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Talent Management in BYD and Geely: Challenges and Strategies in the context of expansion into European market

Abstract

In China, some automobile companies are expanding their business to international markets. BYD and Geely are significant examples to expand to Europe. Also, talent management (TM) integral part of strategic planning in global business nowadays. During expanding to Europe, BYD and Geely have faced some external challenges and internal challenges. Facing these challenges, Geely have a good practice on talent management, which are understanding the cross-culture differences before M&A, Creating learning centre as “soft” integration and deep learning via employee exchange for talent development. In contrast, BYD have average practice, such as expatriation recruitment might not be effective to solve the headquarter (HQ) - subsidiaries issues. increasing sponsored events and promoting organisational statement might improve public perception and might attract talent but they may also divert resources from core operations and misalignment messaging will be adverse employer brand. To improve the TM in BYD, recommendation part come up a short-, mid- and long-term plan for rebuilding the employer brand, improving HQ-subsidiaries conflict, and creating a cohesive organisational culture, thus attract, and keep top talents.

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1. Background of BYD and Geely

With the increasing manufacturing advancement and involution of domestic market in China, some automobile companies are expanding their business to international markets (Ahmed, Khan and Khan, 2022). BYD Company Limited (BYD) and Geely Automobile Holdings Limited (Geely) are the significant examples of Chinese automobile seeking expansion to international. Europe is a jewel market for Chinese automobile firms due to rich resources of automotive manufacturing and the market influence (Allianz.com, 2024).

BYD is one of the leading Chinese manufacturers in the world, specializing in design, supply and manufacturing batteries, electric vehicles, and renewable energy solution. BYD's success is in the electric vehicle market from its vertical integration business model, which strengthens its in-house production power (Business Model Analyst, 2024). BYD has been expanding to Europe market from 2021 in Norway, with significant efforts to penetrate to United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Despite this growth, the company has struggled to fulfill sales targets. In 2023, 15,644 units were sold in Europe, representing only 1.1% market share compared to the 5% target (Teng, 2024). Some articles highlighted internal tension, unsatisfactory quality control and failure market research are the reasons for BYD failure in Europe (Hossain, 2024;

Huang, 2024).

Geely is one of largest automobile Chinese firms who is global prominence by merging and acquiring several established brands. Starting from 2010, Geely has demonstrated its innovative mindset using its acquisitions with Volvo expanding its Europe market (Xie et al., 2022). Through cooperated with well-established Volvo, Geely has strengthened its technology advance and diverse talent with establishing their new brand Lynk & CO. In 2023, Lynk & Co. sold 22,000 units, ranking in 39 in Europe, surpassing BYD 15000 units (Geely Auto International Corporation Public Relations, 2024a; Geely Auto International Corporation Public Relations, 2024b).

2. Talent management – international expansion

Talent management (TM) is integral part of strategic planning in global business nowadays (Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). To address the complexities of managing a diverse workforce across different countries and cultures, TM is a strategic level of resource management and development in global corporations, involving a series of activities or processes of attracting, sourcing, retaining, and developing of high potential employees on international scale (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016; Caligiuri et al.,

2024). Based on the theory of resource-based, human capital plays pivotal role as unique internal resources for achieving competitive advantage and enhancing organizational performance (Kraaijenbrink, 2011). In the business expansion to Europe, BYD and Geely must leverage unique capital and capabilities to direct diverse markets effectively and obtain long-term competitive advantages.

3. Scope of the challenges of Talent Management (TM) in BYD and Geely

3.1 External challenges of TM

TM in the cross-border expansion has several external and internal challenges faced by some of multinational companies (Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020). There are no exemptions in BYD and Geely. External challenges are the factors which occur in a wider contextual and econ-, social-environment, and multinational companies might not directly control (Stokes et al., 2015). Based on the same context of expansion to Europe by Chinese automobile companies, BYD and Geely have faced some similar external challenges.

Fierce talent competition with high labour cost is one of the external challenges. Due to globalisation and workforce change after pandemic, talent competition is one of the biggest concerns for human resource (HR) today (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2021), especially in lucrative automobile industry (Chen et al., 2024). Traditional workforce in automotive industry relies on large amount of manual and heavy-skill workers (CEDEFOP, 2021). Due to transforming from fuel and gas-powered to electric, creating a cross-industrial workforce relies on talents with ability in high-tech, data analytic and software engineering (CoachHub, 2023), growing serious competition with talent with other industries. Furthermore, in Europe, although a well-established automotive industry has rich resources and labour in R&D, most of R&D share is in Germany, more than 13% share compared with 1.9% in Central and Eastern Europe. Also, Germany is the highest labour cost compared the industry average in global (Freund et al., 2020). Therefore, most of the multinational companies (MNC) move the R&D to near region like Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), creating a fierce talent competition in these region (Ghinita, 2023). To cope with fierce talent competition, some MNC in CEE must

pay high salaries for attracting and keeping the talents (Freund et al., 2020). In BYD, total of R&D personnel cost in 2023 is RMD7.94 billion, compared with RMD 11.28 billion in 2024 (Bitauto, 2024). Labour cost in BYD increase approximately USD 500 per vehicle in Eastern Europe (China Daily, 2024). In Geely, total of R&D personnel cost in fourth quarter of 2023 is RMD3.16 billion, compared with RMD 7 billion in first half year of 2024 (Macrotrends LLC, 2023 ;Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited, 2024).

