

Agile Global Mobility: Living The Purpose And Increasing Value

We, and the organisations for which we work, are embedded in a world that is highly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA). One thing is clear – this VUCA world is characterised by one constant, and that is change. This article, based on a chapter of the RES Forum Annual Report, explores the pressures that Global Mobility(GM) is facing in this world, providing insights into the roles of GM departments. Additionally, we develop a refined GM model to successfully cope with mobility challenges.

The RES Forum, an International HR and Global Mobility networking and information sharing group with over 1600 members in more than 600 companies based in over 45 countries around the world, surveyed its members on 'The Role of the Global Mobility Function' in January 2018. 50 organisations took part in the survey. They provided insights into the approaches, developments and thinking of large companies. 40% of the multinational corporations (MNCs) surveyed employed more than 25,000 staff with a further 52% having more than 1000 employees. 62% had more than 100 assignees with almost one in five (16%) having more than 500. All respondents worked in GM with two thirds (62%) occupying senior leadership roles while others led particular areas of GM. This research forms the basis of the chapter, "Agile Global Mobility: Living the Purpose and Increasing Value" in The RES Forum Annual Report 2018, Global Mobility of the Future: Smart, Agile, Flawless and Efficient. The chapter is authored by Professor Michael F. Dickmann, Professor of International HRM at Cranfield University, School of Management, and Chris Debner, Strategic GM Advisor, and a summary of the results is presented here.

Key Recommendations For Agile Global Mobility

1. Understand GM Trends and Pressures
2. Design Smart Global Talent Management Interfaces
3. Construct Agile GM Configurations based on Business and HR strategies
4. Create Flawless Programme Leadership
5. Implement Efficient Global People Effectiveness Approaches

6. Individualise the GM Relationship
7. Expand the work of the GM department
8. Professionalise the various GM Roles
9. Seek the shared purpose of GM work
10. Focus on the assignee experience

We address the following questions: What are the factors that drive change in Global Mobility? Where will they add value and what are the considerations needed to cope with the change? Why and how do we need to rethink GM to enable it to master its future? We will consider the future of Global Mobility and the necessary changes using three perspectives. First, the mobility function as being a substantial partner in creating organisational and international value. Second, we explore the implications on GM arising from the broader company context and its stakeholders. Third, we want to concentrate on the true drivers of global value, the employees and their varying interests and capabilities.

We have found in recent years that in most MNCs, mobility work is strongly process and compliance oriented to the detriment of strategic work, talent management and people elements. These are some of the roles that would give GM departments a broader, yet more focused purpose, allow it to strengthen the experience of assignees and would add to the value creation of GM work (see below). In the last three years, however, there were substantial gains for these wider roles. Almost two thirds (62%) of senior GM professionals now work as a strategic advisor (up by 11%). A quarter (26%) now also mostly or always fulfil

global talent management roles (up by 19%). Progress towards smart GM management can also be seen by a third of GM professionals (30%) working as global people effectiveness experts (up by 16%). This constitutes massive progress – the percentage of GM professionals influencing talent management has quadrupled and the percentage of GM staff factoring in people effectiveness insights has doubled (RES Forum, 2015).

So, are GM professionals enacting the roles they seek to fill, i.e. those that they believe would strengthen GM work? There are still substantial gaps between reality and aspiration. A substantial number (+32%) more would like to be strategic advisors, global talent managers (+21%) or global people effectiveness managers (+27%). Thus, many MNCs still lack strategic GM advice that would help them to lay down long-term objectives, direction and focus for their international work. Many, therefore, have an insufficiently defined purpose of GM. In addition, having a massive gap in the areas of talent management and people effectiveness will substantially impact the experience of international assignees as well as the value created through GM. If some of the GM leaders do not act as they wish, that does not necessarily mean that the whole GM function cannot fulfil this role. However, looking at the whole mobility function does not give more encouraging information. As Figure 2 demonstrates, fulfilling these key GM roles is even less common for the GM department than for their leaders.

Figure 1: How GM Leaders currently 'always or mostly' act, and how they would like to act in the future



Figure 2: How the whole GM Function currently 'always or mostly' acts, and how they would like to act in the future



Interestingly, the gaps between what is happening today and what GM leaders would wish to see in their GM departments in the future are mostly similar. Almost a third (28%) lament a gap in the global talent management role, a quarter (24%) would like to strengthen due diligence, and 40% would like to augment their department's role in global people effectiveness work. Shockingly, there is one area where the gap from today to tomorrow is even more pronounced. Almost half (48%) of MNCs seem to be suffering from a lack in strategic GM advice.

