

Thriving Abroad - Driving Assignee Engagement

When international assignments go wrong, the cost - financially, emotionally and psychologically can be high for all stakeholders involved in the process. Although only a small percentage of assignments fail, the degree to which they are judged to be successful in terms of role performance, positive career development outcomes and retention post assignment varies considerably.

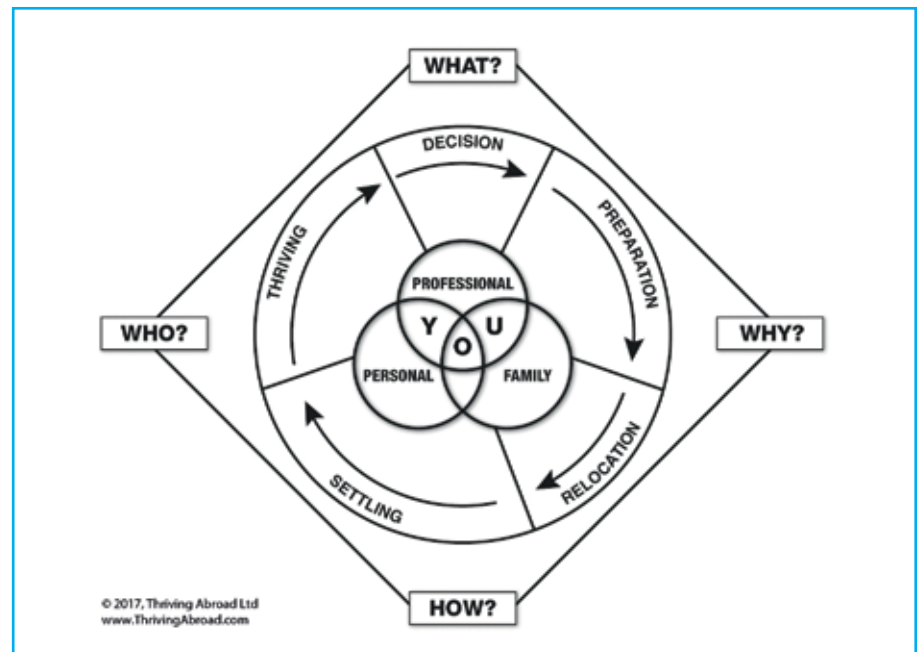
While attention on outcomes and return on investment is important in proving the effectiveness of global mobility from strategic and cost perspectives, a focus on the measurement of outputs at the expense of inputs to the global mobility process can mean important opportunities for performance changing measures are missed. Assignee engagement is a case in point.

The Benefits Of Engagement

Engaged employees are defined by Gallup (2016) as those who are 'involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace'. Where employees are highly engaged - higher levels of performance, productivity, psychological well-being and retention can result. A Towers Watson/RES Forum survey: Assessing Sustainable Engagement Among Expatriate Employees, found that assignees tended to be more highly-engaged than their equivalent home-based employees.

In some ways, this is not surprising as the very nature of international relocation engenders a deep sense of employee commitment from both a personal and professional perspective. This represents both the benefit and the challenge of global mobility. There is a lot at stake for the employee, they have high expectations of the organisation in terms of support, and a strongly vested interest in positive professional and personal outcomes. In turn, the organisation has high expectations of the employee because of the investment they have made in them.

Meeting and/or managing expectations effectively and adopting an approach to the support of international assignments that incorporates the key drivers of employee engagement, is a powerful way to boost positive outcomes from international assignments.



The Framework For Thriving Abroad

An international assignment is not only about a professional or career change. It represents a complete life change, one that for over 70% of assignees involves partners and children too. The Framework for Thriving Abroad (above) represents the personal change process that is international relocation, and highlights the process from decision to the creation of a thriving life abroad. It emphasises the impact moving abroad has on the assignee and partner from a professional, personal and family perspective, and sets as its objective the aim to thrive, not simply survive, creating a positive life enhancing experience for all.

Different stages of the relocation process benefit from different organisational inputs and support, and these can contribute to the engagement and motivation of assignees and their partners. Some of the key drivers of engagement that are particularly relevant to the assignment experience include:

- Clear strategic direction, purpose and objectives of the international role
- Strong leadership and managerial support, engendering trust and confidence
- Recognition and appreciation
- Care for the employee's general well-being
- Employee empowerment and involvement in decision making
- Employee personal growth and development

- A consistent and frequent two-way communication.

