

The Changing Role Of Global Mobility

I have worked in International Human Resources since 1999. There is not one day where I do not learn anything new! I remember that I sat in the last row of a very expensive Global Mobility seminar in Berlin. I was about three months into a role that was at least one shoe size too big for my experience. I must have made a big impression in the interview. I had landed my dream job as the “HR International” Advisor for Asia Pacific responsible for around 80 assignees and representatives of a large global bank. The seminar was a waste of money on me. It was far too specific and detailed. The cases were more the exceptions than the general rule, and I am happy that at least I remembered when to apply the “183-day-rule” in a case of double taxation, and when to not even bother.

We Are Not Relocation Professionals Even Though We Often Engage Them

Later in my Human Resources career, I noticed that there really isn't a lot of good advice out there for international Human Resources professionals, plus if you say you work in “Global Mobility”, a lot of people think you are doing relocation. When talking to other HR Professionals and senior managers they often underestimate the complexity of Global Mobility, and one of the remarks that still makes me angry is when Global Mobility Professionals are called “Admin staff”, because what we do requires an enormous knowledge and skill set.

If you are one of my colleagues you probably share my view that a Global Mobility Professional has to be:

- Highly analytical (you are a comp and cost expert)
- Highly technical (you are an expert on tax, social security, immigration, employment law)
- Highly experiential (you have to have moved 200 expats to know your job)
- Highly sensitive (you work with talents and their families in a phase of high stress)
- Highly intercultural (you speak at least four languages and deal with numerous cultures).

We need to build up our own professional standard and education whilst we need to learn to work more in line with the

businesses and clients we serve. We need to step up and become real consultants.

Five Megatrends

Since the year 2000 many Human Resources departments have been restructured and adopted an organisation model with HR business partners, centres of expertise and shared service centres (“Dave-Ulrich-Model”). Some forward-thinking Human Resources Professionals claim that we have to move away from our traditional ways of working and sharing work. Structures have become flatter and more fluid. HR Leaders and business line managers seek input from Global Mobility Professionals directly and earlier in the process. A Big4 Consulting Firm on the other hand just stated that “Global Mobility Shared Service Centres” are the new black for 2015 (see Deloitte [www.internationalhradviser.co.uk/storage/downloads/Global Mobility Shared Service Centres That's The Bottom Line Deloitte.pdf](http://www.internationalhradviser.co.uk/storage/downloads/Global%20Mobility%20Shared%20Service%20Centres%20That's%20The%20Bottom%20Line)).

Let's take a look at trends we are confronted with that influence our work. We have all been influenced by five megatrends:

- Technology
- Globalised corporations
- Global economic crisis
- Generation X, Y and Game
- The population growth in China/India and South East Asia.

From these five mega trends we can already see eight Global Mobility trends that were also mentioned in a report by Worldwide ERC (2012).

Eight Global Mobility Trends In A Nutshell

- Repatriation retention continues to be an issue for many companies
- Selection and assessment of candidates includes more intercultural skills than in the past
- Third-party vendor management (the management of all providers involved in the GM process such as relocation companies, intercultural trainers, spouse career coaches and more), is driven by global alignment and cost-reduction but most companies have regional quality needs
- Local plus packages (local market salary

and contract plus housing or support with relocation), seem to indicate constant policy reviews with input from assignees

- Alignment of Global Mobility programmes with Talent Management where talent is the driver
- More assignments from traditional inbound countries such as India and China pose challenges for traditional outbound locations
- Cost containment for less strategic assignments. We see more short-term and commuter assignments, developmental assignments and local-to-local transfers
- GM value proposition needs to define the higher value of the GM function for business growth. In other words: GM has to prove its relevance for business critical operations. (Source: Worldwide ERC – 2012).

The Changing Role Of Global Mobility

You have noticed the change happening. You realise it's not about you any longer. It's about HR as a whole. What has been preached to us over the last 20 years is entirely wrong. We cannot be strategic business partners unless we are in a strategic function (see HBR Blog Post).

Where Are These Strategic Functions?

They have to do with the talent life cycle, with recruiting, with moving talents into the right places at the right time, and with developing our current and future leaders so that they are able to deal with the complexity of dealing with today's world. We are in the centre of this change but only a few of us have seen it coming.

More Transparency In The Assignee Population

Many assignees have been burnt by the experiences of expats around the world. They heard horror stories of lack of social security, lower standards of living, marital breakdowns, children being traumatised and not able to study. They have also heard the repatriation reality: Assignees were not promoted when they repatriated. The stories are online. Ten years ago there was hardly any communication outside of the traditional “expat clubs”.

Now, experiences are shared. Companies have lost the trust of their employees.

Employees of all ages and colours (especially the younger generations), are seeking transparency for their international careers, benefits and working hours.

More Dual Career Couples

Dual Career couples and their issues did not really raise any eyebrows twenty years ago. "Expat wife" was a career aspiration. Now women take the lead and are becoming a major assignee population. Trailing husbands form support groups from Basel to Barcelona.

The Global Mobility Professionals

We still work with tools that are basically excel sheets. We still need to fill hundreds of forms. We still need to seek approval for every minor exception to the policy and stay up all night when an expat is in a dangerous country.

What Should Change For You?

We think that the profile of Global Mobility Professionals needs to be raised. We think we need to be trendsetters, we think we need to be more up to speed on social media, have better tools and be self-guided learners. In short: We think we need to be globally competent.



Angela Weinberger has lived in Germany, Switzerland, UK, India and Australia. After her graduation in "International Business Studies" of the University of Paderborn, she worked in Human Resources specialising in Global Mobility during her corporate career at a large global bank and one of the Big 4 Professional Services Firms in Germany and later Switzerland.

Angela is known in the German-speaking world as a Global Mobility Expert. She started her company Global People Transitions GmbH in 2012. She offers career and executive coaching to expats and their spouses through programmes. She also works with expats on improving their intercultural communication and prepares expat families for their stint in Switzerland through intercultural training. She consults HR Professionals on how to improve the international assignment experience for expats, their spouses and families. Her working languages are

English and German, but she also communicates in French, Spanish, understands Swiss German and learns Arabic.

Angela recently published "The Global Mobility Workbook – A Step-by-Step Guide for Managing International Assignments". (Available on Amazon)

Link to Website

www.globalpeopletransitions.com

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