Leading Successful GM Work

What does the data mean in broad terms and how can Global Mobility be advanced to make it fit for the future? Rethinking Global Mobility is driven by some key trends and drivers. In the following, we reflect on four fundamental GM roles which are driven by six key factors. In these areas we focus on value creation and practical measures.

Role 1: Agile Global Mobility Created Through Strategic Advice

GM leaders need to develop agility to align and support their business and HR strategies, to develop value and to adapt quickly to changing organisational needs. Technological advances, automatization, artificial intelligence and robotics, the need for new skill sets, and dynamic operating models are all expressions of the rapid changes in the business environment. These developments make it necessary to find feasible ways to adapt to them and to harness the opportunities for the organisation. Constantly changing requirements, which are already varying among different stakeholders, make it necessary to provide flexibility for assignments. The key value of GM is related to broader business and people management objectives (Edstrom and Galbraith, 1977;

Dowling et al., 2013). On a highly strategic level, aligning GM to business and HR strategies in order to enable and support the business in creating value is highly important. These often embody key objectives such as the control of the business units, cultural integration across borders, knowledge creation, transfer and application, or enabling certain work activities through filling positions (Dickmann and Baruch, 2011). To successfully advance the agility and flexibility of international work in organisations, GM professionals need to fill the role of strategic advisor and to understand the manifold ramifications of their organisation's strategy and the diverse GM avenues that could be pursued to realise their MNC's ambition. Figure 3 gives an overview of the breadth of GM tasks and recommendations on how to advance GM excellence. The figure outlines all the SAFE areas and depicts the various roles of GM professionals. While agility refers to the strategic advisor role there are

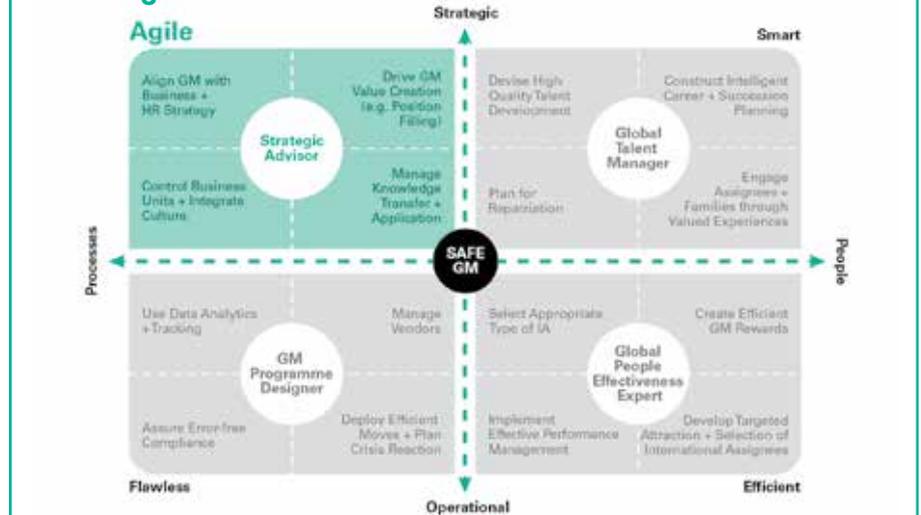
spill-over effects into the other quadrants as the other roles would also benefit from the flexibility to master emerging challenges.

In practice, this means that GM professionals have to identify ways in which mobility strategies underpin organisation-wide strategies. GM professionals need to create business cases for transformational change but at the same time focus on incremental changes. Given the VUCA environment that we face, it is simply not good enough to undertake a transformation every five years. As part of strategic changes, GM departments need to develop policies that facilitate agility. This might mean, for instance, to develop 'core flex' approaches and to create flexible governance approaches that incorporate agility in relation to exception management. Agility will also go a long way to future proof GM and may be expressed in other quadrants of Figure 3. Younger generations entering the labour market will likely drive a change in more flexible remuneration approaches, which will also have an influence on compensation and benefits in GM. Dealing with agility in GM means to plan for crisis responses, develop scenarios and approaches to refine the corporate reaction to events such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters. This can include e.g. a cost saving scenario or the plans for potential group relocations (in the light of the Brexit). It will be necessary to stay close to the business and your stakeholders to understand their changing needs and future aspirations. The bottom line is to be prepared as much as possible for potential future demands.

