

**Master Course Human Resources and Global Mobility
Expatise Academy and FEI, Erasmus University Rotterdam**



“Global mobility is increasingly becoming a key employee value proposition for global organizations to assist with the attraction of new talent and the retention of existing talent.”

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Thesis statement and sub-questions

This paper explores the following thesis statement: “Global mobility is increasingly becoming a key employee value proposition (EVP) for global organizations to assist with the attraction of new talent and the retention of existing talent.”

To formulate an answer, the following sub-questions are examined:

- What is the definition and significance of talent?
- Why is talent in the spotlight?
- What are the identities and interests of stakeholders of the talent issue?
- How does global mobility relate to the issue of talent?
- Who are the main actors in the talent and mobility theme?
- How will these main actors relate to one another moving forward?
- What are the key priorities within global mobility, and what do they imply for the function?
- Which factors (e.g. global mobility, employee experience, organizational ESG score, a compelling EVP) currently attract and bind talent, and why?

Methodology

The analysis and conclusions of this paper are based on insights from the articles, literature, and surveys in the references list. To ensure its relevance, the documentation is generally from within the past six years. In addition, I contacted various industry experts to obtain their reflections on the topic.

1. Introduction

According to the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus, change is the only constant in life, and it is a never-ending story. In fact, the world has continuously accelerated its pace of change, which has necessitated constant adaptation. From a business perspective, it is imperative for organizations to continuously plan and prepare for change, which requires an agile mindset.

Various economic, social, and demographic forces are gradually leading toward an elemental shift in how we work and how companies organize their talent pools. Since talent is currently scarce in the rapidly developing global economy, world-class workforce planning and an internationally mobile workforce are essential for achieving strategic objectives. Consequently, organizations will be required to find more effective ways to mobilize resources for business purposes while also meeting the increasing vital requirement regarding the employee experience.

Global mobility could be significant in this context, as it entails more than merely moving people to new jobs around the world: it enables people and organizations to work, live, and thrive in new places around the world. As such, with this research, I investigate whether global mobility is increasingly becoming a key EVP for global organizations to assist with the attraction of new talent and the retention of existing talent. I would like this paper to be understandable for professionals outside of human resources (HR) as well; therefore, I briefly define the main concepts underlying the thesis statement.

Global mobility is an organization's ability to move its employees to locations abroad for various reasons. The main reasons are as follows:

- to address a business or project need;
- to provide a specific service/skill that is not available locally;
- to fill local skill gaps shortages or exchange expert knowledge;
- to support the transfer of the culture or spread consistent organizational values;
- to develop leadership and talent;
- to create a global mindset;
- to manage or supervise a team;
- to provide training;
- to engage in regional responsibilities;
- to set up new businesses abroad;
- to pursue a personal motivation or circumstances.

Employee value proposition refers to a set of associations and offerings that an organization provides in return for the skills, capabilities, and experiences that an employee can contribute to the organization. It encompasses of the primary reasons for which people commit themselves to an organization, and it acts as a key driver of talent attraction, motivation, engagement, and retention. The EVP should discourage a focus on compensation as the primary offer (Wikipedia).

Talent consists of the skills, knowledge, and experience that a business needs to meet its purpose and deliver on its goods and services to clients and consumers. Talent is the human element of broad capabilities that a business requires.

2. Economic, social, and demographic forces

It has always been vital for leadership to spot trends and prepare the business to take advantage of them. The megatrends that impact organizations around the world pose risks to the unprepared but also present opportunities to companies that are willing to reassess their way of working. The following economic, social, and demographic forces affect the working world:

- *Globalization*
The world is becoming increasingly interconnected through the process of globalization. This process has facilitated international trade, as companies are conducting more business across national borders, which results in heightened competition for new customers and markets. Consequently, an international mobile workforce is crucial to achieving strategic objectives. Because of improvements in transportation and communication technologies, it is easier for people to interact at the international level, travel to foreign places, and work internationally. Most large companies have an international corporate network, and they work with international customers and suppliers. As such, they need a highly engaged workforce with intercultural competencies and a global mindset.
- *Gig economy*
The future of work is skill driven; as organizations become less hierarchical and more digital, positions and job titles will become less relevant, whilst skills and the capacity to update and renew them will gain significance. People will occupy positions to develop skills that will ensure their long-term employability and enable them to work for multiple organizations and, for some professionals, as gig workers. In a gig economy, temporary, flexible jobs are common, and organizations prefer to hire independent contractors and freelancers rather than full-time employees (Chappelow, 2019). A gig economy weakens the traditional economy of full-time employees in a lifelong career who seldom change positions. In the modern digital world, it is increasingly common to work from home or be a 'global nomad' who lives an international lifestyle. This trend supports independent contracting work, because many of those jobs do not require the freelancer to work in the office. Organizations can also choose from a wider range of applicants in the hiring process because they do not have account for proximity.
- *Urbanization*
Currently, 55% of the world's population resides in a metropolitan area. This urbanization will intensify, as that figure is expected to increase to 68% by 2050 (PwC, 2013). The supply of talent is shifting, and demand for skills is increasing sharply. Much of the population growth over the next 3 decades will be concentrated around metropolitan areas in emerging economies because these locations begin to mirror developed economies. Projections indicate that urbanization, the gradual shift in residence of the human population from rural to metropolitan areas, combined with the overall growth of the world's population could add another 2.5 billion people to metropolitan areas by 2050 (PwC, 2013). In the coming decades, population shifts will have a strong influence on the locations in which organizations conduct business. Urbanization provides opportunities to increase productivity and attract talent. However, in regions that are at a relatively early stage in their economic development, it presents risks of overcrowding, poverty, and poor schooling, which can lead to factors that are improbable to attract or nurture talent.
- *Demographic changes in the workforce*
A mix of population changes and an aging workforce in a lot of countries as well as the evolution of country-based multinationals into global entities have fundamentally altered the working world (PwC, 2013). With four generations in the workforce, demographic diversity has challenged global mobility professionals to think differently, redefine programs to obtain more nimble solutions, and be as flexible as needed. An impending demographic issue is evident in the rising number of retirees who are no longer in the workforce but nonetheless expected to live significantly beyond their retirement age.

The birth rate seems too low to replace these retirees in the workforce (Investopedia, 2018). The looming workforce shortage of skilled workers necessitates global mobility to support an increasing number of international movements.

- *The fourth industrial revolution*

The current fourth industrial revolution, which is also known as Industry 4.0, is underpinned by several disruptive digital technologies (Gaydos, 2019). This revolution is rapidly transforming industries and business models worldwide. The usage of digital technologies to adapt a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities is making progress.

