

FROM MOBILITY TO MOBILISATION

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Introduction



The world of Global Mobility has fundamentally changed. COVID has created an environment in which the old certainties have been upended. Trends that were nascent just a year ago have been catapulted into the mainstream. The future holds lots of uncertainties, but also opportunities.

One of the clear trends we have seen over the last year is the focus on companies mobilising their workforce innovatively, as normal talent

flows have been displaced. Wherever talent is, and wherever it needs to be, Global Mobility is being asked to shift the focus from physical mobility to effective talent mobilisation.

As the function reinvents itself to achieve this new goal, we anticipate significant changes and challenges both in the short and medium term. With so many to choose from, here, I have highlighted my top half dozen things you can expect to see coming down the line.

1. Think creatively, think strategically:



As companies remobilise, there will be a lot of attention on sourcing talent effectively and having purposeful assignments. At the same time, Global Mobility has demonstrated its ability to operate both flexibly and strategically throughout the crisis. When you bring these two together, there is an opportunity for Global Mobility to engage with talent in a way that has been only aspirational until now.

There are so many options available to optimise the deployment of staff: from the acquisition of new talent to extended business trips, from assignments to remote work. Global Mobility has the chance to think strategically and actively shape its role in the mobilisation of talent. Now is the time to consult with the business, identify talent mobility objectives, and use the expertise of the function to deliver creative, flexible, pragmatic solutions.

As an example, a pharmaceutical company has created a “vision 2025” project to reimagine talent deployment. Engaging with Talent, the business, and leadership, it is taking a long-term strategic view of the future role of mobility. The objective is to design a programme that supports talent mobilisation in all its forms.



2. Operational hurdles:



As the rollout of the vaccine accelerates, restrictions on international travel will start to ease. Many companies are reporting that planning for new assignments has picked up. Assignments that have been delayed are now being reactivated and critical deployments are being prioritised. While it may be an exaggeration to talk of a tsunami of relocations, there is certainly significant pent-up demand, with companies eager for the green light to relocate their talent to where it needs to be.

Supporting this remobilisation is likely to be a key focus over the coming months. However, it is clear that the opening of borders will not mark a return to business as usual. A number of challenges are likely to come to the fore. Examples include the need to comply with vaccination passport regulations, a backlog among authorities in processing visa and work permit applications, and a chronic shortage of containers for household good shipments.

Responding to these challenges is going to take time, flexibility, and resourcefulness. An example I have already seen is an increase in companies offering support to purchase furniture in the host location, rather than ship household goods. Aligned to this, companies are revisiting their approach towards storage. This removes considerable uncertainty from the assignee and their family, delivering a better assignment experience in the face of these difficulties. Thinking around problems and deploying creative solutions will be critical to mobilising talent in the future.



3. Green mobility:



Global Mobility teams are increasingly being asked to evaluate how to mitigate the carbon footprint of international talent mobilisation. Green initiatives are cascading through many organisations and forcing some fundamental questions to be addressed. Recent initiatives I have seen include:



A defense sector company that has eliminated very short-haul flights, now requiring European commuters to take the train for journeys less than 4 hours



A government agency that requires an energy efficiency assessment of expatriate rental properties prior to the lease being signed



A consumer goods company that has introduced carbon offsetting for all home leave trips



A manufacturing company that is encouraging virtual working for commuters of one week per month from the home country

As the drive towards decarbonisation accelerates, Global Mobility teams may increasingly need to identify ways to make their programmes green and advise the business about the carbon impact of mobilising talent.

4. It won't be "business as usual":

Although some companies are keen to re-establish pre-COVID working patterns as soon as possible, the majority believe that there has been a fundamental and permanent shift in patterns of mobility. The emphasis on mobilisation means Global Mobility is likely to be working in a world that is permanently more complex. A different approach will be required to seize opportunities. In particular, to succeed Global Mobility will need to:



Be Nimble

This means being able to react flexibly to situations, be they the personal concerns of an assignee, the needs of the business, or the rapidly changing geo-political environment.



Understand their stakeholders' needs

Some companies have spent the last year examining exactly what their stakeholders need and have used that information to define their mission for the coming years. However, the most recent Mobility Outlook Survey shows many companies are still not engaging with the organisation enough. By understanding the talent and business needs of the organisation, Global Mobility can build out a portfolio of options that offer scalable, flexible mobilisation solutions.



Be consultative and creative

By consulting with the business, Global Mobility can gain better insights into the purpose of the planned employee mobilization and use the right type of mobility product to solve the need.

As an example, a manufacturing company has engaged in a survey of the business, both quantitatively through a survey, but also qualitatively using stakeholder interviews. Based on the feedback, it was recognised that Global Mobility needed to be much more closely embedded in the business to allow deeper understanding of business need and empower team members to operate in an agile and flexible way.

5. Remote and virtual working:

Many organisations are putting frameworks in place to help the business make informed decisions when it comes to mobilising the organisation's talent effectively. Remote and virtual working are seen by some as a compliance minefield, while for others, it is an opportunity to gain access to a wider talent pool, to attract and retain key people and to gain a competitive advantage.

Remote work and virtual assignments are clearly not for every organisation, but now that the genie is out of the bottle, the demand is unlikely to go away. Global Mobility has an opportunity to embrace the trend and actively shape the remote work framework.



As an example, a consumer goods company has recognised that it can significantly increase its attractiveness to key talent through a remote work policy. They are repurposing their Global Employment Company (GEC) to make it a vehicle that enables international remote working and virtual assignments. The GEC provides the structural framework to efficiently manage the compliance risks and dramatically increase their ability to mobilise talent in an innovative and flexible way.

6. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:



It is widely recognised that a diverse workforce brings innovation, accelerated growth, and organisational success. Global Mobility has a critical role to play in enabling a diverse population of employees to gain the international experience needed to be successful in their careers and valuable to the business.

Historically, rigid policies have too often treated the needs of a diverse workforce as exceptions. To offer the support that will facilitate a non-traditional assignment, requests have to be filed, approvals sought, and budgets approved. In order to better mobilise a diverse population, Global Mobility needs to be imaginative, empathetic, and flexible.

Trying to second guess the needs of a diverse group of employees and to address their needs in the policy will always leave gaps, as people's circumstances are unique. To that end, we have helped a company put diversity at the heart of its mobility programme through a "diversity fund." The fund can be used to provide whatever support is needed to address the employee's unique situation and facilitate the mobilisation of that talent internationally. As the fund sits within the policy, exceptions are not required.

By removing the stigma associated with exceptions and providing a flexible, inclusive framework, the policy is no longer the rulebook defining what can and cannot be provided. Instead, it becomes a fluid and adaptable framework that facilitates the mobilisation of talent across the whole spectrum of people.



Conclusion

This is an exciting time for Global Mobility that presents an opportunity to radically change the way talent is mobilised. This is just my take on some of the trends that I believe will be shaping mobility in the months and years ahead. Do you agree? What are your top 3? If you want to discuss any of these topics or if you have a different perspective, let me know!



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