, and Canada ranked 18 competencies, and the results reveal much agreement about the qualities required of senior HR leaders under various operating conditions.

Across all four countries/regions, "strategic thinking" and "effective communication" emerged as the top two competencies for senior HR professionals. India and the Middle East and North Africa listed the same top five competencies, although in a different order, suggesting that senior HR professionals face similar demands in those regions.

Canada, India, and the Middle East and North Africa shared "leading change" as one of their top five selected competencies, and the United States, India, and the Middle East and North Africa ranked "HR knowledge" as a top competency.

The United States is the only country that rated "integrity" and "ethical behavior" as important qualities, likely driven by recent corporate scandals and the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act. In Canada, "persuasiveness/influencing others" and "credibility" rounded out its top five.

The survey, released in March 2010, was conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) in partnership with the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations and SHRM India. The full study, available at www.shrm.org, also details the rankings of each country or region as well as more data on training for these competencies and top qualities needed during an economic crisis. [WL](#)

Top 5 Competencies for HR Leaders					
	1	2	3	4	5
United States	Effective communication	Strategic thinking	HR knowledge	Integrity	Ethical behavior
Canada	Strategic thinking	Effective communication	Persuasiveness/influencing others	Leading change	Credibility
India	Strategic thinking	Effective communication	Business knowledge	HR knowledge	Leading change
Middle East/North Africa	Strategic thinking	Effective communication	HR knowledge	Leading change	Business change

Source: SHRM's What Senior HR Leaders Need to Know: Perspectives from the United States, Canada, India, the Middle East and North Africa, 2010.

Combining Leadership and Community Development

By James Longwell

Cadbury Plc, recently acquired by Kraft Foods Inc., is a global confectionary company with a long and rich tradition of combining business with social good. More than 20 years ago, Sir Adrian Cadbury wrote “The Character of our Company,” the essence of our current values statement—long before sustainability became a buzzword—asserting that being profitable and being responsible are not mutually exclusive.

With that in mind, two years ago, we created the Leadership for Performance (LFP) program that paired our rising talented leaders with community groups and non-governmental organizations in a consultative partnership that developed our talent while meeting a community group’s strategic needs.

The Groundwork

Out of a global pool of 500 senior managers, business leaders from the company’s seven global units select between 12 and 16 delegates through an annual leadership potential selection process to participate in the six-month LFP program. Because the programs are delivered locally, several can run simultaneously.

Delegates receive 720-degree feedback from colleagues, supervisors, clients and family. The results feed into a coaching program and on-the-job learning opportunities. The bulk of the leadership development work occurs over a five-day core learning event on-site with the chosen community organization. But delegates receive coaching and training before, during and after the event.

In North America, we chose to partner with the Greater Newark Conservancy (GNC), a non-profit organization promoting environmental stewardship to improve the quality of life of New Jersey’s urban communities through education, job training, community greening and environmental justice programs.

Staff at the Parsippany, N.J., office of Cadbury North America had volunteered at GNC for five years. Together with GNC leaders, we decided to address the challenge of developing a business model that would improve their revenue streams through their existing landscaping service and educational programs. GNC had just received a contract from the New Jersey Department of Justice for a 16-month Prisoner Reintegration Initiative (PRI) for newly released prisoners. GNC would begin working with PRI to provide job training opportunities for ex-offenders while beautifying the greater Newark area. Our goal was to help make the PRI program a sustainable one for GNC.

Two weeks prior to the September 2009 event, 16 participants from Mexico, Canada and the United States received background material on the project and met on a virtual call. Delegates received four coaching calls prior to the event to prepare them for the leadership challenge they would face.

LfP in Action

On day one, participants met each other in person and went through leadership workshops. Delegates visited the garden at GNC to see their work in person and met the executive director and board of directors. In the afternoon, participants broke up into individual groups and met with GNC leaders to gather information and ask questions. Even at dinner, they were talking about what they had learned, from the board chair down to the garden workers.

Every morning of the program begins with small group coaching sessions based on each delegate’s strengths and development areas and continues with a different theme of leadership development before

returning to the community partner work. On Tuesday afternoon, they met with GNC representatives again to build relationships and to challenge them on ideas. Delegates also met with ex-offenders in the PRI program. We prepared and coached them for that meeting, recognizing that both parties would be nervous.

GNC Executive Director Robin L. Dougherty was impressed by the leaders’ sensitivity. “Many of the leaders had never had experience working with an impoverished, under-educated person who had a life they couldn’t understand. But they were able to relate to them,” she said. “You could see how the empathy and passion they developed for the ex-offenders drove their work.”