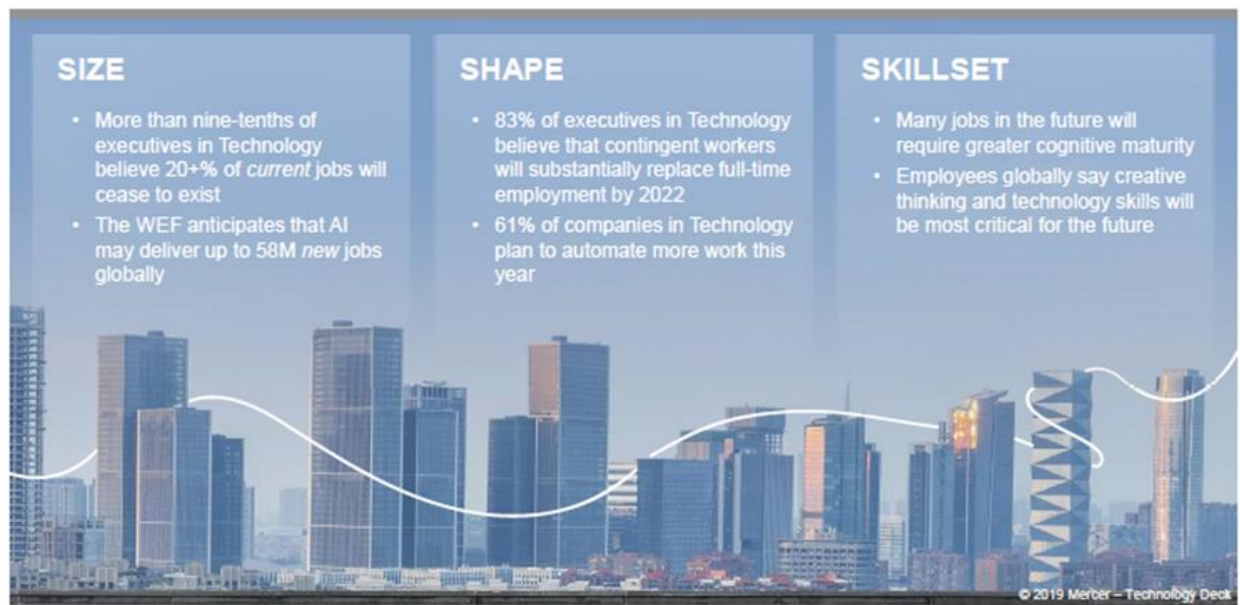
Increasingly common business practices include corporate cost optimization initiatives, changes in business and talent requirements, and attempts to demonstrate more value through predictive analysis and the analytical techniques that support it.

Technological advances are an ideal source of productivity boosts; however, they can also phase out roles (Investopedia, 2018). Skill requirements shift constantly as technology develops, as do the ways in which work is carried out and delivered. As a result, organizations should consider redefining roles, creating new jobs, educating employees, and attracting talent with new digital competence skills.

Luckily, technology also facilitates immense advancements in HR and data analytics. Human resources can contribute significant strategic value in predicting the necessary skills and plan for changes in demand and supply. Such value requires highly effective performance by HR in the use of sophisticated analytics to identify talent trends and skills gaps and provide guidance for organization in adapting its talent strategy, training, and reward framework to maximize available opportunities (PwC, 2014).

Figure 1 below (source: Mercer, 2019) shows how the fourth industrial revolution is changing work.

Figure 1



With respect to global mobility, technology, which enables data to be readily available, presents an opportunity to enhance visibility of the commercial aspects of managing global mobility programs. The ability to deliver reporting and easy-to-track management data is key. Technology can shape reporting and processes for compliance purposes and provide management with insightful analytics.

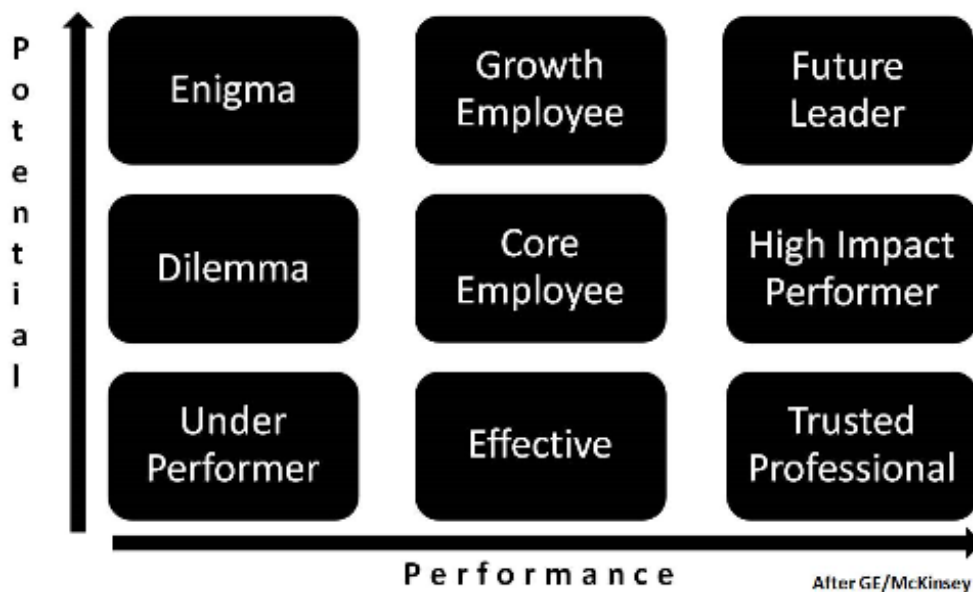
3. Talent

In principle, talent has no single definition and can be interpreted differently per organization. For instance, it may refer to the rate at which one improves with effort (Smerek, 2018). Alternatively, it could be an inclusive term that encompasses all employees. Finally, talent could consist of the employee group that possess and exhibit the most valuable characteristics for the organization.

The following statement, which has also been mentioned in the introduction, provides a comprehensive explanation of talent for the context of this paper: talent refers to the skills, knowledge, and experience that a business needs to meet its purpose and deliver on goods and services to clients and consumers. Talent constitutes the human element of broad capabilities that a business requires.

The McKinsey nine-box talent matrix (figure 2, below) has been utilized by numerous organizations around the world to identify and calibrate the talent performance and potential of a team. The matrix is arranged as a grid so that users can effectively identify talent by plotting performance and potential on it. The x-axis reflects performance, while the y-axis indicates potential. People can be positioned at a low, medium, or high level along each axis; thus, there are nine possible categories to which one could assign an individual. These boxes are assigned descriptors. For instance, the top-right box represents high performance and high potential and is labeled "Future Leader."

Figure 2



3.1 Talent in the spotlight

Talent is undoubtedly relevant to an organization's success. In terms of workforce, people, competence, and skills, talent has been the bailiwick of HR, as "getting the right people to the right places at the right time" is critical to the success of global organizations. Over 20 years ago, McKinsey proposed the concept of the "war for talent," which describes the increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees. The observations that were made at that time are more relevant now than ever. Recent research by Korn Ferry has identified the emerging threat of a global talent shortage of skilled workers. In this respect, the traditional saying of "attract and retain" is being substituted for "attract and continually attract."

Business leaders confront a dual challenge: the short-term problem of acute skills shortages in specific markets and disciplines and the longer-term issue of finding and developing the talent the business will lead in the future. With attrition rates in many regions high, retaining talent has become a priority; retention is particular an issue in Asia, where hiring levels and resignation rates are nearly double as high compared to the West, and the attrition rate of high-performance employees is also significantly higher (PwC, 2013). Considering the above, it is not surprising that talent management is considered a top HR priority and is becoming a strategic business imperative.

3.2 Winning the war for talent

The emphasis on talent has led to innovations in how organizations approach recruitment, move new employees through the organization, and appropriately exit them. Organizations have extensively used talent mapping, forecasting, and analytics to enhance their talent management strategies and link them more closely with the wider business plan (PwC, 2013). Maintaining the status quo is not an option for any organization that wants to stay relevant and thrive. Nearly 30% of companies that were listed on the "Dow Jones Industrial Average" 15 years ago are no longer part of the stock market index and have been replaced by tech-savvy, innovative enterprises. This shift underscores the urgent need for every organization to pursue constant innovation for the sake of business sustainability.

The most successful organizations maintain full talent pipelines in any case, which may contribute to their success. The talent winners also recruit continuously rather than simply filling openings. Today, general managers and HR professionals need to help their organizations not only fight the talent war but also win it. The victory requires the creation of successful organizations as well as clarity regarding talent management with a focus on an outcome that adds value. For example, in addition to building on their strengths, individuals must use them to empower others. Beyond measuring the amount of training or staffing, it is necessary to measure the impact of training or staffing on key organization outcomes. Competencies are significant to the extent that they affect key business outcomes.

