

Home HR Rely Too Heavily On Email For Engaging Assignees

John Rason, Head of Santa Fe Group Consulting Services, draws on the results of the Global Mobility Survey in relation to how companies engage with employees once they are on assignment.

For international organisations, their expatriate assignees typically represent the most costly employee group outside of the Boardroom. From various research studies conducted over the past 20 years we know that between 1 to 3% of the global workforce are international assignees, yet paradoxically represent between 9 to 13% of total global employment costs. So it is no wonder that many organisations are reviewing how they can better engage and retain this significant investment. Contemporary thinking is looking at the way that we communicate with our international assignees.

The world's largest study of Global Mobility Programmes from the US, South America, Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia and Australasia, identifies that email is the primary method that businesses maintain engagement with their employees on assignment.

The Global Mobility Survey identified that 82.7% of businesses rely heavily on email to maintain communication with their employees whilst on assignment with a high proportion solely reliant on the medium.

International Communication Strategy Critical To Assignee Engagement And Retention

With the perennial focus on talent retention, concerns over assignee attrition and the effectiveness of email for employee engagement, shouldn't businesses be looking at improving how they communicate with their employees on assignment?

Whilst on assignment overseas, it is easy for an employee to become disengaged from their home business. A company's communication strategy with its international assignees is therefore critical to the success of its global mobility programme, maintaining the employee's engagement with the company and ultimately retaining talent.

Strategies For Communicating With Your Assignees

The web portal www.globalmobilitysurvey.com enables us to review in more detail the communication techniques used by HR and Global Mobility departments to communicate and engage with their assignees. It reveals that programmes managed from different countries and industry sectors vary considerably in terms of the level of communication and types of communication used. For example, programmes managed from the UK performed the worst in terms of levels of communication. UK managed Global Mobility programmes often "left their assignees in the cold", indicatively with 10% of UK managed programmes having no assignee communication programme in place at all. Indian managed programmes on the other hand indicated the highest level of communication and assignee engagement. Characteristically, they provide mobile devices to their assignees (41%) in order that they can stay in touch more easily.

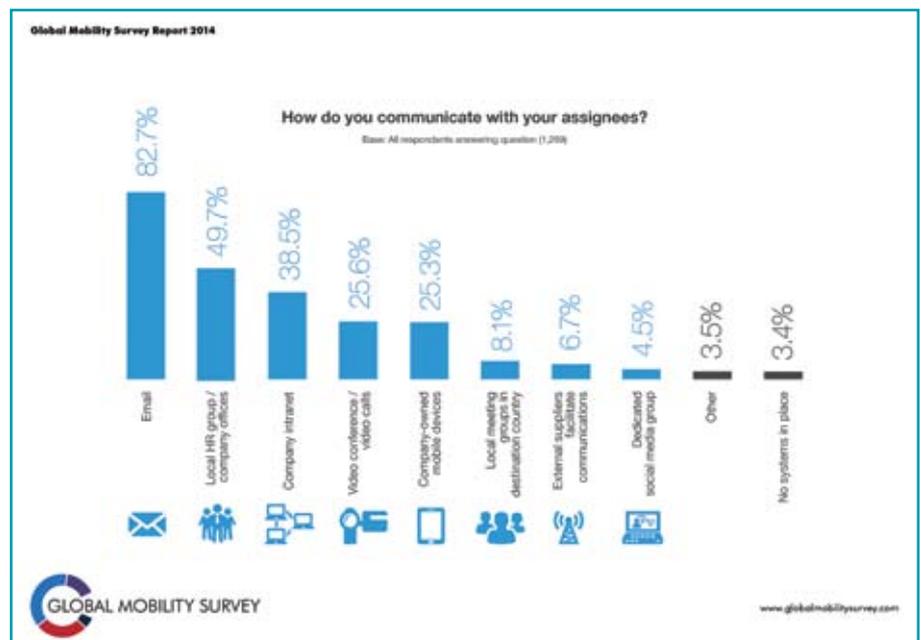
At an industry level, the Utilities & Energy industry are notably better at keeping in contact with their assignees than any of the other major industries, and 96% of these professionals saying they regularly use email to keep in contact with their assignees. Similarly, their figure for communication provided

via the company-provided intranet is also high, at 64%.