Cultural distance is another external challenge of TM faced by BYD and Geely. Culture has been one of the common issues in international business due to some of the knowledge advancement, positive financial outcome, and competitive advantage (Caprar et al., 2015;; Sulastri, L. 2024). In the context of cross-border expansion, culture distance is the discrepancies of values, beliefs, language, and norm form one country to another country. These discrepancies influence different stakeholders (e.g. expatriate staff, host staff, human resource manager, managerial staffs) cognition, behaviour, and decision-making processes, which enhance the complexity to align

strategies of TM and affect the cohesive workforce and organisational performance (Shin, Morgeson and Campion, 2003; Liu et al., 2020). Cultural distance challenge is more significant impact on expatriate talent (Lueke and Svyantek, 2000). Turnover rate of expatriate talent is always higher than other stakeholders due to fear and sophisticated socialisation process with culture adaption with host talent (Mello, Suutari and Dickmann, 2022). For BYD and Geely expanding to Europe, the extent of culture distance is significant between China and Europe, such as individualist vs collectivist (Etloom, 2022), hierarchical (Froese et al., 2020), barrier in language (Wang, 2024) and emphasis on nationalism. Therefore, it might increase the challenges for BYD and Geely to adjust and find a good-fit culture.

3.2 Internal challenges of TM

There are some internal challenges of TM faced by BYD and Geely. Internal challenges are the factors which drive by the organisation and its corporate capabilities, strategies (Vashisht and Vashisht, 2019).

Geely adopt cross-border Merge and Acquisition (M&A) multiple automotive brand (Si, 2023). Cross-cultural management is main internal challenges of TM. M&A provides critical strategy of acquiring talent with knowledge and capabilities advancement but have yet all to success without substantial HR efforts, especially retaining talent (Holland and Scullion, 2019). Most of the failure M&A is high turnover of talent like management and leadership after the post-M&A (Chang-Howe, 2019), and culture conflict is one of the serious reasons why these talents leave. In cross-border M&A, except mentioned on the external challenges - culture distance between two countries, corporate culture conflict is the challenges and tensions that occur when companies background tries to combine their working practices, operations, and values. To better illustrate the challenges, one of the cases - Microsoft in Mexico and Nokia in Finland is good example. Corporate culture's Nokia is individualism, without hierarchical and self-effacing, while Microsoft is hierarchical, performance-oriented and competition (Wittwer, 2024). Due to lack of effective cross-cultural management, miscommunication and argument have raised, eventually high technical talent loses. In

Geely, cross-cultural management is more challenging because M&A is for multiple brands.

BYD's strategies focus on using own brand, creating subsidiaries and manage by a headquarter (HQ) in China. Weak employer brand is internal challenges in BYD.

Positive employer brand is a critical strategy for attracting, sourcing, and retaining the talents (Japutra et al., 2023). Employer branding relies on collaboration with various stakeholders (e.g. internal employee, HR, executive, CEO) via multi-direction communication building and sending a consistent reputation and image to external. In MNC, there are lots of strategies to deliver the employer brand (Reis, Sousa and Dionísio, 2021). Due to increasing the global awareness of social and environmental commitment, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is one of the common tools for global employer branding (Gandasari et al., 2024). However, CSR can dramatically decrease the attractiveness when company show misalignment of CSR initiatives (Wang et al., 2022). In preliminary stage of expansion to Europe, BYD join CSR to increase the attractiveness of brand. However, some human right and ethical issues,

such as worker slavery, discriminatory recruitment, have occurred that might affect BYD employer brand.

HQ and subsidiary conflict are another internal challenge in BYD. Due to rapidly market change and technological advancement, MNC must constantly change the strategies and structures. In the changing process with complexity of coordination works, the conflict between HQ and subsidiary might be raised. Managerial play a critical role for formation to align with HQ and subsidiary goals, so most of the conflict is managerial between HQ and subsidiary (Reilly, Scott and Mangematin, 2012). Conflict is related to organisational commitment. Modulating good conflict might help the talent development and retention while adverse conflict might eventually lead to talent lost. In BYD, serious internal tension has occurred in expanding to Europe (Cheng, Davis and Huang, 2024). HQ's managerial has a conflict with Europe's managerial due to misalignment of sales target (Huang, 2024).

4. Case analysis on current practice of TM in Geely and BYD

Geely adopts M&A strategy for expansion which is risky for TM. The reasons are some cases of the M&A failed due to failure of HR integration, such as cross-cultural conflict, substantial talent lost. Retaining the talent and developing more potential talent, Geely uses innovative approach, which is “soft” integration and creating a culture of “constant learning” in whole company (Jonsson and Vahlne, 2021). There are three keys of practices.

