

Global Workforce: Digital Innovation in Mobility

Global Mobility functions will come under increasing pressure to consider the impact of digital transformation. This pressure will come from within the organisation, from the employees and from the external environment.

The traditional workforce has been influenced by rapid changes in digital market trends, advancements in technology, connectivity, plus new attitudes to work and careers from the connected workforce generation. International tax landscapes have also undergone various major developments, notably Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) and digital transformation of tax authorities (e.g. HMRC's Making Tax Digital project), to meet the demands of the digital age.

Several trends, including automation, the growth of the gig economy, a greater demand for flexible working, and the proliferation of disruptive technology, are transforming business models and radically changing the workplace and how work is done (Figure 1).

This article will explore the hypothesis that Global Mobility functions are faced with a new set of emergent demands to help their organisation remain competitive. They are being asked to be more AGILE, USER-CENTRED, DIGITAL, EVIDENCE-BASED and SIMPLE. In other words, they are expected to be as nimble in their operations as digital Start-Ups. This article will also look at new tools and trends for Global Mobility functions to react to these changes and adapt to the digital revolution.

The Changing Role Of The Global Mobility Function

Global Mobility functions are undergoing rapid and profound change. Once viewed as a transactional function that delivered international assignment services to globally mobile employees, Global Mobility professionals over the last few years have moved into the role of 'Trusted Advisor' or 'Strategic Partner' to the business. However, they are now being asked to help lead the digital transformation that is re-shaping organisations worldwide. Deloitte's 2017 Human Capital trends survey results suggests that challenges and change for organisations will be most notable in three main areas:

- **Digital Workforce:** Mobility functions will

need to respond to a global workforce infused with "digital DNA" and promote mobility frameworks that facilitate new network-based structures

- **Digital Workplace:** Mobility functions must adapt to a working environment that enables productivity and uses innovative technologies and engaging communication tools to promote engagement, enhance collaboration, wellness, and a sense of purpose
- **Digital Mobility:** Organisations will challenge the Global Mobility function

to operate in a digital way, use digital tools and apps to deliver solutions, and continuously experiment and innovate.

This shift is happening rapidly, and Global Mobility leaders are now being pushed to take on a rapidly changing role to help drive the digitisation of their organisation and function. In this context, Global Mobility professionals are expected to play multiple roles to meet the expectations of the changing workforce and business leaders.