Role 2: Smart Global Talent Management and Individualised GM Relationships

Successful GM work is not just smart in the sense of clever; it is also able to create specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused and time-bound objectives for global

Figure 3: SAFE Roles of GM: Agile - Living the Purpose and Increasing Value



workers. The role of the global talent manager will grapple with some of the tensions that are often a challenge in developmental work. Organisations set up talent and career systems and paths that are geared to groups and yet, GM professionals will work with individuals who want a tailored solution in response to their goals and situations. Millennials (and to some extent earlier generations) are already pushing quite hard for an individualisation agenda. While the systems aspects always have the potential to display tensions with individualised talent management, developing flexible approaches allows organisations to strive for an agility that is becoming ever more important. The value of smart global talent management lies in the focus on the intersection of organisational and individual interests. Constructing intelligent careers has shown to be valuable to individuals (Suutari et al., 2018; Jokinen et al., 2008) and organisations (Inkson and Arthur, 2001). Where organisations engage assignees and their families, devise high quality and useful talent development and plan ahead for repatriation, they are experiencing higher retention figures and better performance (Scullion and Collings, 2006; Dickmann, Suutari and Wurts, 2018, Doherty and Dickmann, 2012). In addition, their expatriates feel more valued and satisfied with their work abroad. What are some of the activities necessary to develop smart and individualised GM? There are many roads to Rome, but useful activities are centred around understanding and factoring in individual drivers and motivations in the GM attraction, selection and assignment approaches, or implementing GM mentor and coaching systems. In addition, it would be useful to truly understand the learning needs of individual assignees (and fit them into the overall development needs of the organisation) and to factor these into the career planning for individuals. And last but not least, GM functions must think more across functions and engage with relevant stakeholders such as Talent Management, Workforce planning, Travel Management and others.

Role 3: Flawless Compliance Through GM Programme Design

Too much focus was given in the past to compliance, while ignoring that it basically is a hygiene factor. Compliance cannot improve employee experience. Complying with local tax legislation, remaining in the home social security system as promised, obtaining a work permit, adhering to applicable labour laws and the existence of an emergency telephone number when needed; simply does not have the potential to make assignees happy, whereas the absence of compliance bears a lot of potential for dissatisfaction. The value of high quality programme design lies predominantly in two areas. First, being

'flawless' in compliance is highly important because of the multiple risks that come with non-compliance. Second, successful tracking and data analytics, e.g. with respect to risk identification, vendor performance, security and crisis arrangement evaluation, satisfaction with removal companies etc., is likely to give information that can improve the GM programme, reduce risks and increase satisfaction. This may go some way to senior managers regarding the programme management role as more than simply operational. Practical approaches in the market to treat compliance for what it really is differ by the size of mobility programmes. Some of the options are depicted in Figure 3 under GM Programme Designer. MNCs with larger programmes should consider whether they can maximise the outsourcing of compliance activities to external partners

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beyond what they are doing today. It would be useful to identify a dedicated professional, or groups of professionals, with a compliance mindset to be in charge of dealing with external service providers and being knowledgeable about the various aspects of the compliance risk. Good vendor management is obviously important. Being in charge means (since compliance is the key hygiene factor) that these professionals are also positioned in such a way that they can make tactical decisions, e.g. on issues and exceptions that would have formerly landed on the desk of the Head of Mobility. In this

way, the work is done by the people who are best placed to do it. In a smaller assignment programme, the option to have specialised compliance experts may not be feasible. Specialisation is possible only in larger programmes and generalists are typically found in smaller assignment programmes. They should experience at least a different view on compliance and attempt to find efficient external partners to manage it.

