Global Mobility Trends – The Big Picture: Yesterday, today and tomorrow
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Trends are popular in Mobility. While some are short-lived, others prevail. A look at the confirmed trends of yesterday and today and an outlook towards future trends will explain their meaningfulness and provide an insight into the evolution of the mobility function.

In what sense are trends impacting your Global Mobility programme?

Increasing numbers of Mobility programmes are becoming aware of internal and external factors that motivate a change in their strategy, as expressed in changes of policies, processes and structure. Trends evolve not only from an observation of these factors within an organisation but also from challenges faced and when external aspects are gaining in relevance in the market.

Organisations respond to these and their actions tend to be around for a while before they are recognised and labelled as trends. An exception to this rule are the trends of tomorrow, which are based on valid assumptions and experience only, but have the potential to make your Mobility programme “future proof” if observed.

Experience shows that Mobility programmes are extremely diverse from each other, based on size, complexity, competencies, culture and company objectives to name just a few differentiators. Not all trends of the past, present and the future influence Mobility teams in the same way. While some are still tackling trends and challenges of the past, others might already be dealing with the trends and challenges of tomorrow. Mobility programmes in different organisations may even find different answers in response to the same trends and challenges.

Organisations need to assess trends for their relevance and applicability to their own Mobility programme and then make an informed decision on the adoption of a trend. Does it support better alignment with internal and external factors, competition and business objectives?
Here is a headline overview of the most common trends that I observe in the market. Categorising them as yesterday, today and tomorrow is an attempt to show the enormous changes over time and the evolution of the Mobility function itself.

Yesterday

• > 90% male assignees
• Predominately assignments from HQ country
• Majority experienced senior talent
• Financial incentivisation of assignments
• Split payroll
• Classic short-term and long-term policies
• Assignment management as a “travel agency”
• Case by case management
• Assignment management dealt with "in-house"
• Low awareness for compliance

Today

• Increasing diversity of assignees (gender, age)
• Linking with talent management
• Increasing number of inbound and third-country assignments
• Cost pressure / cost reporting
• Host-based compensation approaches (e.g. local plus)
• Split of assignment policies (e.g. developmental, rotational, commuters)
• Localisation and repatriation
• Strategic alignment of assignment management
• Standardization of processes
• Increasing use of outsourcing
• Strong awareness of compliance and reputation
• FX rate issues
• Emerging markets
• Increasing importance of travel security
• Demographic change (dual career, Gen Y and origin)
• Increasing importance of cultural preparation
• Use of specific IT solutions
• Increasing growth of assignment programmes

Tomorrow

• High diversity of assignments (gender, age, seniority, Gen Y & Z and origin)
• New assignment types (tele commuter, multi-responsibility)
• Assignment management integrated in talent management
• KPI’s and RoI’s, improved cost reporting
• Use of big data
• Extended workforce / workforce of one
• Support and alignment with HR transformation
• Regular review of mobility strategy (policies, structure & processes)
• Increasing role of IT, automatization
• Strategic partner of management
• Partnership with external providers
• Strategic outsourcing
• Compliance and travel security becoming a hygiene factor
• Business travel compliance responsibility
Going back to the point on Mobility programmes being extremely diverse from each other, just because a trend was observed in the past does not make it irrelevant to an organisation now. It takes a thorough understanding of each trend and how it influences your Mobility programme to come to a decision if a strategic or tactical change is necessary to deal with it. This is why trends are one of the key building blocks of a sound Global Mobility Strategy.

It is extremely helpful to understand what answers and approaches other companies have come up with in response to a trend or a challenge in order to find the right answer that suits your Mobility programme. You need to know what others do, in order to build the confidence for the change that you decide upon.

Many companies are currently in the process of becoming more strategic in Global Mobility or updating their Mobility strategy, which itself is one of the key trends that I see currently. Since a sound strategy development process will put their focus also on the challenges and trends, dealing with trends in itself has become a trend 😊

A lot of importance is placed on Mobility programmes being agile. Agility is defined as the ability to move with speed and ease. It is therefore paramount to be aware what trends and challenges are on your path and to make sure that your Mobility programme tackles them before they either cause issues or slow you down.

Make sure to be aware of trends, possible answers to them and their applicability to your Global Mobility programme before embarking on a change for more agility.

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