

Ten Key Steps To Effective Global Talent Management

While global mobility practices today have evolved considerably from what they were even five years ago, and expatriates in the form of “global careerists” provide substantial benefits for savvy companies who get what they are about and the value they potentially bring, global talent management still presents ongoing challenges for many organisations. This is in part due to the changes modern expatriation has caused, including: (i) the emergence of global careerists; (ii) that expatriates are now increasingly demanding rewards beyond only financial remuneration; and, (iii) that the prestige of an international assignment has been replaced by the normalisation of global mobility as a routine step on the career ladder.

These challenges are further complicated by companies’ slow response to internally adjusting their organisational structures, policies, and procedures to provide a new level of service in line with the changing demographic of the assignee profile. As global careerists become more nimble, savvy, and albeit demanding for companies to support, organisations themselves need to ensure they have the right type of strategic outlook and processes in place to create and administer a more integrated talent management programme within the mobility offering for their people. How do we do this?

Developing and Motivating Global Talent

One important way to address global talent management is to shift the focus away from just the end points of the process – finding and acquiring talent, and then trying to keep it – to the intervening processes of deploying and developing talent. Complicating the situation, however, is that expatriate employment relationships are becoming especially complex, particularly in relation to career management support. We recommend a number of best practices for motivating global talent and driving employee engagement:

1. Career Planning

It helps for organisations to identify a

global talent pool with key positions, including successors for key executive positions, and high potentials. Assignees can then be monitored in terms of what they do and how best to develop them. Global talent review systems are crucial for managing assignees because they enable all parties to know what level assignees are operating at so that business units can pinpoint people with potential and determine in what roles they should next be considered. If little expertise exists internally to provide this, companies may wish to consider funding executive coaching and mentoring, which millennial employees in particular have found to be a valuable part of their expected training and development. This isn’t about helping assignees find a job with competitors, but about managing expectations and helping them find ways to overcome some of their career frustrations while sustaining critical employment relationships.

2. Understand Assignee’s Needs

When companies seek feedback from expatriates, the focus is all too often on process elements such as relocation assistance and the quality of the repatriation programme. Rarely do companies seek feedback as to expatriates’ personal satisfaction with an assignment and the outcomes they have derived from it. Questions that matter include whether assignees are happy with their new career/role, whether they have plans to stay longer, and whether the assignment has helped their development.

3. Prepare and Equip

Ensuring that assignees are best prepared to be successful in their new, often challenging assignments, can make or break the important on-boarding and subsequent assimilation phase of the assignment. Organisations that spend the appropriate time and resources to fully prepare and equip their people before departure can help exponentially increase the effectiveness of the transition and also lay the groundwork for ongoing assignment success.

4. Network and Support

Maintaining contact with assignees who are considered high potential and alerting them to new opportunities usually involves little effort for a substantial return. However, this requires an organisation to have a structure in place internally, with clear accountability as to who is responsible to liaise with, and support, assignees throughout the assignment.

5. Manage Expectations

Assignees’ expectations in relation to global career development are crucial. When expectations regarding what expatriates are prepared to buy into are clear from the outset, particularly for global careerists pursuing multiple assignments over many years, the commitment and retention rates of assignees are likely to be higher.

6. Plan Repatriation

Whether an expatriate is repatriating for good or intending to relocate again at some point in the future, the planning of repatriation activities is a major shortcoming of many companies. Best practice for repatriation involves having an assignee pop up on a list six months or more before he or she is due back, then identifying a job or at the very least entering into a discussion about what could be next. As obvious as this seems, many expatriates worry that they will slip under the radar and be made redundant, or stuck in limbo because the employer has no jobs on offer. Research shows that these fears frequently result in a strong desire to avoid repatriation altogether and instead to re-assign to anywhere but “home,” thus pushing assignees to look for jobs with competitors.

Retaining Global Talent

Another important way to address global talent management is to find key ways that companies can keep and retain the talent in which they have invested much time, effort, and money. Ultimately, retaining global talent is perhaps the biggest return on investment payoff of all. The critical question is, once we

have bought or developed talent, how do we counteract talent loss and brain drain? Whether the goal is short-term on-assignment retention from bought talent, or long-term succession planning for talent that is developed internally, the aim has to be to keep the people one really needs long enough to achieve the specific objective that made the organisation want to employ, or deploy, them in the first place. We advocate the following best practices:

7. Instill Top Management Support

When top management does not support global career activities, assignees know. Supportive senior managers, particularly those with their own global career experience, can be pivotal in sending clear messages that international assignees are valued and that global careers matter. They can also encourage others in the company to focus on improving global mobility and enhancing global career opportunities.

8. Talk to your assignees

One consequence of modern expatriation is that many assignees offered the opportunity to go abroad no longer look at just the next assignment. Instead, in an attempt to piece together how expatriation, as a career choice, furthers their career and personal aspirations, they look far beyond the next assignment, sometimes seven or ten years down the track, through subsequent re-assignments. Their focus nowadays is frequently much longer-term than that of the organisations they work for. This can be highly problematic, because in the absence of clear communication channels and openly communicated organisational life, assignees recognise that some of the skills they are acquiring (e.g. cultural flexibility) are generic rather than organisation-specific, and that they can often pursue their careers across organisational boundaries, in inter-organisational careers. The situation may be further complicated by family considerations, for example, a spouse's career, or the desire for stable and high-quality education for one's children in alternative suitable locations.

9. Formalise a Talent Management Programme

It is one thing to talk about talent management and another to actually

do it. Many companies want and seek talent, but few "walk the talk" when it comes to implementing an effective GTM programme. Research shows, however, that organisations with a properly managed talent management programme (with clear internal accountability for administering, supporting, and deploying talent) have repeatable and sustainable success over their competitors.

10. Reward and Recognition

Ultimately assignees need to feel validated and appreciated for their efforts. Having a system of real reward and recognition tied to pay-for-performance demonstrates that an organisation actually values the experiences and skills assignees have gained. Linking talent management to performance and rewards then becomes the backbone to demonstrating true organisational commitment to an assignee programme. As people are rewarded and recognised, this also helps to increase assignee engagement and retention. Well-motivated people who are on assignments, doing the job companies want them to do, and who are well received and still considered talented when they come back or move to another assignment, sends a clear message that global careerists are valued and important.

In this article, we have taken a closer look at global talent management, and have recommended that for organisations to acquire the global talent pools they seek, it is essential to follow a 10-step plan. This requires attention to the softer elements of human capital management: a genuine feeling that mobility is supported by top management, that successful assignees are rewarded and recognised for their efforts, and that their expectations are openly discussed and understood. Doing so is crucial because, in today's expatriation landscape, an organisation's future is dependent on its global talent pool and its mechanisms for enlarging and developing that pool.

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