Role 4: Efficient Global People Effectiveness Expert

Part of the individualisation of the GM role is that of understanding the drivers of individuals in the organisation who may want to work abroad. Developing an overview of these motivations allows MNCs to shape their branding of global careers (Point and Dickmann, 2012), to refine selection and reward mechanisms, to be able to identify the most suitable candidates, to design rewards (not necessarily monetary ones), that could also be job content, talent and career related that are appealing to individuals. The obvious value of being a people effectiveness expert is in relation to sending better suited assignees abroad who have the appropriate set of drivers for the objectives of the organisation. In addition, this allows the selection of a better matched assignment type e.g. short-term, long-term, business travel, cross-border commuting, etc.). The data in this report shows that organisations have drawn up different reward offers – e.g. in terms of package design that gives less generous rewards to developmental assignees or that distinguishes between assignment durations. Understanding the motivations of expatriation candidates and factoring these into assignment conditions (say, in deciding between hostile versus family-friendly host locations; dual career implications etc.) should have a motivational effect and may add to the quality of the assignment experience. Having superior assignment planning, that builds on the individualised candidate information, may also lead to improved performance management in relation to the assignment objectives. The practical approaches to implementing the global people effectiveness role are manifold. They could start in devising a superior global career branding approach (Point and Dickmann, 2012) that outlines the purpose and advantages of international assignments to internal and external candidates. The actual selection of expatriates can be substantially improved (Harris and Brewster, 1999) through the use of psychometric instruments, competency-based interviews or measures to find out candidates' global work, motivations. Thus, going beyond the 'coffee machine selection' to have a more sophisticated and formal approach to global staffing is likely to be highly beneficial (Scullion and Collings, 2011). Designing reward systems that are not 'one size fits all' but are responsive

to assignment types, locations, lengths and objectives, can also increase effectiveness and efficiency. The importance of this point needs to be reiterated. To achieve this it will be necessary to go beyond the silos in which some GM functions are still working and to engage with other relevant functions and stakeholders. Trying to achieve a better understanding of the drivers of individuals to work abroad and to reap the stated benefits of being a People Effectiveness Expert will not work in isolation. The data given in Figures 1 and 2 has shown that many GM leaders see a gap between the current GM strategies, roles and practices and what their aspirations are. Our argument with respect to 'rethinking Global Mobility' has explored the four roles of GM in more depth, but there is more to GM work if an organisation truly wants to be fit for the competitive challenges of the future. Beyond SAFE Global Mobility, there are two further, overarching factors that will strengthen GM work.

Global Mobility With A Compelling Purpose

There is a mutual dependency between assignees and their employers (Larsen, 2004). Organisations highly depend on the quality of their international workers while assignees may find themselves 'high and dry' in certain situations in their host environments, especially in hostile or crisis contexts (Bader and Berg, 2013). GM purpose has been predominantly seen through the employer lens and especially incorporates the strategic and operational process dimensions of Figure 3. The value for the organisation in determining its key mobility objectives and how GM can support organisation wide strategies have been discussed under the strategic advisor role. However, it is important to go beyond a strategic level to look at the vision of the organisation and to long-term goals that are attractive to individuals, that they can identify with and that give them purpose. Working abroad will change the psychological contract of assignees and their expectations (Conway and Briner, 2005; Dickmann and Baruch, 2011). Our data clearly indicates that assignees benefit on a range of levels, including their own personal growth and career progression. This is what is widely expected by assignment candidates and has been long shown to have a major impact on their decision to work abroad (Hippler, 2009). In terms of the GM programme designer role, letting people down in terms of compliance or security issues will fundamentally rock their relationship with their employers and will have a detrimental effect on their global work and identification with the organisation. The implications are complex and wide-ranging. The intended role and objective of an assignment will have to be analysed in the sense of delivering purpose to the organisation and providing purpose to the individual. Thus, corporate knowledge transfer,

skills gap filling, control and coordination issues, will need to be aligned to the mindset and motivations of assignees. More broadly, even if your company has a purpose statement, it might well make sense to define a team purpose for mobility that is aligned with the company purpose and objectives.

Mobility teams need to engage in the purpose of creating positive assignee experiences. A paradigm shift is already happening in HR and HR transformations

Global Mobility – Focusing on Assignee Experience

Purpose is the new currency for creating attraction, retention and an engaged workforce. Mobility teams need to engage in the purpose of creating positive assignee experiences. A paradigm shift is already happening in HR and HR transformations. In the past they predominantly focused on cost savings and reducing cycle times. Now they are looking at the effectiveness and, not exclusively, the efficiency of change interventions. Treating compliance as a hygiene factor will support the shift towards purposeful GM that aims to enrich the private and professional lives of assignees. International Assignments (IAs) are undisputedly one of the most significant experiences an employee can have during his/her career. It involves their families and creates great learning and developmental opportunities when living and working in other cultural contexts. Where assignees (and their organisations) avoid or overcome the risks of culture shock, work-life imbalance, family separation, etc. it has been shown that their performance, career progression, talent development and long-term retention is highly positive. This is why Global Mobility needs to focus on employee experience and how to enhance it. In addition, many organisations

