

Should Companies Invest A Little To Save A Lot?

The Global Mobility function is not a new phenomenon nor is the concept of an employee being placed on assignment as a result of globalisation. However, in recent years, the budget for an in-house Global Mobility function has become minimal or non-existent.

The Global Mobility function historically has sat within Human Resources, Compensation and Benefits, Workforce Management or as a standalone function. The function can be centralised, decentralised or have a Centre of Expertise to undertake the day to day operations or strategy that make Global Mobility so unique. However, this uniqueness can mean a lack of understanding of the function and comprehension of its importance to the overall strategy of a company and its success globally.

Global Mobility Function Current Capabilities

The current capabilities of a Global Mobility function vary according to the budget they are provided with. This budget dictates the staff that can be employed and the resources available to the Global Mobility function within a company. If there is no, or minimal budget, the function will be under-resourced in staff and capability. This can lead to overworked Global Mobility Managers and Global Mobility Specialists who are unable to partner with stakeholders within the company or provide cost-effective assignment solutions that enhance the company strategy.

Over the last five years, more and more functions are under-resourced or reliant on under skilled employees to aid with the daily operations of the Global Mobility function, and in some cases one person will be expected to undertake all operational actions globally. In these instances there is minimal scope for value to be added and Global Mobility often refer to themselves as “firefighters”, ensuring an assignment is compliant from both a tax and immigration perspective only.

There is no time for Global Mobility Managers to educate key stakeholders on the Global Mobility function, maintaining poor working relationships that do not deliver what either party requires from one another. If neither party deliver, ultimately the employee

on assignment suffers and potentially revenue for the company can be lost. In extreme cases a minor breakdown in a relationship or uncertainty about expectations can cause the employee to resign and the client relationship to suffer.

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The Global Mobility function's uniqueness is cemented in the need for multiple vendors to undertake the task of placing an employee on assignment. No other function is so reliant on external parties to undertake its daily operations, but this is essential for the Global Mobility function to maintain compliance and administer the benefits and allowances of the company's Global Mobility Policies. If the Global Mobility function is under resourced, monitoring vendor service level agreements is not a priority and a company can be overcharged fees and be provided with inadequate service with little challenge from the Global Mobility function.

In parallel to inadequate vendor service and fees, the Global Mobility function can become reliant on Excel or software developed by other departments to track who is on assignment, critical dates and

to undertake core tasks which can create a laboured and time intensive process. There is no budget for technology to enhance and ease the administrative burden of placing an employee on assignment. Sadly, the Global Mobility function relies on the individual capabilities of team members as opposed to utilising the numerous technological offerings available on the market.

Global Mobility Function Potential Capabilities

The Global Mobility function has the capability to be one of the most innovative, strategic and successful functions within a company. However, to achieve these goals the function needs to be provided with a budget and support from senior leadership. The Global Mobility function requires specialists in relevant fields who can undertake key tasks in a timely and proactive manner avoiding the “firefighting” many Global Mobility professionals have become akin to.

Global Mobility Managers can partner with key stakeholders and add strategic value to the company's assignment requirements through training, planning and understanding an individual stakeholder's needs. However, this can only happen if the Global Mobility function has the resources to allow Global Mobility Specialists to work independently and allow Global Mobility Managers to work strategically and not purely operationally.

Freeing time for Global Mobility Managers can also enable more time to be spent on vendor relationships. The relationship between the Global Mobility function and a vendor should be seen as a partnership and requires effort from both parties. The more time the Global Mobility Manager can dedicate to this relationship the better quality service the Global Mobility function will be provided with, and the value of these partnerships will be shown to the company through a better understanding of each other. This can also mean the proactive monitoring of the service level agreement, tracking fees and regular meetings to maintain the partnership which are undertaken proactively and not relegated to a task when the Global Mobility Manager has capacity.

Providing a Global Mobility function with basic technology assistance will ensure minimal time is spent on administration, tracking and determining metrics which are part of the Assignment Lifecycle. Automated tools can

enhance reporting requirements and provide global consistency with processes and policies. If the entire worldwide Global Mobility function uses the same system, employees are provided with consistency and have the same assignment experience no matter which region they are relocating to and from. A positive experience during the assignment initiation helps build a relationship of trust with the Global Mobility function which can be maintained for the duration of the assignment if minimal time is spent undertaking administration.

Global Mobility Function Expectations In The Future

In the future the Global Mobility function will be expected to act as a strategic partner with the company, a trend which is slowly growing, and offer cost and time effective solutions. Assignment packages are no longer extensive and the traditional assignment types are changing to meet differing needs, which the Global Mobility function should be able to respond to. If the function continues to be provided with a minimal budget and has limited staff and resources, it will be impossible for a proactive response to the ever changing demands imposed for the Global Mobility function, leading to frustrations from both parties.

Globalisation does not appear to be disappearing despite the rise of nationalism

in the last year, but the movement of an employee globally is ever-changing and becoming more complicated. Every company has to make cost savings to balance the books and keep shareholders happy, but at what expense? Chipping away at the Global Mobility function budget or not providing the function with the staff and capability it needs to be best in class can have far reaching consequences, which are not isolated to compliance. Placing an employee on assignment is a large investment by a company and an unhappy experience can result in the employee's assignment failing, or the employee resigns. Every employee on assignment incurs an investment of three to ten times the base salary, which means it is crucial the assignment is successful and the employee is retained. Shieldge estimate that the direct costs of multiple assignments failing can cost a company in the United States of America over two billion dollars.

If Global Mobility is under-resourced in skills, technology and budget there will be little time spent on the "nice to haves" that can save an assignment, and the investment of placing an employee on assignment will be futile. The Global Mobility function is only as good as what a company has invested into it, if that investment is minimal, the function will never be best in class or thrive to meet the ever changing global compliance demands and minimise expenditure for the company.



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Upon graduation from university Holly undertook a graduate scheme in US & UK expatriation tax before moving to EY to specialise in global mobility. She then moved into Global Mobility consulting before becoming the project manager tasked with helping the Head of Global establish a GM model and process for a global energy company. Holly currently works as a Global Mobility Manager, and along with her global counterparts is working towards the re-design of the Global Mobility function of the company following a recent merger. Holly is fast gathering a growing reputation within the industry and in 2016 was nominated and shortlisted for Global Mobility Rising Star within the EMEA region.



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