The well-known HR guru David Ulrich has observed that "through ensuring talent, HR enters the business game, through building organizations, HR wins the business game. Human capital leaders who can bring cutting-edge, creative solutions to facilitate their organization's business goals will be considered as valued contributors.

3.3 Talent is important for all stakeholders

The primary stakeholders for talent growth have traditionally been part of the organization. Investments in talent have resulted in higher employee productivity and well-being as well as organization strategic success. Moving forward, the value of talent will also depend on how talent choices affect not only internal stakeholders but also stakeholders outside of the organization (Ulrich, 2019). David Ulrich has suggested the following three emerging stakeholders in the shift from viewing talent as primarily an internal activity to approaching it as an aspect that provides valued outcomes outside the organization.

Boards of directors

In a recent meeting of the National Academy of Corporate Directors conference, a group proposed the expansion of the compensation committee of the board into the talent, leadership, and culture committee. This committee would have a charter to evaluate not only the organization's compensation practices but also its processes concerning leadership, succession, talent review, culture, and talent risk management. A broader "talent" mandate at the board level signals its importance for business leaders throughout an organization.

Customers

In recent years, scholars have argued that leaders are most effective when their behaviors reflect customer promises. When a solid brand translates to a leadership brand, leaders create more value for both targeted customers and employees. A customer focus essentially considers employee sentiment to be a lead indicator of customer sentiment. Regardless of how employee engagement is measured, it is a lead indicator of customer engagement. For example, customer net promoter scores (benchmark that measures the customers' willingness to recommend your business to others) are highly correlated with employee commitment scores. Employees should focus on delighting customers and developing the skills that customers value.

Investors

Many investors are increasingly interested in predicting and capturing long-term value from an organization, which requires consideration of factors beyond financial results (e.g. earnings, EBIDTA), such as intangibles (e.g. strategy, brand, technology, and systems), talent, leadership, and culture.

In this regard, research has reported several relevant findings. In one study, approximately 35–40% of an organization's market value was related to financial results, while 30–35% was related to intangibles (e.g. strategy, brand, and supply chain). In addition, 25–30% related to the quality of leadership. A higher quality of talent should reflect stronger investor confidence that an organization can deliver intangibles and consistently produce financial results.

In interviews, investors almost uniformly agreed that people are important, and talent management processes should affect their valuation of the organization. Even though they recognized the variance in market valuations due to talent, they often lacked an accurate method to understand and track talent.

According to the above findings, with regard to talent, stakeholders include anyone with a vested interest in the organization who depends on or serves the organization, including parties outside the organization, such as the board of directors, customers, and investors. When talent ideas and tools connect to these stakeholders so that a link is established, more value is created for the stakeholders and the organization.

4. Talent centricity versus global mobility

Talent centricity is a priority of the corporate agenda, and the role of global mobility in building a brand is increasingly a topic of discussion. Global mobility is part of the wider category of talent management. It is a way to deploy and develop talent and reflects an organization's ability to move its employees to locations abroad for a variety of reasons.

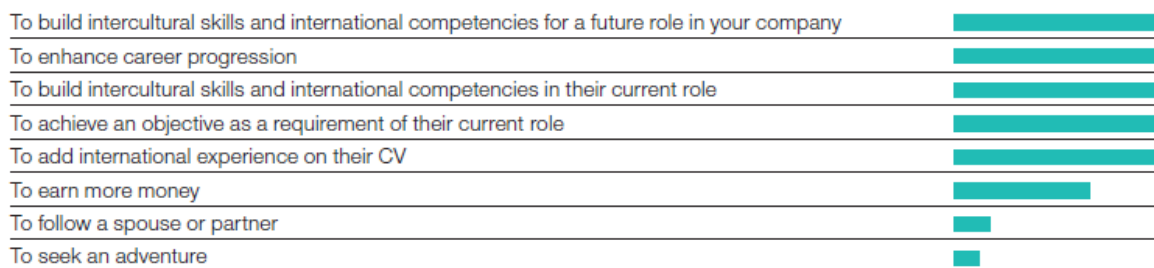
Employee-initiated (one-way) moves are on the rise. Organizations that facilitate this option are focused on retaining key talent. Some organizations present international opportunities to new recruits directly out of college. The trend of employees increasingly taking control over their careers and initiating the mobility decision has magnified the potentially weakening role of the home location. Hence, organizations - especially in central talent and global mobility functions - need to place an ever-increasing emphasis on assessing the value that they expect from a move as well as how they intend to capture the value.

Business agility is emerging, and organizations are focused on positioning the right individuals in the right places at the right time. Their mode of accomplishing this aim is set to become a more fluent concept that is driven by strategic need as well as the optimization of investment in a mobility program. Organizations will be required to find increasingly effective ways to mobilize resources for business purposes and to meet the increasing candidate experience requirement for mobility (PwC, 2013). Tertiary education trends offer insight into the interest in international assignments from (potential) talent. Educated individuals are becoming more widely available and diverse in terms of ethnic and racial nationality and origins.

Figure 3 below, suggests that highly motivated employees demand global experiences as part of their overall EVP. In addition, employees are more frequently expecting education and personal growth to be central to their employment arrangement, which are elements that global mobility can offer. Employees are becoming less willing to accept work abroad if it does not meet their needs.

Figure 3

Key drivers for employees undertaking international assignments (source: Santa Fe | the global mobility survey 2019):



With the combination of the strategic importance of mobility for business growth and increasing employee demand for global experience, substantial growth in mobility is expected. In this regard, a global mobility opportunity is an important step in one's career development. It provides the chance to enhance one's resume by acquiring and developing skills in a new location, which potentially contributes to marketability. It is also a life-enriching experience that will enhance cultural literacy, expand professional networks, facilitate the mastery of foreign languages, and broaden one's perspective. There is growing acknowledgement that the most promising future leaders of current organizations must reflect the world in which they operate. Thus, global work experience is a fundamental part of their development. It is desirable—and often mandatory—for senior leader and executive positions, which signals the assumed value that organizations gain from this experience.

In recent years, the previously employer-centered job market has changed into an employee-centered market, and employees have demanded more experiences.

An international assignment or relocation is one of the most significant experiences that an employee (or gig worker) can have during their career (employee life cycle from hire-to-retain). Global mobility opportunities also support personal growth by providing a chance to travel, have new experiences, and meet people with different mindsets and outlooks on life. According to a recent study by Rice University in conjunction with Columbia University and the University of North Carolina, living abroad increases “self-concept clarity,” which implies that people who choose to live in a new country tended to have a stronger sense of self. Moreover, the study reported that living abroad could increase life satisfaction, reduce stress, and improve job performance (Leasca, 2019).

