

# A View From The Plane Window – Enhancing The Employee Experience

**“When I flew recently to Bratislava, I found some time during discussions to look out of the plane window. I saw the industrial complex of Slovnaft chemical factory and the giant Petr’alka housing estate right behind it. The view was enough for me to understand that for decades our statesmen and political leaders did not look or did not want to look out of the windows of their planes. No study of statistics available to me would enable me to understand faster and better the situation in which we find ourselves” (Havel, 1990).**

This excerpt taken from Vaclav Havel’s New Year’s address to the nation in Prague on 1st January 1990, is significant for a number of reasons. Much of the free trade we see across Europe and beyond today, some 28 years on, and which fuels the expatriate activity of our global organisations, can be traced back to the world changing events of 1989. The fall of the Berlin Wall is the most obvious to the majority, but the fall of the one-party government of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and installation of Havel as the first President of Czechoslovakia can be counted amongst the many outcomes. Moreover, however this section of the speech can be seen as a metaphor for scenarios faced by Global Mobility teams and international assignees alike in terms of the employee experience.

## Technology And Data For Programme Management

Fortunately in the corporate world of today we don’t have the same issues with the validity of data Havel refers to in his address. Whilst a recent focus group we conducted reported that the majority of mid-size Global Mobility programmes were not using a technology solution to track and manage their programme, it did not necessarily follow that organisations were not able to produce data and analytics. That said, other industry studies show a bleaker landscape with large numbers of Global Mobility teams reporting deficiencies in being able to report metrics back to their businesses. Indeed, the importance of data and analytics is clearly

highlighted in the RES Forum’s 2018 Annual report as part of its SAFE GM model described in the last edition of International HR Adviser. As Professor Michael Dickmann states in the report; “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” (Dickmann, 2018). Improving satisfaction of course can only happen if the corporate organisation is tracking data elements, either internally or through its vendor partnerships, which have a correlation to the employee experience. Resulting from their commitment and obligation to what the

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SAFE model refers to as ‘Flawless Programme Management’, an overwhelming majority of organisations have sufficient processes in place to track the hygiene compliance data elements. However, what is less certain is the extent to which many organisations are able to track data elements which relate to the employee experience. Capturing a variety of data through pulse checks and employee feedback campaigns will support the refinement of programme design with the employee in mind; however, Havel’s point that looking at the situation from above and taking a holistic perspective is surely worthy of consideration. Data analytics offers a lens through which to look at a programme but it may not paint a complete picture. The Global Mobility function needs to ensure that there are a variety of interfaces not only with the employee but with Talent Management, Reward, and other stakeholders, which will help to develop a rich picture of what the employee experience looks like.

## An Employee Perspective

It is not just the corporate organisation looking out of the plane window however. The employee will take a holistic perspective of their interaction with the organisation through the Global Mobility experience. Continuing to use the plane as metaphor for the employee experience, it is possible to break the employee experience, from a Global Mobility perspective at least, down into three component parts. These are shown in the diagram opposite.

### Opportunity - The Engines

Just as the engines of an aeroplane propel it forward driving it into the air in conjunction with the wings, the opportunities an organisation creates for Global Mobility drive the employee experience and give it lift off. The means, by which an employee can access information concerning international opportunities; the linkages between talent management and Global Mobility, and the extent to which the organisation values and harnesses the skills employees develop whilst working overseas, all contribute to an organisational environment which incorporates mobility into its functioning. Amongst the recommendations for SMART Organisational Development of the SAFE GM

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## WINGS

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## ENGINES

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## FUEL

Opportunities are fuelled by the organisation having the right structures in place to facilitate mobility.

- Adopt a holistic perspective taking into account the interests of a variety of stakeholders
  - Capture relevant data outside of the confines of compliance monitoring
- Establish superior frameworks to facilitate mobility opportunities, including effective policy and remuneration structures and support mechanisms
- Balance technology with the human touch to contribute to a positive employee experience

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model set out in The RES Forum's 2018 Annual report, a number of engine components are set out, including devising career planning and progression systems, augmenting the attractiveness of global work to internal staff, and developing brand appeal to external global careerists (Dickmann, 2018). Other industry studies overwhelmingly demonstrate the linkage between successful career progression and international assignments for high potential talent in a large number of multinational companies.

