

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL MOBILITY

MANAGING DIVERSITY AGAINST DIFFERING CROSS-BORDER STANDARDS

Diversity in business is about the positive benefits that a mixture of individuals with differing characteristics and perspectives can bring to organisations and those who work in them. Businesses are increasingly recognising the commercial and organisational benefits of diversity. This might be higher staff retention rates, better understanding of customer needs or an increased likelihood of getting fresh and innovative ideas to boost performance.

However, managing diversity for multinational companies is complex because each country has its own interpretation of how to do it. It is this disparity between countries that can be the most challenging aspect of international resourcing and managing diverse cross-border talent.

HARNESSING THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY

Diversity perspective suggests that differences as well as similarities across the workforce can help with achieving business goals. Each employee brings to their workplace their own world view, experiences and relationship styles, and this is amplified in the context of international working. It is the job of international managers to ensure this diversity works effectively for the organisation in terms of talent retention and productivity, as well as providing new opportunities and greater engagement of individuals.

Helping employees working internationally to understand local contexts, labour regulations for expatriates, cultural attitudes and ways of behaving, while still attempting to promote progressive practices, is an important part in developing appropriate international business strategies on diversity.

EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Diversity categories are varied, however, a key area that requires better understanding is that people think differently and are wired differently. Extrapolating this notion further reveals people with thought process diverging from so called 'dominant societal norms'.

The accepted jargon for this is neurodiversity. Neurodiversity is an emerging concept that acknowledges natural variations in human brain function, ways of thinking and behavioural traits. But there is not yet an accepted way of recognising the specialist strengths within a neurodiverse workforce such as the nature of specialist thinking skills compared to generalist thinking skills.

Neurodiversity might include such conditions as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, bipolar disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. For the purposes of this article, we focus on autism, it being the most prevalent. In the UK, it is thought that one in eight people are diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. The UK is forward-thinking in its approach to incorporating neurodiverse employees into the workplace. However, there is still much work to be done to remove the pervasive stigma attached to autism and the general lack of understanding.





MANAGING NEURODIVERSITY ACROSS BORDERS

With the increasing use of international remote working and virtual team arrangements there is an opportunity to consider greater participation and inclusion in international work.

This requires managers to focus on how to identify the roles and tasks most suited to those considered neurodiverse, how to assess their workplace needs and the value they can add to the business.

Managers also need to consider national variations disability legislation. Most countries have adopted approaches in line with the United Nations Statute on the rights of Persons with Disabilities. This recognises the need for organisations to make accommodations and adjustments to support the widest possible range of human experience. These accommodations might include:

- Work environment flexibility
- Schedule flexibility
- Specialist supervisor and stakeholder support
- Training
- Workstation adjustments
- Language, culture, and literacy coaching

There are very few existing studies evaluating the effectiveness of adjustments in the workplace, which provides a challenge. Most organisations rely on professional judgment and common sense rather than formal evidence. Some countries have a proactive approach by endorsing specific recruitment programmes within organisations. Others view it as a disability or an incurable mental impairment and offer no support with schooling or employment. Some countries have no screening procedures and therefore no official figures for comparison.

The UK Access to Work programme supports the assessment of workplace needs and is widely respected in the UK. There are few programs of this kind internationally. The same role is more typically provided informally or privately by Occupational Health, Human Resources or Employee Assistance Programs from an organisational point of view.

The internationalisation of firms and the greater mobility of labour is bringing into sharp focus the need to understand the applicability of host country labour regulations for neurodiverse expatriates. International managers seconding employees abroad or hosting assignees from another country need to know how to handle the relevant different approaches.

FORCES DRIVING GLOBAL MOBILITY STRATEGY

At the same time, there is a need for a more effective platform for regulating international employment issues – a platform that facilitates setting standards and creating alternative sustainable visions of how people should be managed. A cohesive working environment is one where everyone feels accepted regardless of where they are from.

As the world emerges from the Coronavirus pandemic, businesses are considering more agile and flexible working arrangements, including remote international working. This has increased focus on sustainability, health and wellbeing. This new sense of direction is revealing opportunities and approaches for neurodiverse employees which will allow them to participate in international projects and cross-border work more easily.



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