

The CEO is feeling the loneliness of his position. The threat posed to his firm by Asian competition is real and frightening. His senior executives—capable, committed, internationally experienced—believe they understand and are addressing the problem. They have built this company into a multibillion-dollar industry leader and are confident they can maintain that position.

The CEO knows otherwise. Nothing in the company's history is comparable to this new challenge. The old solutions will not work. How can he convince his executives that a real crisis looms on the horizon?

For more than five years, the executive development function at this firm has lain fallow. The last program, an advanced management course designed to broaden emerging executives as a university program does, served its purpose well and was attended by 85% of the current executives. No compelling reason has existed to launch a new program. Certainly the executives themselves are not interested; they just want to do their jobs. But maybe, thinks the CEO, maybe now there is a reason.

And so the executive development function receives its new charter: Find a way to thoroughly capture the executives' attention and focus it on the dangers posed by Asian competition. To fail at this, confides the CEO, is to risk the continued health of this successful communications and electronics firm.

After months of hard work, the new program is ready for its debut. As 18 senior executives arrive for the pilot session, some grumbling arises from the group. What are they doing here? If there is such a big problem, why have they been pulled away from their offices for six days?

At week's end, six of the participants admit they had come with every intention of finding a way to deep-six the program. Prior to attending, each had been visited by colleagues with the same idea: No way are we going to do this. Make sure that program goes no further than its first session.

But the program convinces participants that a serious issue exists here. They have been underestimating the nature, scope and complexity of the threat originating in



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Asia. The old solutions will *not* work; now is indeed the time to re-evaluate the traditional ways of doing business.

## *Moving Ahead*

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The most successful organization may be unprepared to meet new challenges. The daily demands of success can preclude taking the time to explore the uncharted waters of the future—and even the most seasoned executives are apt to find surprises in that future when they examine it in a focused, concentrated manner. Though resources may be limited, they are wisely invested in programs with the power to move executives beyond today, so that they are better equipped to manage tomorrow.

## *The Journey*

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Participants spend six days with a world-class faculty team of academics, consultants and government dignitaries. A program facilitator provides continuity and linkage and ensures that the group thoroughly processes the information presented.

Content areas addressed in the program are described below.

The United States' Industrial Base: Is the U.S. declining as an industrial power? What are the implications either way? Japan: The pervasiveness of its governmental orchestration and industrial networking Korea: How and how quickly is Korea gearing up to compete as a major industrial power? China: The risks and opportunities related to doing business with the People's Republic of China Models: for analyzing organizations, industries and countries (viewing a country as a corporation)

One of the many innovative features of the program is that each country is studied as if it is a corporation. In addition to the expected examination of social, cultural and political trends, each country's international trade goals, industrial strategies and economic performance are analyzed. An actual competitive Asian firm is also considered as an example of these dynamic tensions. The week ends with a dialogue with the CEO about the group's concerns, issues and recommendations for action.

One hundred and eighty vice presidents attend the program. All nine sessions are held in less than nine months to ensure that the effects of the program are focused, concentrated and have maximum impact.

One of the most dramatic outcomes of the program is participants' recommendation that further intense effort be devoted to studying the corporation's interaction with and presence in the Asian Pacific Rim. The vice chairman creates a task force of seven senior vice presidents who, for three months, devote 100% of their time to this project. The results and recommendations of the task force are shared with all 180 vice presidents in a series of facilitated follow-up meetings.

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