Figure 1: Forces disrupting global workforce

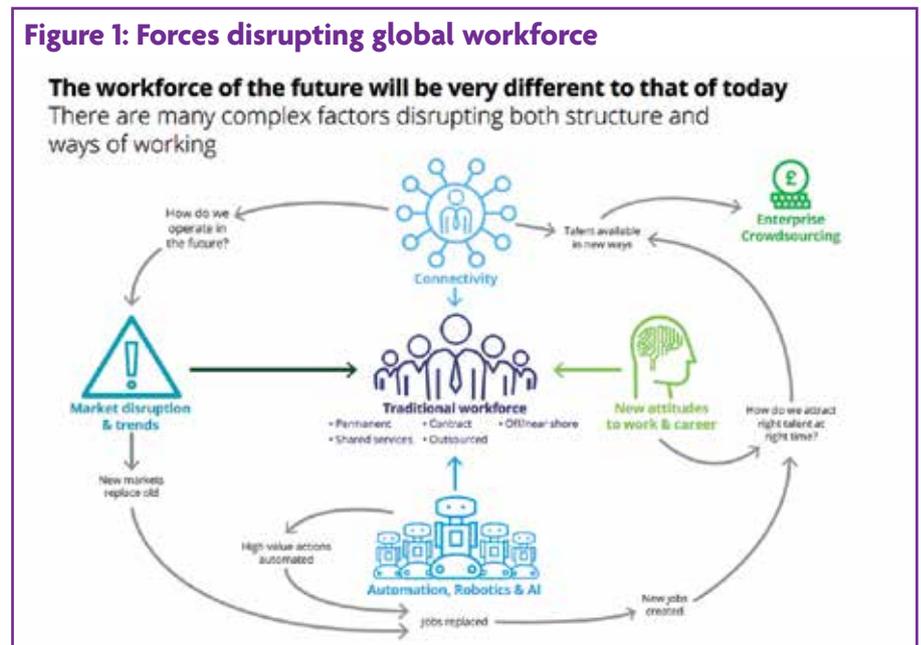


Figure 2: The different roles of a global mobility function

Current		Emerging
<p>Trusted advisor To be the trusted advisor to business leaders and managers, helping them so, in turn, better perform in their own roles as stewards of the people agenda.</p>	<p>Delivery champion To carry on moving the needle on efficient and effective delivery of core Global Mobility function processes and programmes to the employees.</p>	<p>Experience designer To pick up and ide design thinking at the heart of everything the Global Mobility function does. There is a need to be targeted in terms of core talent personas, and ensure a fantastic experience.</p>
<p>Data scientist A need to use analytics to successfully predict demand and supply of key skills within the industry, particularly given high retirement rates.</p>	<p>Organisation engineer To be skilled at designing and implementing agile organisation structures including team based solutions that are impactful and scalable.</p>	<p>Engagement architect To drive recommitment of employees' hearts and minds at a time of significant uncertainty through the use of innovation and digital technologies.</p>
<p>Ecosystem curator To be adept at curating both the internal and external ecosystem of talent, especially as the gig workforce becomes a reality.</p>	<p>Culture evangelist To continue to carry the culture flag and partner with the leaders to articulate and make the desired culture in the organisation very real.</p>	<p>Digital pioneer To understand and tap into emerging digital technologies that can enable efficient and effective delivery of strategies and programmes.</p>

While some of these roles are evergreen, some are new and emerging (Figure 2).

These market forces are shaping a change in the way Global Mobility professionals are now being expected to think - like start-up entrepreneurs – common trends include becoming more agile in the way that they approach design and deployment, and to truly bring the employee experience and talent to the centre of everything that is done. The net effect is that organisations are looking for Global Mobility outputs to have a truly significant multiplier effect on their programmes, policies and frameworks. They are expected to fully understand and embrace new, emerging technologies to make a bigger impact where it matters.

New Tools And Trends At Your Disposal

The Global Mobility professionals' traditional roles and responsibilities are not going away. Therefore Global Mobility functions today are under pressure to fully understand and embrace new changes and their emerging roles by redesigning talent practices, experimenting with digital, and by building a compelling assignee experience.

There are a wide range of new tools and trends that have emerged in recent years which many organisations have yet to consider (Figure 3).

Various tools and workforce models are available to organisations to make employees lives easier and companies more efficient. We will focus on four areas that will likely have the most impact on Global Mobility in the short-term future: Robotic Process Automation (RPA); Next-Generation Workplace Tools; Cognitive Technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Gig Economy and Crowdsourcing.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA)

Arguably the most prevalent and accessible disruptive technology, robotics, can provide new opportunities to reduce costs, improve productivity and retain talent.

Robotics can help mobility functions re-skill their workforce, and prepare staff for working alongside robots and automation software. Embracing this new way of thinking required by technology will be a key asset for Mobility functions in the future. Mobility functions are experiencing initial success where RPA is embraced to take small steps, such as replacing tasks that are repetitive (e.g. organising data, copying and pasting information from private or public data sources, and sending routine emails to multiple stakeholders). Automation software, for a relatively small investment, can mimic administrative tasks that a human would typically undertake, allowing their time in turn to be re-purposed to high value tasks for the benefit of the Mobility Function.

Interest and activity in RPA is growing, and this technology is already being used in mobility functions to speed up administrative / transactional processes.

It will be important for teams to give their workers the opportunity to learn and upskill – this will help leaders manage the impact of RPA on employment and ensure teams have the skills, as the use of technology increases.

Adopting RPA and gradually embedding these techniques within existing processes, will allow Global Mobility teams to focus on lowering costs and improve operational efficiency, by creating a more nimble and effective function.

The Gig Economy And Crowdsourcing

The increasing use of contingent freelance workers alongside the rise of the robots and smart machines, is also having a significant contribution to the changing the landscape of the corporate workforce.

Under the gig economy model, workers are not permanent employees of the company but instead have chosen to accept individual jobs or shifts when they are offered. The UK office for National Statistics recently forecasted that around 8 million people could be actively engaged in Britain's gig economy by 2020.

The popularity of the gig workforce is growing, largely due to the growing millennial population, a greater acceptance of technology, advanced network infrastructures combined with an increasing demand from organisations for a more fluid talent pool. For business, this flexibility offers a platform for greater agility which will promote innovation and minimise costs. As technology continues to disrupt business models across every sector at an unprecedented rate, businesses are increasingly likely to establish a more dynamic and reactive workforce to draw upon.

In addition to the gig workforce, crowdsourcing is gaining great momentum in the global mobility arena. Also known as silent offshoring, microwork, the human cloud, or workforce-on-demand, crowdsourcing is an evolution of shared services and outsourcing models. Crowdsourcing can contribute to creating a more flexible agile practice and helps adjust and respond to the needs of its future workforce.