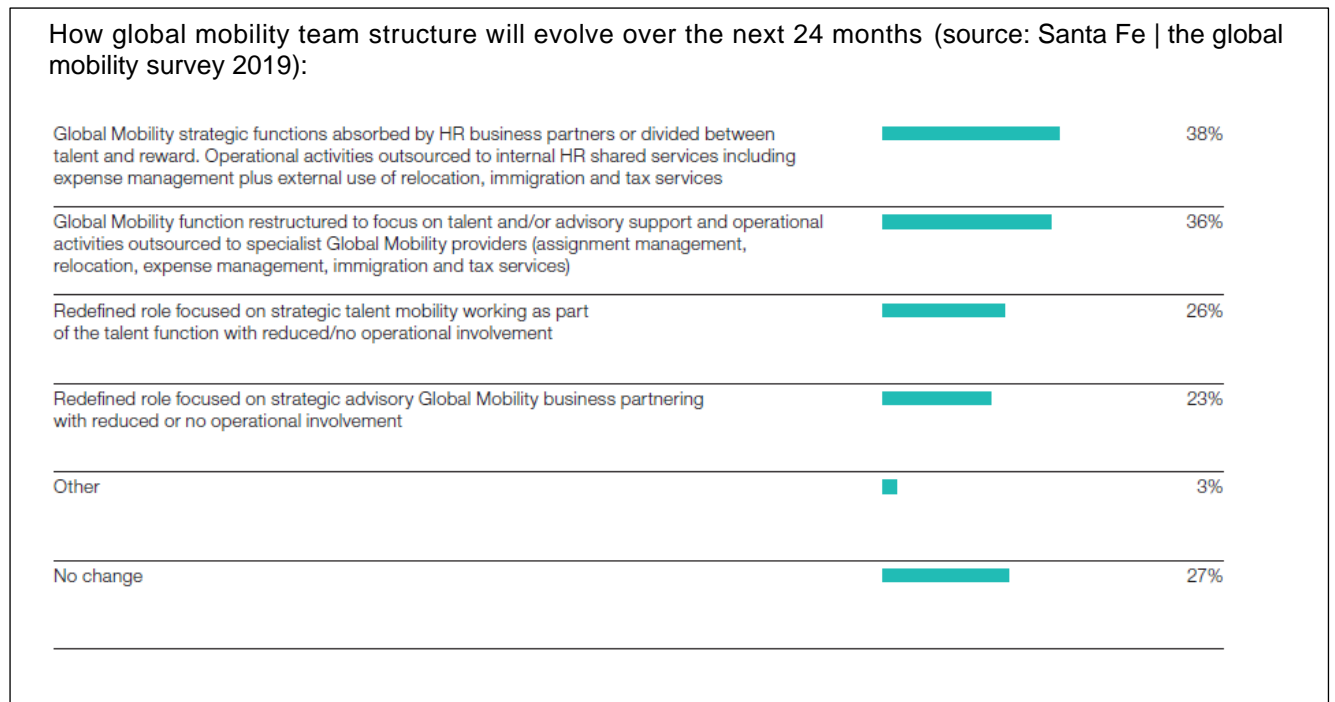
4.1 Key actors in the talent mobility theme

The drivers of global mobility are the home and host business units (line managers) as well top management of the organization or the division and units. These parties approve or block mobility. They must agree on how to cover or split the cost of mobile employees and develop an understanding of the value of mobility and its relation to their business goals.

The stakeholders who are in charge of delivering and managing mobility are generally the home and host HR teams, talent management, and the global mobility team. Potential functions can extend to workforce planning, finance, tax, legal, and diversity and inclusion. For global mobility professionals, it is advisable to consider these teams as not the customers only though also the future ambassadors of the global mobility program (Debner, 2015). For the teams that are responsible for delivering mobility, the critical objective is to coordinate their actions. A lack of coordination between talent management and mobility has been a common issue.

The reporting line for global mobility has traditionally been the head of rewards (compensation and benefits function) or the head of corporate HR. While this case still applies in many organizations, the composition of global mobility functions has attracted scrutiny, as demonstrated in figure 4.

Figure 4



The top three points in figure 4 all mention “talent.” Since global mobility is responsible for the international experience of an employee during the employee lifecycle, it is considered the central mechanism for executing a talent strategy. A shift toward talent management would be logical since these key topics are relevant to both global mobility and talent management:

- talent strategies;
- attraction and employer image;
- assignee selection;
- career and performance management during an assignment;
- (post) repatriation support;
- key performance indicators (KPI's) and returns on investments (ROI's).

Since there are major touchpoints between the functions, there is an evident demand to link the global mobility strategy with the talent management strategies and objectives.

Futurists have agreed that connections across borders and companies will continue to form. Departments should ideally work as a team by combining their specialism and expertise to focus on end-to-end processes. Often, even a small deviation from organizational silos can reveal valuable opportunities.

4.2 Talent mobility and stakeholder collaboration

In general, certain hierarchical and financial organization structures can create a political, complex, and disengaging approach to mobilization of skills. This effect is mainly due to the placement of value on skills instead of the thought behind the human experience and the link to the retention of skills. Collaboration among various stakeholders is at the core of fruitful talent mobility practices. Collective action may be the only means of considerably changing labor market outcomes. Broader collaboration has a stronger impact.

Stakeholders should ideally be related via an engagement framework, which represents the department's commitment to work effectively with its stakeholders, listen and learn, and continue improving its performance. For the purpose of this engagement framework, the process of stakeholder collaboration to build resilience through collective action, shared capacity building, and the development of strong relationships is built on mutual respect and trust. Co-creation and partnering are also key in this respect.

Talent mobility requires an integrated people-oriented strategy to deliver on its promises. Just as local employees must understand the implications of their performance for their career progression, internationally mobile employees need to be informed about the impact of their assignment performance on their opportunities within the organization. Similarly, all internal stakeholders and HR teams need to comprehend the objectives and details of the mobility program and the requirements they must fulfill to deliver a smooth talent management experience. A helpful tool in this respect is the RACI matrix, which consists of the following factors:

- R** – Responsible: who is responsible for carrying out the task;
- A** – Accountable (alternatively Approver): who is responsible for the whole task as well as what has been accomplished;
- C** – Consulted: who can provide value advice or consultation about the task;
- I** – Informed: who should be informed about the task process and/or the decisions in the task.

An alternative version is the RASCI matrix, which includes an S to represent Support (i.e. who provides support during the implementation of the activity, process, or service).

4.3 Modern mobility and its priorities

The working world is changing quickly, which has changed the ways in which the global workforce is sourced, organized, and managed. Knowledge, capital, trade and goods are more globally connected than in the past. Besides that, growth in emerging markets is increasing the number of employees who work outside of their home location, and critical shortages in talent in specific markets and disciplines have advanced global mobility to the boardroom agenda (PwC, 2013). The domain of global mobility is evolving, and “modern mobility” entails its own unique set of challenges:

- *Compliance risks*
Business need to deploy people rapidly, though social security, tax and payroll and immigration requirements often present obstacles, and failure to comply with the rules poses significant risks (PwC, 2013). Compliance is a particularly complicated matter to address in emerging markets and other jurisdictions wherein laws are constantly changing. In addition, global mobility must respond to circumstantial changes in economic cycles, government regimes, political unrest (e.g. in Hong Kong), and political events (e.g. Brexit). Such matters are constantly shifting the barriers to global mobility, which renders the domain complex. Compliance risks are also caused as many governments have more effective information technology systems for tracking the travel movements and work activities of international mobile employees compared to most organizations. From this perspective, considering the intensifying compliance and regulatory environment, compliance risks are a top priority for global mobility professionals.
- *Duty of care*
In the coming years, duty of care for employee well-being will replace duty of care for compliance. The focus on duty of care entails vigilance for terrorism, dangerous locations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender expatriates, and expatriates in crises, especially human-induced ones. Such crises reportedly arise from severe levels of expatriate maladjustment, some of which relates to excessive international business travel during expatriation. Duty of care policies, processes, and procedures should be in place within organizations and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are consistent with the purpose. The world is constantly changing, and the risks within it are dynamic as well.
- *Shift in mobility patterns*
Assignee levels have increased by 25% over the past decade and are expected to rise further. There is flexibility beyond the traditional two- or three-year relocation followed by a repatriation, which enhances the appeal of global assignments. Unprecedented forms of global mobility have developed in response to employee preferences and business needs, and many of them do not contain relocation at all. Commuter assignments, short-term assignments, global nomad constructions, and extended business trips are available and increasingly popular. In this context, there is a trend of more fluid and less predictable deployment of mobile employees. Because of the employee-centered market, the delivery of the global mobility experience and the underlying career promise will become more critical in the future (PwC, 2013).

Figure 5 shows how the shift in mobility patterns generally looks like.