The work heated up on Wednesday as delegates referred to notes from previous sessions to analyze what they had learned and to come up with ideas. In the afternoon, they met again with GNC representatives to test solutions.

At Cadbury, we believe to be a truly effective leader, you need to be aware of what your own values are to understand what drives and motivates you. On Thursday, we worked on this with them, and that set

them up well to work into the night on Friday’s presentation.

GNC staff, board of directors and volunteers attended Friday’s presentation. After an in-depth analysis of GNC’s mission, programs and fundraising sources, delegates gave recommendations for improvements. They also offered to run a session with the board to work out elements of the strategy they proposed.

“You could tell the participants had done their research and worked really hard to understand the challenges,” said Dougherty. “Most of the board members come from the corporate world, and they noted that their companies had never done anything like this.”

Post-Event Work

At the conclusion of the presentation, we coached delegates on how to take what they had learned back to the company. One participant called the experience the most transformative event of his life. Another said it was a powerful experience that allowed him to reflect on his effectiveness as a leader.

The power of this experience comes from working with a community organization. It’s not a case study or theoretical. The people are real, as are the lives they are affecting.

After every event, we conduct follow-up surveys, and each delegate receives four more coaching calls. We also ask delegates to determine five key leadership themes, both strengths and development areas, and we monitor and evaluate their progress for 12 months. We have individual conversations with their managers to find out how they’ve used the program in their day-to-day work.

The work with GNC didn’t stop either. “We’ve had meetings around our vision statement and are beginning the second phase of the work,” said Dougherty. “The partnership gave us an opportunity to hear from all the different constituencies we serve and put all the pieces together. Without Cadbury, we wouldn’t have had the time or the money to do that on our own.”

In addition to the GNC project, LFP participants have completed nine other projects with local community groups in Australia, India, Thailand, the United States, Ghana and the United Kingdom. We are currently in discussion with Kraft to adopt the program throughout its wider organization. [WL](#)



Cadbury delegates meet ex-offenders participating in the Conservancy’s Prisoner Reintegration Initiative.

James Longwell is global learning and development director at Cadbury in London.

My Story: Moving from Administrative to Strategic HR in Ghana

By Irene Asiedu

It has been a little more than a year since I joined TechnoServe Ghana on January 19, 2009, as HR manager, and the strides I have made here are reflective of the progress being made by HR throughout Ghana. As we in HR build our experience and knowledge of the profession, we are changing perceptions and adding value to organizations.



Irene Asiedu

At TechnoServe, I started changing perceptions at the job offer stage. Initially offered a position as an HR middle manager reporting to the financial controller, I declined the offer. I knew from past experience that it was not beneficial for HR to report to finance because finance's prime focus is to keep down costs, which is sometimes at odds with HR's priority of investing in practices that engage and motivate staff.

After declining the first offer, I approached TechnoServe's Ghana Country Director and explained to him the importance of giving HR a seat at the management table. I conveyed that the best way for me to make a contribution to the organization is to be seen as an equal partner to the rest of senior management and to have direct access to him. I must have made a convincing presentation, because I was subsequently offered a better package reporting directly to the Country Director. I accepted this offer knowing I would have the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution.

As is often the case, I learned my value as an HR contributor under pressure. I had been working as an HR assistant at the Overseas Processing Entity of Accra of Church World Service, whose mandate is to administer the U.S. government's refugee resettlement program in West Africa, for only two months when my boss resigned. The person who took my supervisor's place had no background in HR, and soon, senior management began relying on me for HR-related issues. When the organization decided to downsize, I advised management to offer a voluntary severance package and outlined implementation details. This approach proved successful and painless. Eventually, my duties expanded, and I was promoted to HR manager on par with the rest of senior management.

Making an Impact

At TechnoServe, I anticipated that my attempt to make HR more visible would not be embraced wholeheartedly. Therefore, I took time to meet one-on-one with each member of the senior management team as well as my direct reports. This gave me a good understanding of their roles and how my job interfaced with theirs. It also gave me information about general issues of the organization.

I came into this role with work experience in human resources and administration as well as a sound knowledge of the Ghana Labor Act. This background has served me well in my ability to provide information to senior management to facilitate strategic decisions about staff.

Change has not been easy, however. Following difficulties getting completed appraisals from a number of supervisors, I instituted a more progressive process of providing continuous feedback to employees and documenting these discussions in logs. I communicated the new process, answered managers' questions and articulated the benefits for them and their employees. The goal is to make annual performance appraisal a simple formality of summarizing year-long discussions, which would not be a surprise to the employee. Four months in, however, not all supervisors have implemented the new process. I will not be deterred, though, and I intend to meet with these supervisors to find out what else they need to begin.

