Five Traps to Avoid When Driving Global Growth

Written by Debborah Himsel, Reviewed 2026

Avon went global in a big and bold way at the beginning of the 21st century, recognizing its future was dependent on creating a more integrated strategy in markets as diverse as South America, China, Russia and elsewhere. With highly acclaimed CEO Andrea Jung at the helm, their strategy seemed to be working extraordinarily well initially.

Ultimately, however, it failed to live up to expectations—they lost share to competitors, suffered from scandals and had other problems. While numerous factors accounted for their global difficulties, the big problem was that they fell into common global traps—five of them to be exact. Let's look at each one of them and how to avoid them.

Trap #1 – Becoming too reflexively local or too global. How does an organization leverage economies of scale while customizing its products and services to meet local requirements? At times, Avon committed the sin of trying to manage this paradox through wild swings in business direction – one year they went all out to decentralize the system, the next they swung back to centralized control. The result: Avon failed to meet customer demands, was seen as being overly reactive and ultimately failed to find that delicate global-local balance. Instead, develop the agility to accommodate both sides as legitimate and consider both in the decision- making process.

Trap #2 – Failing to align organization culture with strategy. Andrea certainly was aware of this task, but she may have underestimated the power of the culture to undermine even the strongest strategy. Instead, make sure you understand what that culture is all about, preserve what is crucial for the company and that engages the workforce, and then evolve the culture in the direction to drive the strategy.

Trap #3 – "Blinking". This is the term used to describe Andrea's occasional refusal to follow through on holding a leader accountable on a controversial change or performance-related decision. In a global environment, especially, leaders must be clear, certain and consistent. This stance transcends cultures—it provides employees throughout the world with confidence in their leaders. An inability to follow through sends the opposite message.

Trap #4 – Failing to recognize the new talent demands of global integration. During Andrea's tenure, the company was evolving from a holding company to a more global, integrated enterprise. Consequently, the Finance function needed a CFO to upgrade and consolidate financial systems, implement consistent financial controls as well as processes and to improve margins and reduce inventory. Instead, they hired a CFO generalist and

"deal maker"-- skills that didn't match up well with the organization's continued growth in emerging markets.

Trap #5 – Lacking vigilance in at-risk global markets. Emerging markets can be gold mines, but they can also be land mines, as was evidenced by Avon's recent $135 million dollar settlement with the SEC and DOJ for alleged bribery of government officials in China. Both CEOs and boards need to do a better job of screening hires to determine if they'll adhere to corporate values and internal policies, educating them about these values and policies and monitoring whether they're adhering to them on the job.