Figure 5

Type of travel	Business trip	Commuter assignment	Short-term assignment	Long-term assignment	Permanent transfer or hire
Old scenario	Trips for preparatory or relationship purposes.	Project-based, with no physical move.	Traditional up to one year model for projects or roles, with physical move.	Traditional two to three year model with assignment benefits for 'strategic' reasons.	Usually for external hires or localisation.
New world	What used to take a business trip can now often be a Skype call with screen sharing of presentations.	What used to take a commuter assignment can now be accomplished with remote working combined with a few business trips.	Short-term assignments could become commuter assignments, with less disruption to careers and families, as the lower cost of airfares relative to other expatriate costs redresses the balance.	The disruption to a dual-career couple with children can be mitigated by trading a long-term assignment for a short-term assignment followed by a period of commuting. A small apartment and lots of flights will cost less than a family house and expatriate school fees.	Where no home to return to, move is 'permanent' to make clear that there is no intention to return back to the source country.
Typical scenario	Was a commuter assignment, now a series of business trips.	Was a short-term assignment, now a commuter assignment.	Was a long-term assignment, now a short-term assignment followed by commutes or business trips.	Fewer strategic assignments, relatively more developmental assignments.	Assignees from source countries other than headquarter deployed on a move to move basis.

Source: Sante Fe (2019).

- *Assignee and family matters*

The assignee selection process itself can be demanding. Also, employee reluctance to relocate can arise when destinations are challenging. In growing labor markets where jobs are readily accessible, accepting an assignment may not seem like a risk. In a tougher labor market, assignees may consider the business uncertainty and the re-integration challenges at the end of the assignment and decide that the assignment is not worth the risks. Other underlying reasons may be safety or security concerns, spousal career issues, family obligations, social security, insurances, quality of life, cost of living differences, lack of adequate schools, housing issues, and cultural or language differences. In addition, more couples have opted for split family arrangements wherein one spouse remains in the home country (mainly for short-term or commuter assignments). Global mobility exposes a unique human being (and their family) to a disruptive change cycle that must be underpinned by strong human integration and support.

- *Diversity and inclusiveness*

Encouraging workforce diversity - especially at management level - is a high priority for many organizations. Still, the role of global mobility in helping companies reach this goal has been frequently underestimated. Moving talent between jobs and geographical locations is vital to encouraging diversity and inclusion, and mobility teams should be at the forefront of such effort. In order to reach this, improvement of the collaboration between the global mobility and diversity teams is required (Mercer, 2019a). Organizations can aim to treat their people fairly at all times, though some external bottlenecks cannot be overcome. For instance, employees who are in same-sex relationships or who hold certain religious beliefs might experience disproportionately higher restriction or hostility in many countries and regions around the globe (EY, 2013).

- *Repatriation*
Upon repatriation, the most obvious issues arise when companies struggle to find a suitable job for the former assignee (Meier, 2019). Unmet expectations, a lack of career advancement, and job dissatisfaction might trigger former assignees to leave their organization. Even though the attrition rate of internationally mobile staff is generally similar to that of the overall company, it is concerning given the inordinate cost of international assignments (according to Brookfield Global Relocation services). The departure of a repatriate from the organization presents a negative example to (potential) internationally mobile staff, as it conveys that the opportunity is not worth the risk. Moreover, misalignment of talent management and mobility can impact the entire assignment lifecycle and limit the benefits of a global mobility program.
- *Silos*
The silos of HR include talent acquisition, compensation and benefits, global mobility, and learning - often with their own priorities - and can create a fractured employee experience as well as distance the employee agenda from emerging business needs. The struggle to gain input at the management level, where strategic decisions are made, and to avoid being siloed within HR is a concern for mobility managers. Global mobility should be either connected or integrated to some degree with the talent management team, which should combine their specialist skill sets to enhance the retention and development of talent and potential leadership (EY, 2013). An integrated people strategy that is anchored in the organization's priorities can bridge that distance and drive value in shifting times (Mercer, 2019a). Global mobility should encourage broader dialogue with business and HR stakeholders to ensure that there is a shared purpose and direction and avoid the isolation of global mobility teams from internal decisionmakers.
- *Cost containment*
There are substantial costs in moving talent, which can present an obstacle. In reality, not all business units of an organization can afford to cover the cost of international assignments. Much of the debate over mobility costs targets the affordability of mobility for specific parts of the business as opposed to a general discussion of the cost of assignments. Brookfield Global Relocation Services estimates that assignments typically consume between two and three times the employee's base salary. For high-cost locations, like Singapore and Japan, or regions experiencing hardship, expenses can be as much as four times the employee's salary. Accordingly, there has been a tendency among businesses to encourage local (plus) packages with regard to permanent moves, locally hired foreigners, and career volunteers.
- *Measuring ROI*
Global organizations have increasingly demanded more transparency and data from their internal teams and, by considering internal circumstances, identified how to enhance and ensure that resources are directed correctly to achieve business goals (EY, 2013). Thus, the pressure to provide insight and evidence to support global mobility decisions and to manage program costs will only rise going forward (PwC, 2013). In order to determine the ROI, organizations should know which achievements they are intending to pursue by facilitating global mobility. The challenge is to convince organizations to adopt a longer-term view of investment in talent mobility that considers factors beyond the quantitative cost of international assignments (e.g. retention rate during and after return from an assignment as measured after one and two years, promotion during and after an assignment, performance ratings, graduates who are still employed following the concluded rotation).

The continuously evolving world of global mobility offers organizations new challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed to continue progress in the changing business world.

4.4 Managing modern mobility

Self-service tools and other artificial intelligence (AI)-based solutions may phase out certain tasks of the global mobility function in the future. Still, the need for global mobility programs will grow as organizations continue to expand their global presence and footprint. The daily activities of global mobility professionals are expected to evolve in the coming years, which would allow for a closer focus on talent by shifting responsibility for operational “hygiene” activities (Santa Fe, 2019).

Operational excellence (in assignment support) is still a key goal of global mobility teams, and organizations will need someone to facilitate the practical matters. However, an important question is whether organizational excellence is best delivered internally, externally, or through flexible arrangements. Global mobility requires a predictive rather than reactive mindset. There is an opportunity for global mobility teams to move forward and achieve tighter, more effective integration - which could grant them an important role in strategic mobility planning - rather than making *ad hoc*, case-by-case decisions to fill immediate business needs (EY, 2013). A distinctive power of global mobility input, when included by executive management early in planning processes, is to value and support global mobility views with data, analytics, and quantitative assessment. Making an investment decision in a new location, acquisition, or internal project can be costly if key talent, compliance, or geopolitical factors lack rigorous due diligence.

Consequently, global mobility can assume a new level of importance and has increasingly become a strategic partner that adds value and creates a positive employee experience. This occurrence leads to rewriting job descriptions, upskilling team members, or hiring new talent with more strategic and consultative experience. As a result, global mobility has widened the demands that are placed on the global mobility profession. The function generally has the following focal areas:

