

# Relocation In A Digital Age – Are You A Gate-Keeper Or Game-Changer?

**“I personally relocated a few years ago and my experience was virtually the same as in 1995 when I last moved. There were lots of forms to fill in. However, there’s no doubt now that the industry is in the midst of an indisputable process of change.”**

“Technology is a game changer. It’s bringing Global Mobility into the modern age and aligning us to every other part of the business so we’re no longer lagging behind.”

Sound familiar? If you’re working in Global Mobility, your experiences probably lie somewhere between these experiences: Stuck shepherding assignees through a mire of time-intensive processes, while at the same time aware that the rest of the world is well into the 21st century. Indeed, both these opinions – from two of the heads of Global Mobility at major global corporations attending a Santa Fe Relocation Services event – capture the sense that relocation is a discipline that has yet to face the wave of digital transformation, which has already washed over other business functions. When the CFO demands real time data, can you respond if all the relevant information is scattered across multiple word documents and spreadsheets? When the CEO wants to see the return on investment of costly overseas assignments, how easy is it to pull that together? And at the other end of the spectrum, when assignees are accustomed to social media they expect their company to be able to give them quick access to all the details of their move in an instant, can the person answering the phone respond accordingly? Even better, can the assignee just look for their answers online?

Given how technology has already changed our business and personal lives, expectations have shifted. And yet in relocation – even at the comparatively sophisticated level of some global corporations – the reality is still falling short. For assignees, the challenges begin at the start with too many forms, too many points of contact and fragmented communication across the supply chain. Several Global Mobility heads have shared that this fragmentation then impacts the ability for Human Resources to maintain visibility of an assignee once they had been relocated. Rather than effectively cultivating talent and maintaining a career journey for assignees, all too often the continuity is broken – often leading to a

scramble several months before repatriation to a suitable position for a returning assignee. As a result, it frequently proves very difficult for the business to track the costs and value of assignments.

## Can Global Mobility Become A Strategic Partner To The Business?

Global Mobility can struggle to meet the expectations of stakeholders. And it’s clear that inefficient processes are also holding back professionals in the mobility team who are seeking to be more strategic. This was borne out by the findings of the 2016 Global Mobility Survey – the largest independent study of 1,122 mobility professionals across 64 countries worldwide. Conducted by Circle Research and commissioned by Santa Fe Relocation Services, the study found that a third (34%) of business leaders want Global Mobility to take on a more strategic role, desiring the function to include a long-term view of workforce planning. Yet, despite this, Global Mobility professionals themselves report that they are still spending the majority of their time on tactical, rather than strategic, activities. For example, on average only 14% of their time is spent on strategic workforce planning.

Indeed, our clients confirmed that a lot of resource in Global Mobility is still spent being operational – overseeing the various processes to ensure a successful deployment but, in doing so, being drawn into considerable amounts of tactical, time-consuming work.

## How Can Technology Drive Transformation?

Global Mobility is clearly being pulled in two directions – aspiring to take a more proactive, strategic role, yet facing the daily demands of managing assignments. Ultimately, the solution will demand some degree of transformation and also an investment in technologies that can reduce the operational burden. Global Mobility and Human Resource leaders need to re-assess their mobility supply-chain to focus on where they can best deliver value to the business. Part of this will be to determine what their core internal mobility teams can offer and what could be optimally delivered by co-sourcing with partners.

Like so many other industry sectors and

business functions, technology is set to continue to revolutionise Global Mobility. Services that can be accessed in real time from any location, will make it possible to bring all the data involved in relocation – from the back-end, to supply chain management to the customer portal – into a single platform. Multiple services catering to assignees and supply chain partners will connect to a single, standardised repository of data. This cuts the burden of information capture and ensures an improved customer experience through better communication, more effective case management and greater capabilities for self-service. All of which will help meet the demands of stakeholders, while freeing time for more high value activity.

Ultimately Global Mobility is at a crossroads. Today, the focus on operations casts professionals in the role of gate-keeper. But technology offers the opportunity to step beyond this into the desired role of a strategic advisor to the business. To be a game-changer. The question is, which are you?



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