Crowdsourcing is part of an ecosystem offering access to vast, highly skilled, cheap labour and methods that look set to play a fundamental role in the future of the Global Mobility practice. Enterprise crowdsourcing provides a flexible workforce available on demand and the ability to engage the best talent (outside of your building), skills and specific expertise often in near real time.

We are actively exploring the potential of crowdsourcing by supporting businesses through a range of enterprise-scale platforms across a number of business domains to reach broader crowds. Examples include; gather global location insights (hot mobility trends), Global Mobility technology development (rapid prototype development), technology and data science (global talent sourcing and matching) and independent survey's using the Crowd to capture either feedback or data from a geographically dispersed workforce on items such as real time COLA or housing data, campus or city insights – these themes are not ground-breaking, but the method used to gather data and build technology is, reducing traditional time-frames to complete these activities from months to days.

Next-Generation Workplace Tools

The next-generation of workplace tools offer employers and teams an exciting future to make a positive impact on the workforce in areas such as collaboration, training and learning.

Establishing a connected workforce that is better connected through technology, will also offer business leaders the opportunity to provide a better experience to their teams (and assignees). Data gathered from the next-generation workplace tools will prompt organisations to think about how they value people and subsequently make better decisions about their global workforce.

Figure 3: Digital Innovation - New tools and trends at your disposal



Employees can video conference, access the latest information, share the same documents or workspace from a device and location of their choice. Core office technologies such as word processing platforms, email or telephone, are evolving to provide additional scope for connected and collaborative working. The workspace of the future will therefore not be reliant on costly tele-conferencing arrangements – users can connect themselves, external organisations in a matter of seconds.

Today's "digital learning" platforms mean that staff do not necessarily need to leave the office to attend a training course, producing videos with curated content is far simpler and cheaper to produce than in recent years; which employees can consume at their convenience, on a device of their choosing.

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Most importantly, new digital learning means organisations can make the hard stuff in life, fun. Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) coupled with Gamification techniques being used right now, which create fascinating new possibilities in the collaborative learning and knowledge sharing space.

For example, these techniques are already being used to transform the employee on-boarding experience into the organisation, the opportunity to virtually meet and collaborate with colleagues in other countries, and also virtually immerse themselves into new cities prior to making a decision on moving.

Cognitive Technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Deloitte's 2017 Human Capital Trends Survey reveals that most organisations are in the middle of this fundamental shift to leverage the power of cognitive technologies, AI and automation. While 41% of companies in the survey have already adopted cognitive technologies within their workforce, only 17% are ready to manage a workforce of Co-bots - people, robots and AI working side by side.

Advancements in cognitive technologies, artificial intelligence, and data analytics, are helping organisations go beyond traditional ways of managing a global workforce by using smart machines to detect, predict, and prevent risks in moving people around the globe. Autonomic computing combines automation and cognitive technologies to make systems self-managing and potentially self-defending against risks.

What forces are driving this trend? A massive growth in the volume of data available to organisations, the emergence of new and advanced artificial intelligence (AI)-based algorithms and an expanding pool of data science talent.

Deloitte are exploring this working on various initiatives including leveraging cognitive technologies to improve and train existing tax research and global mobility deployment tools which are complex and difficult to analyse and obtain meaningful data. The combination of Artificial Intelligence and automated mobility advisers provide an attractive option for the future, however, this must be balanced with the often understated complexity of implementing cognitive solutions and the importance of managing the human backlash against automated decision making.

Summary

Workers themselves recognise the power of new technologies and the vast majority are keen for the businesses they work for to take advantage of them. Organisations are less sure about how to harness the power of the advanced technologies. However, Global Mobility functions will undoubtedly face increased pressure to change the way they work from today.

Digital innovation and disruptive technologies are becoming more intrinsic than ever to a business ecosystem and service delivery. Successful businesses in the future will need to be bold and embrace additional skills, including digital know-how, digital creativity, entrepreneurship and complex problem solving. The advent of disruptive technology is here today and is already responsible for the upheaval of long standing business models and established companies; studies show similar transformations are taking place in all areas of business.

Jobs will be disrupted and re-invented by digital innovation, the challenge for Global Mobility functions will be to evaluate the

technology available today and consider how this can augment their human workforce.

As the business environment pace of change accelerates, it is no longer the strongest businesses that survive and thrive – but rather the ones that adapt. Above all, digital innovation needs to be at the core of companies' business models. One of the biggest challenges for Global Mobility will be how to bring Innovation closer to the core of their function, disrupt their own 'business as usual', and spot moments to adopt, adapt and embrace digital themes at the earliest opportunity.



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