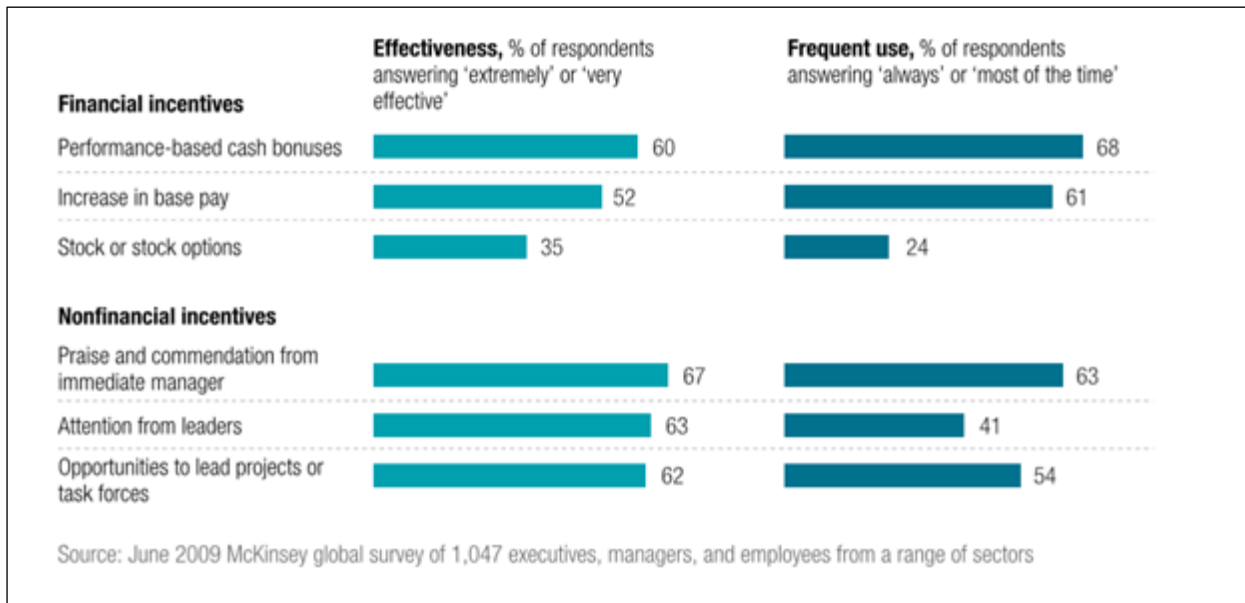
- compliance;
- reward and benefits;
- legal;
- cost management;
- policy gate keeping;
- advisory – executive management and employees;
- employee experience;
- data analytics;
- talent;
- policy and process development;
- duty of care;
- vendor management;
- supply-chain management;
- liaison with external government authorities.

A well-organized and high-profile global mobility function will strengthen an employer brand as well as attract and retain talent. A clear and robust employer brand will also contribute to the success of global mobility programs because talent will be attracted to that brand and provide support for the organizations’ global mobility programs. Global mobility presents an opportunity to explicitly educate internal and external stakeholders to clarify not only the current roles of global mobility but also the potential future contribution of global mobility to organizational development.

5. Becoming a talent magnet

A consequence of the “war for talent” and economic growth is the demand for more competitive packages. Employees may start to seek out better options elsewhere, and an exodus could be imminent. However, the factors that constitute a “competitive” package can vary widely. A McKinsey study has indicated that three non-financial incentives are even more effective motivators than the three highest-rated financial incentives. Figure 6 identifies these incentives.

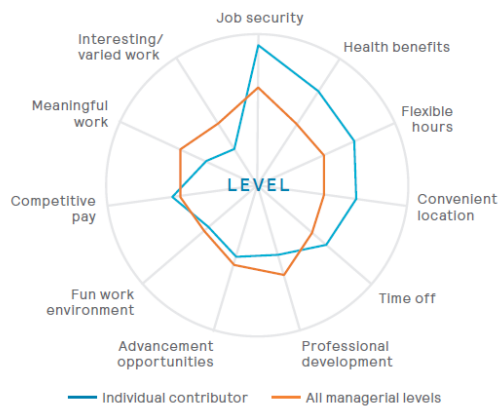
Figure 6



A more recent study by Mercer (2019a) has reported on how employee benefits are valued per job level, age group, and generation. In view of this, organizations have begun using personas to identify which aspects are most significant to target populations and to operationalize their total rewards programs for distinct groups. One point of agreement among nearly all workforce segments was the growing importance of adaptive work schedules. Fifty-four percent of employees stated that managing their work-life balance is one of the top-five initiatives that their organization could provide for them to thrive at work. This perception was also reflected by the 82% of employees who shared that they would be willing to consider working on a freelance basis.

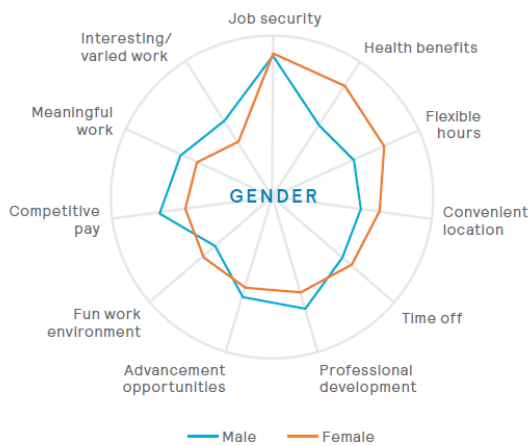
To be an attractive employer, organizations must adapt their talent management approaches to meet the constantly changing expectations of the workforce, which is increasingly inclined to change jobs more frequently than any previous generation. The figures 7, 8 and 9 below, illustrate the reasons that employees remain at their companies. The figures consider level, gender, and generation (Mercer, 2019a).

Figure 7



Source: Mercer (2019a).

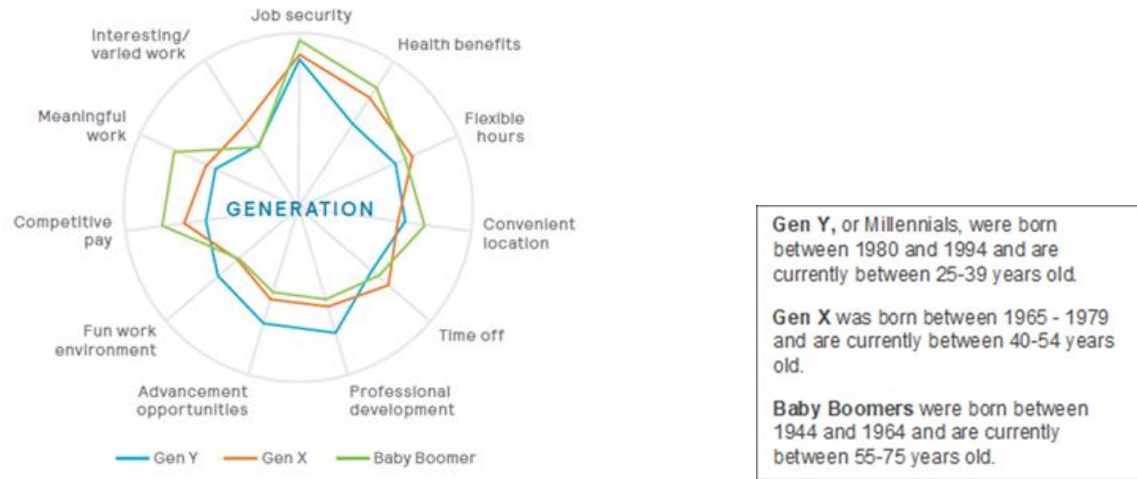
Figure 8



Source: Mercer (2019a).

There are clear differences across job level, gender, and generation. For instance, women value health benefits and flexible schedules more than men do. In addition, individuals in management positions seek professional development and opportunities for meaningful work, whilst individual contributors value job security above everything else.

Figure 9



Source: Mercer (2019a).

Compensation is relatively less significant to Generation Y but a key motivator for Baby Boomers. Since the workforce is aging and retiring, this trend is expected to intensify. Tertiary benefits (i.e. those that cannot be labeled by a monetary value) are gaining importance. Employees are more concerned with the total career experience than with compensation. The focus on personal interest, development, and opportunities overall - of which global mobility is an example - has increased.

Since possibilities for travel are an attractive feature of a job, global mobility opportunities enhance the appeal of an organization to new hires. Many employees want a passport that is filled with foreign stamps, as travel can bolster personal growth and career development. Employees of all levels and generations may be interested in engaging in overseas work to accelerate their careers or explore the world, but this trend particularly applies to “Next Gen” workforce (i.e. Gen Y and Gen Z), who will comprise 75% of the work force by 2025. These generations typically search for meaningful, developmental experiences through work abroad and a fulfilling career at home (or elsewhere) upon repatriation. As such, the possibility to travel and gather new experiences and skills is a strong motivator for them (PwC, 2013).

