

Preface

by *Beniamino Quintieri**

The progressive opening to international trade and the processes of globalization that have taken place in recent decades have produced great benefits for the world economy, which has experienced unprecedented growth rates. The entrance into the international arena of new participants (China in the first place) and the consequent opening of new markets have created additional opportunities for international trade. However, they have also generated an expansion of physical and cultural distances which require both investments to gain knowledge of these markets and putting down roots – or at least a more stable presence – in countries where companies used to export on an occasional basis. Increased competition from emerging markets also introduced a new element in the search for competitive advantage linked to the possibility of fragmenting production processes, giving rise to the development of global value chains.

The redistribution/relocation of production presented businesses with a series of additional information, communication and coordination costs, calling also for a recalibration of human resources. Furthermore, increased price-based competition from emerging markets has meant that countries such as Italy need to focus more and more on the quality of the products (which is linked to a series of intangible elements such as art, culture, creativity, design and technology), with the aim of intercepting the growing demand for niche products – in particular from new markets. The recognized excellence of ‘Made in Italy’ products alone is,

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however, not sufficient to ensure adequate market penetration. When addressing new markets, promotional activities specifically targeting their consumers are needed. This requires knowledge of those markets and a more continuous presence in the territory of interest.

Today, in an economic scenario marked by the effects of the pandemic and strong geopolitical turmoil, international trade is facing multiple and difficult challenges. Difficulties in obtaining raw materials, increased logistics costs, protectionism, development of e-commerce and increase in the risk of foreign investments – combined with the consequent shortening of global value chains (reshoring) – are all factors that will make companies' foreign operations more complex. Human resources with the ability to understand and process the changes taking place are more necessary than ever.

We will probably not meet with a deglobalization process – as many believe we will – but we will certainly record a slowdown (*slowbalization*) of trade flows with respect to the rhythms, now unsustainable, recorded in the past. In this context, there are also opportunities that Italian companies must be able to seize. They are in particular linked to the new possibilities arising from the many preferential free trade agreements that the European Union is signing with an increasing number of countries – agreements that could generate new business opportunities for European companies. From these considerations I believe that the importance of this book clearly emerges. Internationalization activity is increasingly complex and will be even more so in the future, as companies will no longer be able to rely on “close to home” export markets. Today we need a much more in-depth knowledge of distant markets and cultures, as well as the ability to intercept the different opportunities. The figure of the Export Manager therefore assumes a growing importance, becoming essential for those companies that have concrete internationalization ambitions. If this is true in general, it is even more so for a country like ours, characterized by a high fragmentation of the productive system and which relies on a large pool of exporting companies of medium-small size that often encounter difficulties in developing more sophisticated export strategies. Ever more, such companies need adequate information on trade barriers, above all on non-tariff barriers, like production standards, labelling, health measures and customs procedures. Such trade barriers are particularly stringent for smaller businesses that lack apposite managerial expertise and find it more difficult to find adequate information.

There is no doubt, therefore, that the Export Manager is an increasingly relevant figure – one in high demand on the market, to be included within a company or, as is the case with many SMEs, to be hired in a temporary role (Temporary Export Manager). Hence the importance of adequate training that can provide the tools needed to deal with the complexities and changes of a continuously and rapidly evolving world. The richness of the topics covered, and the more than adequate level of depth with which they are treated, renders this book a very useful tool for those who want to take on the position of Export Manager, a niche role in the labor market with excellent growth prospects.