



EMPLOYEE MOBILITY AND TALENT MANAGEMENT INTEGRATION



Talent management continues to be a hot-button topic within global mobility. Aligning the movement of employees, whether temporarily or permanently, with the attraction, retention, and utilization of talent imbues relocation with a mission and ties it to the success of the company's human capital objectives. Pretty heady stuff for a function that typically touches less than 1% of a company's employee base.

In early 2017, RELO Direct's Global Mobility Roundtable™ sponsored a wide-ranging survey on ***The Changing Dynamics of Employee Mobility***. The survey, which was conducted by Global HR Strategies Group, LLC, received nearly 100 responses; the results were introduced during RELO Direct's 2017 Corporate Forum.

While the integration of employee mobility and talent management is a topic of much discussion, it isn't always a reality. Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents reported that talent management is a strategy of their mobility program. Of these, just 12% of respondents reported that talent management had been a focus for their organization for some time, while 64% stated that their organization had begun to address it.

Employee Mobility as a Strategic Initiative

Companies that have begun the process of integrating talent management and employee mobility have done so in a variety of different ways. Sixty-four percent of survey respondents reported working with Human Resources and/or business leaders to identify candidates for relocation or assignments, while 46% have become involved in developing strategies for addressing talent management needs within the mobility program. These results align with comments from mobility leaders in general, who report that the need to be more strategic - rather than focusing on defining their department only on the process of relocation - is a key focus of their efforts to be part of the talent management initiative.



One example of this shift is the transition of policy from a solely duration-based approach to a flexible approach – one that aligns policy content with the purpose of the move, business unit needs, and employee circumstances. Flexible policies mean that managers and human resources business partners can adapt to the needs of the business and employees, with guidance provided by mobility leaders to ensure that the goals of the program are met.

Another example is the evolution of new mobility types to better align with needs of the business. In the not-too-distant past, international mobility consisted of only a handful of move types: long term assignments, short term assignments, and permanent relocation. Today, it is common for companies to offer commuter assignments, developmental assignments, rotational assignments, local plus relocation, and an ever growing menu of move types to better align employee mobility with business and talent management needs.

Employees, too, are well aware of the value that international experience or experience in another office or facility within their own country can bring to their careers. Employee-requested moves are good for career development, and therefore for talent retention and promotion. As a result, this type of move is of interest to business leaders and talent management-employee mobility initiatives. Many companies report an increase in these move types, and have developed support programs tailored to their specific needs.

Repatriation as a Key Talent Management Focus

Successful repatriation is a key component of the talent management-employee mobility link with 67% of survey participants reported that they are involved in the repatriation of international assignees.

A growing focus for the integration of talent management and employee mobility is repatriation. Historically, repatriation has often received less attention during the lifecycle of international assignments. Even today, repatriation is often treated as a purely procedural practice, focusing on moving people and their belongings back to where they came from. For many companies, viewing repatriation as a keystone of a successful talent management-employee mobility initiative is a new idea.

There are several ways that global mobility is championing the role of repatriation in the talent management-employee mobility integration effort. For example, 27% of survey respondents reported instituting pre-repatriation planning

related to future career opportunities into their mobility programs. Recognizing that on-assignment performance influences repatriation – and therefore career options – 26% of participants noted they have integrated talent management elements into their assignment performance reviews.

Several respondents stated that they are in the process of developing a home country mentor program as a part of their initiative to integrate talent management and employee mobility, while other respondents noted that they have informal approaches to mentorships. Still, the numbers are small, with just 11% of companies stating that have a home country mentor program in place.

Additionally, 22% of respondents reported they have established a formal repatriation planning program, the components of which can include monitoring of assignment end dates, conducting formal reviews to plan next steps, holding regular status and performance reviews through the assignment, and working with human resources business partners to develop plans for employees post-repatriation.

Rather than as an end-of-assignment reality, fraught with the challenges of finding a position for an employee who has been in another location for three years, companies on the cutting edge of talent management-employee mobility integration consider the repatriation process a critical opportunity to support these valued employees. Not surprisingly, this doesn't begin at the end of the assignment, but rather closer to the beginning and throughout the duration of the assignment, as leaders in the organization develop career plans following assignment. More and more, these plans don't specify traditional repatriation, but rather "next opportunity" options, which may require another assignment or a move to another company location domestically.