Email, Local Offices And Intranet

Unsurprisingly traditional communication strategies lead the way. Email tops the charts when it comes to communication methods with almost all companies using email to communicate. This is in part due to the type of content being exchanged by the business with the assignee and the confidential nature of the information. However, there are now better ways to share confidential information and better ways to engage.

Half of companies (49.7%) also rely heavily on their local HR representative to fulfil the communication with their employees on assignment. This has the benefit of maintaining a level of human contact with the assignee and their family but it cannot be relied upon solely. Culture can vary between offices and it is advisable that there needs to be a connection with the location to where they will be returning to eventually. Simply handing over responsibility to the local office may not be the optimal solution to ensure up to date knowledge of policies, home and host career opportunities and organisational re-organisations. However, personal communication may remain the best way if your assignments are happening in places with limited technology links.



Intranets featured in over a third of companies' communication plans. This has the benefit of keeping them connected with the company operationally, access to job boards and company news. Effectiveness of this medium relates to domains and it may be suitable for today's way of working using mobile devices.

Social Media

Social Media (SoMe) has become the default method for many assignees to stay in contact with their family and friends whilst on assignment, but so far this medium is slow to be adopted as part of a Global Mobility assignee communication programme with only 4.5% of programmes using dedicated social media groups. Perhaps companies feel it is difficult to take social media seriously in a business context, but it is hard to ignore the opportunities that social media presents.

Unsurprisingly, the media industry leads the way in communicating with its assignees using social media, using social media 10% of the time, although this is admittedly a relatively low number. In contrast, many industries are yet to grasp it as a concept and so far have not begun to use it at all.

Once again, India managed programmes outshone the rest of the world with 12% of these programmes adopting dedicated social media groups to maintain assignee engagement.

Whereas social media may not be appropriate for compliant operational transactions such as the transferring of company documents, it does provide a more personalised method of engaging with the assignee. It removes the formality that is sometimes present in communication via email and intranet. It is a ready-made tool for companies to achieve a balance between the personable and the professional. In terms of ensuring the assignee has adapted culturally, if they are encouraged to regularly update their social media channels it can provide the company with a more rounded picture of how they are doing in all aspects of their life on assignment.

The Global Mobility Survey provides an excellent opportunity for HR professionals to gain an invaluable insight into the field. With reports of an expected 29% net growth in Employee Global Mobility over the next 12 months, now is the perfect time to find out how your company can get ahead.

Conclusion

The message is simple; companies need to effectively communicate to improve engagement with their assignees remotely. Ultimately this can be expected to improve the retention of employees on overseas assignment.

A company's assignee communication strategy needs to consider the various options at its disposal and select the correct mix based on who needs to be

communicated with, the sensitivity of what is being communicated and select the communication channels that work best. It is worth noting that for assignee engagement to be effective companies need to go further than simply sending formal documentation. An effort should be made to ensure that assignees remain connected to the company's culture, news and what is happening in the home business.



Comments by John Rason, Head of Santa Fe Group Consulting Services, based on the findings from the Global Mobility Survey.
T: +44 (0)208 961 4141
E: john.rason@thesantafegroup.com

The Global Mobility Survey

Used by leading HR, Compensation & Benefits and in-house Global Mobility professionals, the Global Mobility Survey is a pivotal data source for corporates seeking to benchmark and enhance their own employee transfer programmes. The Global Mobility Survey is commissioned by the Santa Fe Group

www.thesantafegroup.com and conducted by Circle Research an independent and ISO20252 certified research company.

See www.globalmobilitysurvey.com for more information and to take part in the 2015 survey.



FREE IMMIGRATION SEMINAR

Monday 2nd February 2015 at 1.30pm

Immigration Update

This seminar will be a practical session providing advice on the latest Immigration developments and the implications for businesses, and will cover Immigration Policy Updates, Global Immigration Strategy and Management, Compliance and Risk Management.

Presented by Ferguson Snell & Associates. If you have an immigration enquiry that you would like Ferguson Snell consultants to cover on the day please email your enquiry in advance to fs@fergusonsnell.co.uk.

To reserve your place in this free seminar please email:
helen@internationalhradviser.com

The 2015 Corporate Relocation Conference & Exhibition
Hotel Russell, Russell Square, Bloomsbury, London, WC1B 5BE