

Is Global Mobility In Fashion?

According to a recent study by Sterling Lexicon, the answer is a resounding yes. The study engaged several organisations in the luxury goods sector in a panel discussion to better understand which Global Mobility (GM) trends and issues are currently impacting companies and mobility programmes.

As a mobility representative of global fashion houses, upcoming brands, and high-end retailers, we wanted to identify the topics weighing on the minds of GM professionals in the luxury goods sector. While the original premise was to identify common sector-specific themes, the panel discussion concluded that many of the challenges faced by GM professionals are universal to all areas of the global economy.

Policy & Programme Structure

Policy is usually at the centre of every GM programme and this is also true in the luxury goods sector. The study uncovered that many organisations in this industry admit to historically having loosely formed and inconsistently applied policies. Often, these have constituted more of a benefits matrix rather than a set of formal policy documents. Organisations with larger programmes have incrementally introduced greater structure, such as formalised policies and processes, whilst younger brands acknowledged this as a future goal. Across both sides, executive-level sponsorship was considered the most effective catalyst for change management, whether it be an alteration to an existing policy or the implementation of a new one. This has facilitated the engagement and buy-in of the wide group of stakeholders touching GM processes. One sector-specific challenge identified by a number of panel members was the absence of a strong culture of governance within the organisation, which could hinder getting executive-level sponsorship.

GM framework provides structure and consistency within an organisation and many panel participants said that whilst their companies were moving in a more universally centralised direction, a one-size-fits-all approach was not the answer. Regional flexibility on policy application was a preferred solution and appeared to be working for programme owners. This type of programme structure provided clarity to potential employees and kept messaging

consistent for internal stakeholders. However, some organisations are still grappling with intra-regional moves from a policy and regional buy-in perspective.

Employee Experience & Policy Flexibility

Providing equality and transparency as a part of the programme structure enhanced the overall employee experience. It also helped address an issue that one panel member brought up -- that "assignees were always suspicious that another assignee was getting a better deal." The topic of policy flexibility was also discussed, as organisations in the luxury goods sector grapple with the ever-changing demands of younger employees. The panel study didn't see organisations veering towards core/flex, but instead they were introducing a degree of choice and individual customisation into their GM packages. One example was the concept of a lifestyle allowance for things like after-school care, yoga classes, or care for elderly relatives. That approach generated positive employee feedback, according to one participant. In other cases, organisations added a lump sum of cash alongside services, which was also well-received.

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Overall it was found to be difficult to disentangle duty of care and well-being from flexibility. All panel participants recognised the need for an international Employee Assistance Programme and cultural training programmes, with an emphasis on equal access for all.

Talent Management

Employing talented candidates was also a main concern for organisations in the luxury goods sector. One panelist revealed that their organisation was in the early stages of putting psychometric testing in place during the candidate selection process. Other panelists spoke about reviewing past employee performance and working to ensure that a succession plan was in place.

A challenge that some face is different brands sitting under one operating company that does not share similar HR or performance management systems, making it difficult to directly translate performance. The study found measuring performance and planning for repatriation are as important as getting the right person in the right role in the right place. Repatriation planning involves pre-determining the role that an assignee will return to in advance. The majority of organisations that participated in the panel said they were committed to finding the employee a similar role, while a small number of panelists guaranteed the role the assignee left would be available upon their return. The panel emphasised the importance of good repatriation planning, especially for employees who go out on developmental assignments in order to retain future leaders.



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As Account Director at Sterling Lexicon, Stuart focuses on working with clients to optimise their global mobility solutions. Stuart has worked in global mobility for seventeen years. His broad experience of working with different programme sizes across a variety of industry sectors helps to bring success to clients' programmes and wider business strategies.

If you would like to discuss any of the points raised in this article or learn more about Sterling Lexicon, please do not hesitate to contact Stuart Jackson at stuart.jackson@sterlinglexicon.com.