

# Global Mobility Coming Of Age

**Extinction or expansion? This is the stark reality being faced by Global Mobility professionals today. Traditional assignments are dying out yet, cross-border movement overall is on the rise (just not in the same manner as has been the case previously). There are continuous calls for greater flexibility, less bureaucracy, increased opportunities for more junior staff as well as moderately, priced assignments geared towards more senior levels but constructed to provide experience and learning to bolster their internal marketability and career growth. Streamlined, efficient processes, rising levels of automation, a continuously changing geo-political landscape, heightened compliance requirements as well as the ever-present mantra of 'the employee experience', only add to the enormous pressure under which Global Mobility is struggling to remain relevant.**

These changes can be viewed by some as a harbinger of disaster, sounding a death knell for international mobility functions. Or, they can be embraced by Global Mobility professionals, allowing them to demonstrate the versatility, agility and desire to rise to the challenge, and to meet it. Rather than highly transactional interactions, Global Mobility professionals need to be able to adapt and move comfortably into a trusted partner space providing advice, guidance and counselling to business leaders, shepherding them through the morass of compliance requirements which seem to impact more and more aspects of the mobility landscape. Could this, then, be a new age for Global Mobility?

If we breakdown the various points into their constituent parts, we can begin to understand and address each aspect in turn. First, is the steady decline of the traditional full-blown Long-Term Assignment: an international posting for a period of up to 5 years where the individual and their household decamp to an assignment location for the duration. The reason for the decline in numbers for these types of postings of course, lies in their cost. Relocation costs, differences in cost of living and housing, dependent education costs, possibly the loss

of second income due to the inability of an accompanying spouse to take employment and tax costs, all contribute in pricing this type of package out of consideration for all but a select few in today's world.

In certain respects, recalibrating and relaunching policies aimed at long-term postings is the easier proposition to address. To mitigate some of these impacts while still serving the needs of the business and employees will require flexibility and adaptability on the part of Global Mobility and a fair amount of creativity as well. Constructing a segmented set of diverse and flexible policies while being smarter and more creative around the structure and use of commuting and gross-paid (sometimes referred to as Host-Plus packages) and, of course, greater employment of short-term assignments, goes without saying.

Both gross-paid and commuting assignments can, with careful planning, be deployed for mid and upper level staff to address developmental, experience and on-going management requirements, all the while minimising impacts to budgets and disruptions of family life. Engaging with business managers and HR Business Partners early on will be key to understanding the drivers for and budget constraints. Careful probing of whether actual presence in country is required will be essential in ascertaining whether commuter application might not lend itself to fulfilling the brief. It can also provide tax planning possibilities that a full, in-country assignment might otherwise obviate.

A second powerful pressure for Mobility professionals lies in the increasing demands from the business for short-term international experience assignments targeted at, and designed for, Millennial and Gen Z employees. The business wants and need more globally savvy employees but don't really give it any more in-depth thought or planning than that. Not to mention, also more times than not, they are not willing to accept the price-tag to achieve it. All the while the younger employees continue to clamour for international posting opportunities and are quick to vote with their feet if they feel such opportunities are being denied them. Trying to balance the competing needs and pressures is a heavy burden for Global Mobility.

While it is certainly possible to respond by facilitating postings of more junior staff elsewhere, the question remains: what is the overall intention of the posting? Surely there must be more than just allowing junior

members of staff to live and work in another international office? In being reactive rather than pro-active, however, are line managers and Global Mobility acting in a fiscally responsible manner for the organisation?

There is a disconnect in many organisations between having an appropriate programme to address the desires of the Millennial and Gen Z staff when weighed against the needs and drivers of the business. In a disproportionately large number of organisations, there is a woeful lack of cohesion between the business, Talent Management and GM, which runs the risk of losing Millennials and Gen Z sources of future talent from the organisation.

While GM can and do design lower-cost assignment structures that can meet the business desires of cost containment and succeed in deploying the Millennial and Gen Z's on assignment, there is a lack of proper development and structure of curricula, outcomes and return on investment measures, to truly address future business needs. While understanding cultural differences and nuances is undoubtedly beneficial for an employee's long-term growth and an organisation's need for building global mindset, it cannot be the sole reason for a company undertaking the time and expense of an international posting.

How then should GM and Talent Management respond? Global Mobility, partnering with Talent Management, must insert itself into the conceptualisation, creation and subsequent building of a sustainable, re-usable assignment programme framework for experiential learning and exchange.

Certain companies do attempt to provide some sort of learning experience for employees, generally by placing the onus onto individuals and/or line managers to devise a syllabus and effectiveness measures. In doing so, however, this more times than not misses the point and are left with – at best – an inchoate programme. Is it truly enough to merely ask an employee what they want to achieve from an overseas opportunity and leave it at that? Is it sufficient response from the line 'to give them international exposure'? Where is the disciplined, business focused and targeted approach that would normally be applied to a proper business case? Would all the exigencies be suitably drawn out early enough to identify and cover off on potential blockers that might cause the plan to stagnate, resulting in frustration and disappointment for the employee and manager alike?

In order to ensure an appropriate, genuine learning and development experience that

is fit to advance the employee's position whilst also providing a suitable return on investment for the employer, a properly structured opportunity with tangible, measurable results and outputs is necessary. Answers will be required on whether it is possible to structure and how those learning opportunities might be organised; who will be responsible to set the learning agenda; what the expected return on investment is, what the quantifiable outputs will be and, how will that be measured?

Global Mobility can position itself to be experiential assignment architects, assisting in the choreography of the learning and growth agenda by closely partnering with Talent, HR Business Partners and the business:

- Identifying likely role profiles: with Talent Management, HR Business Partners and Line Managers identify and target specific roles to be in programme scope
- Clarifying – which roles and locations will lend themselves (immigration, tax) to a strategically focused training programme: minimum education, experience and/or earning requirements
- With Talent and HR, interrogating your talent pool database to identify and carve out a High Performing cadre
- Matching individual attributes: technical/ linguistic skills, education, grade and compensation against roles

- Defining the programme:
  - Rotational: through roles/departments/ locations on the career pathway
  - Immersive: targeted posting to hone a specialisation (specific role or stream)
  - Project facing: targeting set, pre-defined on-going project tasks
- Candidate selection interviews and criteria: cultural fit, personal circumstances, motivation, and emotional maturity/ intelligence.

While at times and by varying degrees difficult, time consuming and complicated, there is no substitute for putting in the hard work required to formulate a proper learning cum business plan for an experiential assignment. Only by showing the willingness, ability and agility to transform itself will Global Mobility be able to remain an integral part of the business landscape. Otherwise, Global Mobility may very well go the way of the dinosaur.

**Global Mobility Professional**

*noun*

1. **obsolete** ARCHAIC

*Title historically used to denote a [now extinct] provider of global assignment services to clients and their employees; one who ensured relocations and transitions proceeded as smoothly as possible.*



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