### Policy and Remuneration – The Fuel

Opportunities are fuelled by the organisation having the right structures in place to facilitate mobility. The policy frameworks an organisation sets out need to support the varied types of mobility required by the business, whether it be an immediate need to have the right technical skills in situ, an employee moving into a critical role post assignment, fulfilling talent development or attracting new talent, all need to balance the need to manage cost, the assignment need, and providing the employee and their family with the support they need to relocate. In the last edition of International HR Adviser, we wrote in detail about a variety of flexible policy approaches available to organisations to enable mobility. Having the correct mix of policies and policy structures in place is essential for getting the right fuel mixture into the engine. Furthermore, as the RES Forum's 2018 Annual report indicates "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" (Dickmann, 2018). Reward and GM professionals need to strike the right balance from a remuneration structure perspective not only in the current environment but also with an eye on changes in future demand.

### Support – The Wings

Having the right support in place before, during and post assignment is essential for assignment success and the employee experience. The RES Forum reports that twice as many people leave the organisation compared to their non-expatriated peers within the first 12 months of repatriation (Dickmann, 2018). That said, the AIRINC 2017 Mobility Outlook Survey showed that only 31% of organisations are tracking retention rates post expatriation (AIRINC, 2017). The aeroplane metaphor is pertinent in two respects here. Firstly, there is an interesting symbolism in looking through the plane window for assignees insofar as windows have frequently been used in literature to represent the separation of a character from the outside world. Emily Bronte's use of windows in the classic novel 'Wuthering Heights' to represent the isolation of

characters from one another and as a barrier to preventing characters fulfilling their dreams, has a poetic symmetry with the isolation an employee and their family can feel, not only when out on assignment, but also upon their return to the home location.

Secondly, as the RES Forum report highlights that consideration of an employee's next role post repatriation is more prevalent the more senior the employee is in their organisation (Dickmann, 2018), giving this cadre of employees a clearer view of the landscape below when looking through the plane window. The absence of career and repatriation planning at other management levels however, is something organisations should respond to both from the perspective of employee engagement and managing the pipeline of future talent.

The use of technology in supporting the employee experience is frequently spoken about in Global Mobility circles. The recent RES Forum quarterly report on digitisation reported that "the improved adoption of technology was identified as a way to drive engagement during and after the assignment period to maximise the potential for a smooth repatriation to the home location" (RES Forum, 2018). This may be seen as part of an ongoing trend for self-service systems which has been taking hold for some time. There is however, some evidence that turning to AI is not necessarily a panacea for improving the employee experience. One recent study showed that just over a third of respondents saw investment in new technology as a means to improving the assignee experience. Indeed, a recent focus group run by Sterling with senior Global Mobility professionals supported this position. As one of our participants remarked, "Assignees always want to feel as though they are receiving a high touch service. They want to speak to someone who can put their mind at ease. I do think this might change through new generations, but it does feel as though this won't be any time soon". Whilst nobody advocated managing assignees with velvet gloves, there was a strong feeling amongst this group that the emotional connection with the assignee and their family was a key factor in managing the employee experience. The RES Forum quarterly report similarly shows that Global Mobility managers express concern over the negative impact technology may have through depersonalisation of the employee experience (RES Forum, 2018).

### Conclusion

The employee experience from a Global Mobility perspective can be seen through a variety of lenses. Whilst this article does not attempt to identify each and every perspective, it advocates adopting a holistic perspective taking into account the interests

of a variety of stakeholders. Capturing relevant data outside of the confines of compliance monitoring will undoubtedly support and help to develop a rich picture of the employee experience. Putting in place superior frameworks to facilitate mobility opportunities, having effective policy and remuneration structures and support mechanisms, which balance technology with the human touch, will all contribute to a positive employee experience.

### References

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- 3 AIRINC (2017) *Mobility Outlook Survey 2017*. AIRINC
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