observe that they have too few, good quality candidates for IAs. Delivering an attractive global work experience is likely to widen the pool of assignment candidates which allows a better choice for organisations. Assuming a relatively flawless programme design, the experience element of GM is mostly shaped by the people dimension of Figure 3. It includes the range of activities that were discussed under the roles of global talent manager and global people effectiveness expert. To put this into practice would mean taking a close look at all the interactions that an employee (and their families) experience before, during and after an assignment. It would further involve checking how positive experiences look and how negative perceptions are created. This also involves an analysis of the assignee experience with the many external service providers. Furthermore, the host teams have a strong impact on how an expatriate feels, adjusts to the local culture and performs. Overall, it would be good to engage as many stakeholders as possible in the search for a good GM experience. One step would be to explore what the stakeholders believe has scope for improvement. In practice, mobility departments will need to think and live outside of their silos, engage with talent management colleagues and other internal stakeholders. In addition, they need to understand the purpose and objectives of the assignment and distinguish different and alternative forms of global work that are aligned with purpose (as defined by an employee) and that create valued experiences for employees.

Conclusions And Learning Points

This article has concentrated on the dynamic pressures impacting on GM and suggests that agile mobility strategies, structures and policies enable MNCs to shape the future successfully. For this, GM departments need to move out of their comfort zones and out of their silo mentality. They urgently need to understand organisational and HR strategies and should engage intensively with the business. Based on these pressures a new SAFE Global Mobility model was developed that depicts key roles and activities emphasising the purpose and valuable experiences of GM.

Recommendations For AGILE Global Mobility Work:

- Understand the massive and rapid changes that define the world of Global Mobility. Technological advances, automation, artificial intelligence, new competitive pressures needing new capabilities and dynamic operating models create pressures for learning and paradigm shifts
- Smart Global Talent Management needs to create tangible results through the management of specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused and time-bound GM objectives. The value of

smart mobility approaches lies in the intersection of organisational and assignee interests. This encourages integration with intelligent career and succession planning

- Agile Global Mobility Configurations are constructed through strategic advice. These need to be based on the corporate vision, business and other strategies and need to be scalable and flexible to react to dynamic competitive developments. In practice, GM professionals have to identify ways in which mobility underpins organisation-wide strategies
- Flawless Programme Leadership needs to create high quality compliance and vendor relationship management. Flawless programme management mitigates the multiple risks associated with non-compliance. Successful tracking of assignees and sophisticated data analytics can enable GM departments to analyse their activities and improve them even further while increasing client satisfaction
- Efficient Global People Effectiveness Approaches need to understand, attract, motivate and fairly assess the performance of mobility candidates and assignees. This is enabled through the use of more developed global career branding, more sophisticated mobility selection approaches and instruments, as well as a conscious assignment objective setting and management process
- Seek the individualisation of the GM relationship through smart global talent management and efficient global people effectiveness approaches. Given the need for superior data for the management of assignees, it can also be used to individualise where expatriates are sent, what form of assignment they go on to and how they are managed
- Continue working towards enlarging the key roles of GM professionals. These roles are seen as important amongst RES Forum members. However, a third of all GM experts still perceive a gap between roles they fill today and roles that they would like to fill tomorrow
- Improve and expand the work of the GM department. The roles of strategic advisor, GM programme designer (including the focus on due diligence), global talent manager and people effectiveness expert are still insufficiently covered and there are substantial gaps between what GM departments do at present and what roles they would like to enact in the future
- Find the shared purpose of being globally mobile. Beyond using the organisational interest, the purpose needs to incorporate the interests of assignees. This 'mutual purpose' is likely to motivate and energise global workers, resulting in better performance, retention and commitment
- Focus on assignee experience. Staff

increasingly seek meaning in work and life and good assignee experiences should be valued by expatriates as they are likely to enrich their private and professional lives.

MNCs are embedded in massive change and are undertaking substantial internal transformations. GM departments and professionals need to understand and shape these changes in order to live their four key roles. Adapting to the new paradigm developed in Figure 3 and through the SAFE GM approach, focusing on the purpose and employee experience of working abroad needs sensitive, sophisticated and agile GM approaches. The road to this is highly complex. This report hopes to add to the insights of how to effectively tackle these challenges in order to take advantage of the manifold opportunities of global work.

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THE RES FORUM ANNUAL REPORT 2018- GLOBAL MOBILITY OF THE FUTURE: SMART, AGILE, FLAWLESS AND EFFICIENT

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