These companies have also adapted their mobility programs to focus on the special needs of these highly sought-after employees. Family and personal challenges, such as dependent education, housing, and senior care commonly impact these employees' careers. Career planning, too, is a critical element, since employees willing to sacrifice so much for their career seek assurances that there are long-term plans that utilize their unique career paths. Global mobility leaders play a clear role in providing much of the support these employees require.

A still-evolving role for global mobility is tracking the career paths of former assignees. Long known as a key element of the return on investment (ROI) calculation, the idea of tracking how many assignees are with the organization two and five years post-repatriation, as well as evaluating how their assignment or relocation experience contributed to their career progression, is gaining traction. Still, just 18% of respondents reported that they track employees' career paths post-assignment, though many commented that this is an area they are looking into.

The Changing Skill Set of the Mobility Team

Many mobility leaders are beginning to recognize that in order to change the role of employee mobility management in their organizations, there must be corresponding changes to the skill set of their mobility team. While 68% of survey respondents stated they have not made changes to their team's skill set to address talent management responsibilities, some noted that they have not done so because they have other approaches in place, such as teaming with Talent Management or focusing in general on developing a more consultative approach to mobility.

Increasingly, the integration of talent management with employee mobility is resulting in expanded opportunities for mobility managers. As more companies outsource the day-to-day activities of relocation, and more of those activities are automated, mobility professionals are increasingly able to be more consultative with their constituency, an endeavor many survey respondents say they have wanted to focus on for a long time. The ability to work directly with business leaders and human resource business partners to align mobility program with business needs, and to participate in talent management initiatives to promote good candidate assessment and selection strategies are two new work streams cited by mobility leaders that are a direct result of this shift.

While strengthening the link between employee mobility and talent management continues to be a challenge for many companies, 37% of respondents provided specific examples of how they have seen an increase in this effort over the past two years, including:

- More collaboration between mobility and talent management
- Education of hiring managers
- Linking moves with career goals
- Planning for assignments or relocation



What Companies are Doing to Maximize the Role of Employee Mobility in Talent Management

There are many examples of how global mobility leaders are integrating their function with their companies' talent management initiatives. Some are large scale, but the majority remain relatively small and include items such as:

- Using tiered policies, especially a developmental tier capped at two years. The primary benefit of the cap is to ensure that the assignment remains focused on developmental objectives. Some organizations limit developmental assignments to one year, for the same reason.
- Incorporating mobility into employees' individual personal development plans.
- Use of global leadership development initiatives, such as rotational assignments when recruiting college graduates. These rotations include two domestic and one international assignment, and are a very attractive benefit to candidates. To ensure the focus stays on development, the leadership development program bears the costs of the assignments.
- Working closely with talent management – including reporting into this function – includes meeting quarterly to assess possible assignments for the upcoming year.

While the integration of employee mobility and talent management may have begun with its focus primarily in international assignments, more companies are using domestic assignments as developmental opportunities as well. Throughout the comment sections of ***The Changing Dynamics of Employee Mobility*** survey, participants noted that their role in employee career management is growing for all segments of the mobile workforce. Given the critical value that highly skilled works bring to the organization, the importance of fostering effective mobility strategies will only continue to grow.

As a result, employee mobility leaders are seeing their departments, and their roles, changing as the long sought-after focus on strategic value becomes a reality for many in employee mobility management.

This white paper is the first in a series based upon the results of ***The Changing Dynamics of Employee Mobility survey*** and discussions held during RELO Direct's seventh annual Corporate Forum. For questions or inquiries about the survey, or membership in RELO Direct's Global Mobility Roundtable™ contact Roger Atchinson, Senior Vice President, Consulting Services at ratchinson@relodirect.com.

About RELO Direct®

RELO Direct® is a full-service relocation management company. We offer a wide range of mobility management services to support clients with employees on the move. With 25 years of industry experience, RELO Direct® has the systems, processes, and people in place to exceed customer expectations.



About the Global Mobility Roundtable™

The Global Mobility Roundtable™ is hosted and facilitated by RELO Direct®. The Roundtable is completely non-commercial and dedicated exclusively to HR professionals who manage corporate global mobility programs. The Roundtable was created in 2000 by Detroit area HR professionals and RELO Direct® management to provide global mobility managers a forum for education, networking, and sharing information. Regular meetings are conducted at rotating host locations in regional markets and webcast live for convenient access by all Roundtable members.



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