Understanding the cross-culture differences before M&A. As the mentioned in challenges part - the case of Microsoft and Nokia, ineffective cross-culture management might eventually lead to miscommunication and substantial talent lost. Geely, in pre-M&A, CEO and management understand the differences culture of Volvo - people-oriented, autonomy and engagement while Geely is hierarchy, autarchic and goal-oriented. Therefore, they adjust the post-M&A strategy - using “soft” integration keeping two brand operation separate, keeping Volvo’s autonomy (Zheng, Noorderhaven and Du, 2022).

Creating learning centre as “soft” integration. Although Geely did not force integration, they must improve their automotive skill at the time for strengthening its own brand’s R&D power. Learning centre - China-Euro Vehicle Technology Centre (CEVT) was built as a mutual learning platform for the long-term skill exchange (Zheng, Noorderhaven and Du, 2022).

Deep learning via employee exchange for talent development. Except CEVT, Geely and Volvo provide mutual exchange programs for their technician staff. These exchange program strengthen both sides staff cross-culture communication, thus develop culture intelligence for both side of staffs (Jonsson and Vahlne, 2021). Overall, Geely is a good practice for TM, especially for talent development, because before M&A Geely was lack of skill technical and R&D staff (University of Sanya, 2024). After M&A, Geely improve a pool of talent, thus improve the world’s top 10 innovative brand (Geely Auto International Corporation Public Relations, 2023).

There are 2 key current practices of TM in BYD. First, BYD focus on the expatriation recruitment. In 2024, BYD has hired more 200000 positions, including 50000 high

educated R&D position (Revelio Labs, Inc., 2024), for filling the R&D and management position for cross-border and domestic. Managerial expatriation is a common method for alignment organisational goals and adjustment the cross-culture conflict (Wellings, 2024), because they always are senior-level and more familiar the organisation goal. Also, it always aligns with advancement opportunities (Goodall, Li and Warner, 2006). However, it relies on individual capabilities of culture intelligence and problem-solving skills. 40% managerial expatriation in China come back to HQ due to inability to inability problem-solving the host problem (Goodall, Li and Warner, 2006). Second, BYD increase sponsored events and promoting organisational statement to improve employer brand. While these initiatives can improve public perception and might attract talent, they may also divert resources from core operations. Additionally, like the CSR issue as mentioned above, if not executed effectively, they could lead to inconsistent messaging.

5. Recommendation and action plan of TM for BYD and Geely

Since Geely have already had a good practice, this recommendation and action will

only focus on BYD.

For improving talent management at BYD, a structured action plan focusing on enhancing the employer brand and resolving HQ – Subsidiary conflicts is critical.

For short-term plan (1-2 years), review the alignment extent of CSR initiative and actual company activities. This will involve assessing current CSR practices and finding area for improvement. After, start new employer branding campaign that highlights BYD's commitment to innovation, sustainability, and employee development. This can include social media engagement and participation in overseas job fairs. These actions might rebuild the positive perception to potential talents. However, using investment and resources that may divert attention from core operations and increase the cost.

Mid-term plan (3-5 years), provide regular training programs for managerial expatriates and local staff to foster cross-culture understanding and improve the communication.

This will help solving conflict between HQ and subsidiaries. This can enhance collaboration and reduce misunderstandings but also may occur resistance from staffs

accustomed to current practices and increase the training cost.

Long-term plan (5 years), set up a comprehensive TM system that includes mentorship exchange programs and a knowledge-sharing platform to enhance employee engagement and create a cross-culture organisation culture. This might increase talent retention and create a strong organisational culture. However, the implementation might be complex and time-consuming and need continuous evaluation and adjustment.

By implementing these plans, BYD can rebuild the employer brand, improve HQ-subsidaries conflict, and create a cohesive organisational culture, thus attract, and keep top talents.

6. Conclusion

With increasing the technology advancement and release the involution in China, BYD and Geely are expanding to Europe market. TM integral part of strategic planning in global business nowadays. There is no exception in BYD and Geely. However, during expanding to Europe, BYD and Geely have faced some external challenges, like Fierce

talent competition with high labour cost and cultural distance, and some internal challenges, such as cross-cultural management in Geely, Weak employer brand and HQ and subsidiary conflict in BYD. To solve the issues, Geely have a good practice on talent management, which are understanding the cross-culture differences before M&A, Creating learning centre as “soft” integration and deep learning via employee exchange for talent development. In contrast, BYD have average practice, such as expatriation recruitment might not be effective to solve the HQ-subsidiaries issues. Increasing sponsored events and promoting organisational statement might improve public perception and might attract talent but they may also divert resources from core operations and misalignment messaging will be adverse employer brand. To improve the TM in BYD, recommendation part come up a short-, mid- and long-term plan for rebuilding the employer brand, improving HQ-subsidiaries conflict, and creating a cohesive organisational culture, thus attract, and keep top talents.

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