In keeping with TechnoServe Ghana management practice, I have

an open-door policy, and staff members at all levels know they are welcome in my office for HR guidance. Most employees, though, are based in field offices and cannot pop in to ask questions. I make regular trips to improve the connection and communication between HR and field staff as well as to give HR more visibility. This has fostered more trust between the HR team and staff, and HR is now seen as a genuine advocate of the individual and collective well-being of individuals in the organization.

Making HR more visible and strategic has not been easy. It has taken hard work, commitment, time management and self-discipline.

We have revised our employee manual in line with TechnoServe's values. I believe the new version adheres to company values and will provide better guidelines to staff on expected behaviors. For example, regarding performance reviews, we have stated that "Employees are also encouraged to seek regular feedback from the supervisors" so that the onus does not rest solely on the supervisor. In addition, we amended a policy for nursing mothers that now gives them an hour break paid each day to nurse until the baby is one year old.

Making HR more visible and strategic has not been easy. It has taken hard work, commitment, time management and self-discipline. I must be proactive in anticipating needs before they arise and respond quickly. It has also required a lot of self-development, and I use HR web sites and read publications to keep up to date with the latest trends in the field. All this has been worth it, and I enjoy every bit of the work I do to support our staff, who do all they can to make life better for others.

Future Is Bright

HR in Ghana has grown from what was admittedly a low-level position to an increasingly recognized strategic function in the corporate world. As companies—and by extension the economy—grow, HR is evolving into a suite of complex people and strategic management functions that directly report to the highest levels of the organization.

Evidence of HR's growing importance in Ghana is apparent. Local universities now offer degree programs at all levels in the discipline while a professional body, the Institute of Human Resource Management Practitioners, has been set up to provide education in the field. I see daily job postings by companies requesting the services of HR practitioners. It is my hope that one day these positions come automatically with a direct reporting relationship to the local executive in charge. With these developments, HR is geared to play a critical role in the future of organizations and the Ghanaian economy.

WL

Irene Asiedu is HR manager at TechnoServe Ghana, a non-governmental organization in more than 30 countries that helps entrepreneurs build their businesses.

United States Health care reform



President Barack Obama signed into law a historic health care reform bill, which will have a major impact on employers. Beginning in 2014, many U.S. employers with 50 or more workers will be required to provide health coverage or face federal fines. Starting in 2018, employers that offer workers pricier plans—or those with total premiums of \$10,200 or more for singles and \$27,500 for families—would be subject to a 40 percent tax on the excess premium. Retirees and workers in high-risk professions like firefighting would have higher thresholds (\$11,850 for singles, or \$30,950 for families), pegged to inflation. The regulatory process will provide further guidance on compliance.

Canada Quebec speeds up residency process



Hoping to alleviate a shortage of skilled workers, the Quebec government launched a new program that will allow foreign workers to more quickly and easily obtain permanent residency status. The program will cut several weeks off the waiting time to receive a certificate of selection, which is the first document needed for permanent residency. The change will help companies retain foreign workers, and the program will help lure skilled foreign professionals to Montreal.

Mexico Labor reforms proposed



Mexico's Secretary of Labor announced in February labor law reform plans that would make unions more transparent; provide better access to jobs for women, young people and people with disabilities; and address sexual harassment and other work-related issues. The plan proposes changes in the contracting of hourly workers from the current eight hours a day to as little as one or two hours of work to capture workers hired to do small jobs lasting only a few hours. Unions and the opposition parties in Congress strongly oppose the plans.

Bolivia Punctuality pays



Bolivian lawmakers have proposed a new labor law to reward punctual workers. Workers would receive a bonus for arriving at work on time every day for a month. The bill also would require companies to provide workers who reside more than 1.25 miles from the workplace with a travel subsidy and a stipend for buying refreshments during breaks.

European Union Parental leave extended



On March 8, 2010, the European Union (EU) extended parental leave from three months to four months for each parent. The law also ensures employees financial and other benefits while on parental

leave after the birth or adoption of a child. Each of the 27 EU nations must enact legislation within the next two years. The law allows governments to decide if parental leave is fully or partly paid and to set penalties for companies that do not comply.

United Kingdom Whistle-blower regulations



Under new regulations issued for the Public Interest Disclosure Act of 1998, employment tribunals will report an employee's protected claim of an employer's improper or criminal activities to the relevant authority, so that the allegations can be investigated and appropriate action taken. The regulations apply to claims made or amended on or after April 6, 2010.