In his research, the Next Gen expert Yannick Blattler has identified the following three common characteristics that reflect the needs of Next Gen talent in the context of global mobility.

- **Instant:** This generation wants a shorter response time that is enabled by improved planning and more efficient processes. The use of technology and automation will enable instant answers and lower cycle times. The Next Gen also appreciates the opportunity to engage in an international assignment earlier in their career.
- **Flexible:** The Next Gen desires policy and benefit flexibility in the form of segmentation (e.g. approaches that consider certain benefits to be “core” and others to be “flexible”). These elements are highly attractive to assignees, as they foster a more enriching employee experience and, in turn, higher employee engagement.
- **Clear:** Policies should not be lengthy documents. It should be possible to have summaries and interactive documents or websites that provide basic information and more details if selected. Clarity is imperative regarding performance and career expectations from the onset of an assignment to post-repatriation.

Heightened clarity can also be achieved by providing improved destination information and mentoring programs with former assignees. Lastly, cultural training can impart useful insights that contribute to clarity.

In brief, the needs of the Next Gen encourage more instant, flexible, and clear solutions. These elements increase the likelihood that a candidate will accept an assignment, remain with the company upon its conclusion, and maximize the investment of the organization. These outcomes will enhance the employee experience, which is a benefit for all generations.

It is imperative that any global mobility program design is based on the needs of the business and the employee to develop a positive brand image of mobility within the organization. The phrase “one size does not fit all” is applicable; for example, the pension crisis in many countries suggests that many members of the Baby Boomer generation are likely to continue working after retirement age, and their motivation to accept an assignment will probably be based on the term and the financial package (PwC, 2013). Employees with family members or who care for parents might decline to relocate but embrace commuting or virtual mobility techniques. Meanwhile, the Next Gen is more likely to favor short-term and project-based assignments.

As a progressive example of approaches to young talent, a global organization in the Netherlands has introduced “a swipe of Tinder into global mobility” by creating a version of the Tinder application to promote assignments. Thereby, all people who are interested in an assignment are entered into a database or platform, where attendees can swipe and are allowed to swap locations.

5.1 Retaining talent: expanding talent from within

According to research by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), organizations have increasingly focused on retaining top employees. Two-thirds stated that it was more likely for talent in their organization to derive from internal promotions in the future. Employers benefit from the efficiencies of internal recruiting, which include faster offer acceptance and higher satisfaction among hiring managers. Studies have demonstrated that internally grooming talent is nearly 84% less expensive than recruiting an external candidate. Employees also benefit, as a lack of future career opportunities and few development opportunities are two of the five drivers of employee attrition. Nevertheless, internal fill rates have stagnated at approximately 30% in the last three years. Organizations are consequently concerned about closing critical talent gaps and losing talent, as employees are far more likely to find their next role in a different organization than in their current one.

A process to increase internal talent mobility could look proceed as follows (Gartner, 2019):

- 1) define talent goals and business urgency;
- 2) set internal mobility objectives (e.g. internal fill rate in key positions, time to productivity);
- 3) assess the current state;
- 4) prioritize key initiatives from the talent management ecosystem and ensure that everyone has the same assessment of the current state, works toward the same talent objectives, and understands which business needs these objectives will serve.

A successful internal talent mobility strategy can harness rapidly change and growth in an organization’s internal labor markets to meet new challenges and achieve major business objectives. Talent managers are particularly keen to identify future leaders at a young age. Young talent is more difficult to find, as they are not on the professional radar until they begin their careers, at which point they have already joined a competitor (Fidi, 2019). To attract and engage the scarce talent, organizations should adopt a more holistic approach to engaging with existing and potential talent to offer attractive total employee experience including internal (international) job opportunities.

5.2 The employee experience

In recent years, providing a positive customer experience has become critical for brands. The customer experience is defined as the perceptions that customers of services and goods experience during their interaction with an organization over the duration of the relationship. The Next Gen grew up with a customer experience that was far more advanced than that which former generations experienced in their youth. The customer experience has been researched intensively, and customer journeys have been designed accordingly.

The need for a positive employee experience was borne of and closely relates to the customer experience. There is a logical link between the customer experience and the employee experience, as the expectations of the consumer world are demanded in the workplace as well. The employee experience translates the concept to the workplace to increase attraction, engage employees, retain talent, and improve employer image, engagement, performance, and retention.

From customer experience perspective, it is still of importance for an organization to be located near its customers. However, considering the increasing relevance of the employee experience and the “war for talent,” it may be equally crucial to be located in the optimal place to attract specialists and high performers for the business needs.

There is a shift in perceptions from the conventional perspective of the employee as a resource to a view of the employee as a customer who needs to be attracted, engaged, and retained. The employee experience is the new principle to which HR must adapt as it drives the culture and performance of an organization. While the basic notion of the employee experience is the same in HR and global mobility, it is important to note that global mobility defines one of the major “moments that matter” during an employee journey for the retention of an employee from the point of hire to the point of retire. The request to an employee to move to another country, uproot his or her family, and live and work in a new culture is one of the most impactful employee experiences. Therefore, the emphasis on a positive employee experience is even more vital for global mobility in view of its impact.

David Enser, who is a founding partner of the RES forum, has suggested incorporating the prospect of an overseas assignment into the organizations’ EVP as a powerful brand asset that can enhance the employee experience. This simple shift would enable a view of global mobility as providing a relevant employee experience that can attract and retain the most valuable assets. The prospect of a well-curated series of overseas growth opportunities that are rich with both challenging and impressive employer branding opportunities is compelling and will lead to more efficient hiring both internally and externally.

6. Organizational environmental, social, and governmental (ESG) score

The organizational ESG encompasses environmental, social, and governmental efforts to achieve a long-term and positive impact on business performance. Initiatives to support ESG are also referred to as “sustainability” initiatives (HR Policy Association, 2019). The working world has generally become more focused on the impact of motivations, people and engagement as differentiating factors in the competition for sustainability and success. Accordingly, there is increased pressure on HR - the people’s function - to optimize its contribution and impact to the bottom line.

An organization’s social score, which constitutes the second ESG pillar, concerns the way in which the business treats and values people. Thus, it considers the impact of organizations on their employees and the society. It can encompass the following elements:

- risk mitigation;
- talent attraction and development;
- pay equity;
- brand management and public perception;
- community support and involvement;
- diversity and inclusion;
- equal pay;
- training and leadership programs;
- global mobility opportunities.

A high ESG score generally leads to heightened employee morale, stronger attraction of qualified applicants (and, ultimately, more qualified employees), decreases in the turnover rate and reputational risks, and higher employee engagement levels. The last outcome is especially beneficial for organizations, as studies have reported the following results:

- engaged employees were 2.7 times more likely to feel a primary sense of belonging to their organization. Engaged employees work in a flexible, inclusive environment that offers a strong sense of purpose and valuable learning opportunities;
- businesses with more engaged employees exhibited 51% higher productivity (Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L. & Hayes, T.L., 2002, *Psychology*, Vol 87, No 2);
- organizations with the most effective employee communication had 47% higher shareholder returns over the last five years (Towers Watson, 2010);
- engaged employees had less absence days compared to non-engaged employees;
- organizations with engaged employees had 2.5 times more revenues than their competitors with low engagement levels.

Concerns regarding ESG have captured increasing prominence and have the potential to enhance classic financial analysis mostly as organizations that consider them are more likely to outperform in the long term compared to their competition. As a result, investors, customers, governments, and other outside stakeholders are likely to direct more attention to an organization’s ESG score in the future. Furthermore, it becomes easier to work without social pressure from stakeholders, because there is social license to operate.