By integrating these drivers into the assignment experience, a powerful template for the creation of an engaged and highly performing assignee is created. For example;

The Decision:

The way in which the assignment decision is made lays the foundations for a positive assignment experience. A rushed and reactive decision can lead to poor recruitment decisions and unrealistic expectations from all stakeholders. Understanding the strategic purpose for an assignment and the associated role, responsibilities, and expected outcomes, guides the recruitment process ensuring the right person is selected.

The five-pillar decision process proposed in Thriving Abroad emphasises the importance of thorough research from the assignees perspective. Understanding their personal and professional 'why' for undertaking an assignment, and the context of the experience in terms of opportunities and challenges, creates the basis of an empowered and informed decision. This requires open and honest communication between all stakeholders.

Preparation:

Assignees don't know what they don't know. If they have never relocated abroad they cannot know the questions they need to

ask. Organisations can help assignees and their families by providing a comprehensive guide to the context of global mobility and the preparation process from a practical and emotional/psychological perspective.

Organisations have sophisticated assignment contracts and support provisions, however, they often fail to meet the real or perceived needs of the assignee and family, causing dissatisfaction to set in early in the relocation experience. Taking time to understand the needs and perspective, building the trust and confidence of the assignee and family, can help global mobility professionals to better allocate resources and manage expectations.

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Relocation:

This is where the rubber meets the road in the assignment process. It can feel alternately a heady, exciting and chaotic time. The way in which the assignee arrives impacts on how they initially settle into their new role and work environment and their home life.

The on-boarding process is key, with the initial focus being on the employee's and family's well-being and initial adjustment. Tempting though it is to expect the assignee to be up and running quickly, giving time to acclimatise pays dividends later. Adjustment takes time and involves getting used to new roles, cultural norms, behaviours, ways of communicating, the general living environment and new relationships. Ensuring basic needs for comfort and security are met, and supporting the assignee and family to build new habits and routines puts the basics in place for the creation of their new healthy lifestyle. Connection is also important, and so managerial support in finding new social networks, the provision of a local business and social mentor can make all the difference in the early days.

Settling In:

The settling in phase can be a risky period for a new assignment. It can take between six to eighteen months to feel comfortable and reasonably well adjusted. There can be a sequence of highs and lows representing culture shock. The inability of partners and families to adjust has been cited as one of the key reasons for assignment failure or early return.

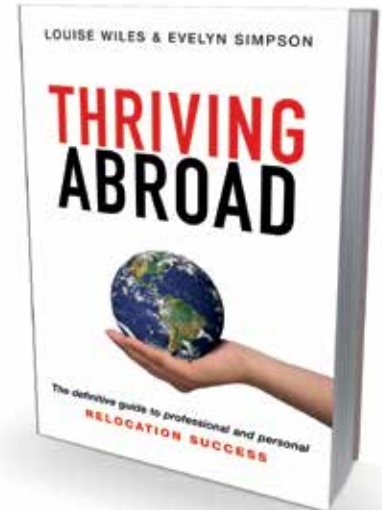
Ironically, this is the period where organisational support and communication tends to tailor off. Additional support would be welcome; for the partner in relation to their professional life, and for the assignee in considering how best to navigate the new work environment and create the required results. Nurturing trust and confidence in relationships between the local management and the assignee is important in engaging the assignee in the objectives of the local company.

Coaching and mentoring support at this point can be helpful in recognising the contribution of assignees and partners, supporting their personal growth and development, and empowering assignees and partners to make the most of the experience.

Thriving:

Relocation and settling in can be an all-consuming experience, and it is easy to become focused on the day to day and forget to think about the future. It is important the assignee keeps an eye on the future and their future career direction. For partners wishing to pursue a professional life in the future it is important they do the same. The assignment experience is a developmental one and it is beneficial to encourage assignees and partners to recognise the skills and knowledge they

acquire through the experience. Keeping communication channels open and active with HR and home based networks means assignees will not be forgotten, and can be encouraged to play an active role in their future career plans.



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How can HR and global mobility engage and empower talented international assignees to create the international success their organisations require?

Thriving Abroad: The Definitive Guide to Professional and Personal Relocation Success is written for international assignees and their partners, putting them at the centre of the relocation process. *Thriving Abroad* recognises the holistic impact that international relocation has on their lives. Viewing the assignment from their perspective *Thriving Abroad* empowers and engages assignees to achieve optimal professional and personal outcomes. Combined with organisational support *Thriving Abroad* makes a powerful tool for supporting and engaging international assignees. If you would like to know more about the book and access the associated Ebook for HR professionals, please visit www.thrivingabroad.com/book