Belgium Employer social security contributions rise



Effective April 1, 2010, employers are required to contribute a larger percentage to Social Security for any employees who receive bridge pensions, whether because of early retirement or layoffs. The purpose is to dissuade employers from putting employees into early retirement, although employees do not benefit directly from the increased contributions. Employer contributions will be fixed at the employee's age at the time the benefits are first paid. For employees ages 50–51, contributions will be 50 percent of the additional allowance, up from 32.25 percent; 40 percent for ages 52–54; 30 percent for ages 55–57; 20 percent for ages 58–59; and 10 percent for ages 60 and older.

Pakistan Workplace harassment protection law



Aiming to create a safe working environment for women free of harassment, abuse and intimidation and to fulfill their right to work with dignity, the Senate unanimously passed the 13-point Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Bill. It requires all public and private organizations to adopt an internal code of conduct, a complaint or appeals process, and an inquiry committee consisting of three members, including one female.

India Foreign schools plan approved



India's cabinet approved a proposal in March to allow foreign universities to set up branches, potentially opening a huge market to international educational institutions. The bill, which is still subject to a decision by Parliament, would eliminate a provision in current law that prohibits a foreign institution from conferring degrees in India. However, it would require universities to invest a minimum of about \$11 million and prohibit foreign schools from repatriating profits.

Singapore Levies on foreign workers to rise



Singapore will begin increasing levies on foreign workers in July as part of an effort to reduce dependence on inexpensive foreign talent at the expense of locals. The monthly levy per foreign worker will be raised to between SGD100 and SGD120 (US\$71–\$85), depending on the visa class, beginning July 1, 2010, and gradually increase every six months to a maximum of SGD150 to SGD250 by July 2012. The government will monitor and enforce activities against employers that attempt to recover levies from their foreign workers, whether directly or indirectly. Employers that do so may face prosecution and may be prevented from hiring foreign workers.

Malaysia 100,000 new foreign workers allowed



Malaysia has agreed to allow manufacturers to recruit 100,000 new foreign workers to help them meet rising demand as the economy improves amid a labor shortage. But Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam noted that the move is only temporary to meet short-term demand, and the government still wants to reduce the number of foreign workers in Malaysia. The new applications are approved for the electronics, plastic, furniture and gloves industries.

Australia Expat families love Oz



Australia's beaches and great schools lifted Australia to the top in a recent survey of expatriates with children by HSBC Bank. The country is ranked as the best place to raise healthy and active children, as more than 75 percent of respondents said their children spend more time outdoors there than they did in their home country. It is also easier for kids to make friends there, as opposed to in the United Kingdom and the United States, which were ranked last on that criterion. Respondents were living in Hong Kong, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Australia, and rated their location on quality of child care, education, ease of integration, cost of raising children and time spent outdoors.

Briefs compiled from SHRM Online, *Montreal Gazette*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Japan Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Star* (Malaysia), *New York Times*, *BBC News*, *Daily Times* (Pakistan), *Korea Herald*.

THE WORLDLINK HR CALENDAR

June 7-9, 2010
International HR Conference
Colombo, Sri Lanka
E-mail: nhrc2010@ipmlk.org
Web site: www.ipmlk.org/nhrc2010

June 10-11, 2010
18th DGFP-Kongress
Wiesbaden, Germany
E-mail: graf@dgfp.de
Web site: www.dgfp.de

June 10-12, 2010
AEDIPE 45th Congress
A Coruña, Spain
Tel: +34 91 420 0612
E-mail: aedipe@aedipe.es
Web site: www.aedipe.es

June 27-30, 2010
SHRM 62nd Annual Conference & Exposition
San Diego, CA, USA
Tel: +1 703 548 3440
E-mail: rosaura.barrera@shrm.org
Web site: www.shrm.org

August 17-20, 2010
ABRH Nacional CONARH
São Paulo, Brazil
Tel: +55 11 3124 8858
E-mail: abrh@abrhnaional.org.br
Web site: www.abrhnaional.org.br

September 27-29, 2010
WFPMA World Congress
Montreal, Canada
Tel: +52 55 51 40 22 14
E-mail: info@cchra-ccarh.ca
Web site: www.hr2010.com

October 13-16, 2010
PMAP 47th Annual Conference
Mandane City, Cebu, Philippines
Tel: +63 2 726 1532
E-mail: pmap@pmap.org.ph
Web site: www.pmap.org.ph

Editor's note: Please submit events for the calendar to Adrienne Fox at afox@pointcs.com.

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President: Carolyn M. Gould, U.S.A.

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welcomes news stories, announcements of events and

ideas for articles. These should be accompanied by a telephone number and e-mail address.
Please send items to:

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NEXT ISSUE

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submit contributions by May 28.
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