Similarly, many (potential) employees are assigning more importance to their organization’s ESG footprint. It is generally accepted that the values of an organization are more significant for (potential) employees than ever (Fidi, 2019). There is an intensifying sense that people want to work for an organization that has meaning, whether it is a drive for a more altruistic dimension or innovation. In comparison, bland, faceless organizations are less attractive.

There is access to more information available than before. Employees can compare benefits, rewards, development opportunities, and corporate culture between organizations at home and abroad. Moreover, they can widely share their own experiences. Figure 10 illustrates, there is substantial transparency.

Figure 10

The New York Times
Inside Uber's Aggressive, Unrestrained Workplace Culture

CNBC
Nike accused of fostering hostile workplace in new gender discrimination lawsuit

Salesforce puts its money where its mouth is with \$1 million pledge for families separated at the U.S. border

Revealed: Google's 'two-tier' workforce training document

In a **transparent world**, the consumer brand and employee brand are one and the same – authenticity is critical.

An employer's **value proposition** should be **multi-faceted** – just like the talent that contributes to an organization's success.

Attractiveness is a **two-way street**. A deal's appeal can be diminished by negative perceptions of the brand or an inability to uphold brand values.

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It is therefore vital to spread organizational values. However, such values have to be consistent at global level. Global mobility can be key to ensuring that the employer brand has the same meaning in Amsterdam as in Manila, as the company can send its ambassadors - who live and breathe organizational values - to other countries to spread the message. At the moment, in terms of the social score, China is behind, while Europe sets the pace (Global Investment Megatrends, 2019).

7. A compelling EVP

Talent and skills are more desirable resources than ever before. To obtain these resources, organizations need to make an offering that clearly differentiates them from their competitors. Such offering should pose value for (potential) talent (e.g. employee engagement and trust). Notably, a range of organizational outcomes have been linked to the EVP (Heger, 2007).

A strong EVP defines the essence of an organization. It conveys to both current and potential talent how the organization is unique, which principles it represents, and why people are proud and motivated to work there. It may include such elements as an inspiring vision or a distinctive culture as well as potential gains in value from employment with the company. For an EVP to become a lasting competitive advantage for an organization, it must be unique, non-substitutable, and difficult to copy (RES, 2019).

Although the needs and wants of current and potential talent are diverse, most companies adopt a global approach to their EVP rather than a local or generational approach. Organizations may want to consider whether they need to adapt and broaden their EVP strategy to meet the needs of the various employee groups and subsequently communicate the appropriate aspects to the right groups of people.

The Next Gen, recognizes their advantageous position due to the excess of demand compared to the supply of talent. For organizations, it is a major opportunity to respond to the talent issue with possibilities that address their desire for travel and international work. Considering this desire and the modern globalized world, a global mobility offering from an organization should be considered a crucial part of a global organization's EVP and can provide a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talent who seek travel and international work experiences.

The reality that talent has the opportunity to embark on an international assignment is a certainty in any major organization today. However, organizations can differentiate in terms of the actual process and design of their global mobility offering as well as how they convey it. For example, organizations can communicate about the purpose and career stage of an assignment, the organization's repatriation strategy, and the effects of an assignment on post-repatriation career prospects.

7.1 Global mobility within an EVP

In regard to accounting for global mobility in an EVP, the following advice is stated in the RES report (2018).

- *Understand the needs of each department*
A deeper understanding of the needs of each department—and, in particular, of the opportunities that these departments could offer to (new) employees with respect to international working—can provide a massive competitive advantage in the “war for talent.” It is important for all relevant departments to align their interests and discuss their desired approach to global mobility as part of the EVP to enable organizations to determine a common solution. The specific benefit of working globally has to be shared with the other departments.

- *Increase flexibility*
 - By implementing and explicitly communicating cross-border work opportunities, organizations can differentiate themselves from their competitors. While it may not be possible for every position, employers who can offer such opportunities and communication are highly likely to attract employees who perceive access to international working opportunities as a hugely desired benefit.
 - Organizations should develop individualized and flexible packages to fulfill individual needs and desires. Global, inflexible packages fulfill some of these desires and need but may also include benefits that are not relevant to assignees. An individual who can compose an individualized assignment package that is perfect for them feels individually recognized. Yet, this process does not imply monetary waste. Often, an assignment package that allows employees to select from a range of assignment benefits based on their personal relevance can be more cost effective than offering a full range of assignment benefits, of which some hold no value for the employee.

- *Communication*

When an organization has developed an ideal EVP with strong references to international work, it must promote and publicize that EVP. By communicating the opportunities, the organizational offerings regarding international work can attract highly qualified talent who possess the required skills to apply. To effectively convey the EVP and all of its aspects, organizations should utilize all available marketing channels, including job advertisements, social media, websites, interviews, and more.

- *Measure success*

Finally, organizations must ensure that they incorporate methods to check that their efforts have been successful. They should define success criteria (e.g. the number of applications that are generated, the number of accepted job offers, the turnover rate) and observe how the EVP affects such criteria. Alternatively, applicants and newly hired employees can be surveyed to learn more about their decisions. This cycle can benefit from constant improvement and renewal.

8. Conclusion

Talent is in motion. It is of great significance as talent is of importance for not only internal stakeholders though also stakeholders outside the organization (boards of directors, customers, investors). An organization that wants to succeed in the market needs to recognize the importance of talent management to attract, motivate, and retain the necessary talent. Moreover, an organization must rapidly and compliantly mobilize skills. The increasing fragmentation and diversification of the pool of global professionals highlights an urgent need for further integration across talent and global mobility functions.

To attract and engage the scarce talent, organizations should adopt a more holistic approach. Thereby, they should engage with existing and potential talent to offer an attractive total employee experience that reflects the elements that employees desire and the moments at which they want them.

Global organizations need to recruit talent from wherever it is available, which inevitably involves global mobility. Global mobility is a valuable career development tool that also helps organizations address talent shortages and close skill gaps. Hence, as a business function, global mobility is a key contributor to an organization's global strategy for talent management.

The reporting line for global mobility has traditionally been the head of rewards (compensation and benefits function) or the head of corporate HR. Though, a shift towards talent management would be logical since there is an evident demand to link the global mobility strategy with the talent management strategies and objectives.

It is crucial to work together more closely between functions, expand global oversight, and capture insights from data and analytics. New roles and ways of thriving in an automated world are not fiction of the future but the present reality. This new working world may imply a change in the roles and skill sets that are required within HR and global mobility teams to provide a different service for their business and controlled flexibility for employees. Global mobility can support reflection and revision of not only policies and processes but also the organization itself.

The continuously evolving world of global mobility (e.g. compliance risks, duty of care, shift in mobility patterns) offers organizations new challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed. Organizations should be innovative in their approaches to global mobility partly out of necessity, as they need to adapt to the needs of the changing business world as well as the varying preferences of distinct generations of employees (PwC, 2013).

Given that there is a higher number of employee-initiated moves than ever before, organizations should be sufficiently flexible to meet not only the talent needs of the business though also the motivations and expectations of the talent (Sante Fe, 2019). The Next Gen is interested in travel and international work, which indicates an opportunity for organizations to respond with compelling EVPs that address such interests. Offerings that appeal to these interests can provide a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining talent.

Global mobility can also play a role regarding the organizational ESG score, which encompasses environmental, social, and governmental efforts to achieve a long-term and positive impact on business performance. A high ESG score generally leads to heightened employee morale, stronger attraction of qualified applicants (and, ultimately, more qualified employees), decreases in the turnover rate and reputational risks, and higher employee engagement levels.

Thus, in conclusion, global mobility is an increasingly key EVP for global organizations to assist with the attraction of new talent and the retention of existing talent.

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