

A Brief Strategic Article For Employers With Mobile Employees

Kim Miller, Director, EMEA Reward, Global Compensation, Brown-Forman Corporate, briefly reviews the key issues of working globally, from identifying key processes of managing a global workforce to examining the factors that encourage or dissuade employees to successful work around the world, and in particular to identify the influences on the global business and strategy, continued challenges between the 'employer' and the 'employee', the global HR model, identifying fundamental processes to global management, performance management and cultural sensitivity in understanding the differences in behaviours, attitudes and expectations that exist among different multinational employers and employees.

There are plenty of practical ideas, lessons and information from working in a global environment that we learn each day; together with understanding varying aspects of global operations and globalisation, understanding cultural differences and global influences each day, managing from a distance and global leadership.

To reflect and examine other areas which will include organisation cultural drivers and building long-term market leadership, global management structure, entering into new revolutionised economy, and getting to global alignment with the global HR model.

There are many factors that influence the world of international employee mobility and are true today as it was 20 years ago.

Global Performance Management

So far research has indicated a variety of opinions and suggestions in managing global employees, and it is stated that it is the means of getting better results from the organisation, team and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competence requirements. The performance management process is not just a system of forms and work flow processes – it is essentially about the actions people take to achieve the day-

to-day delivery of results and manage performance improvement and a positive approach to managing staff working around the world.

This reinforces the strong business needs for expanding globally and moving towards a consistent but flexible approach to managing performance, and adapting too many cultures within the organisation.

There sometimes appears to be limited integration across global companies and long-term strategic planning and how global companies are continuously improving with new processes and technology. The process of effective performance management will be critical in developing world class people who instantly recognise the capabilities of the future.

Companies, who are seeking for international growth and to deliver with a short- or long-term plan, should ensure that the numbers of employees working from their home base must increase their global perspective and communicate effectively with people from around the world. On occasion, the process of relocating employees to work overseas from initial selection and recruitment, monitoring effectiveness throughout employment to completion of the work assignment can sometimes be a little fraught with anxiety for all parties concerned. The selection and pre-meetings have a very positive effect on adaptation to a new working environment, even though the effectiveness of these is strongly influenced by other factors. From previous research it transpires that employers highlight that a mobile workforce can represent a significant investment in future organisational capability. Of course, it is perfectly true that factors other than a failure of the career development process are at play in the issue of workforce retention. A mobile workforce have family issues which companies must not ignore; the family has to adapt to working and living in a different culture and the problems 'reverse culture shock', for example, are all important consideration. Some staff encounter difficulties and there is evidence of negative effects on both personal and family life. However, there

is strong evidence that issues associated with career development, promotion and redeployment planning, are central to the retention of valuable employee resources.

Cultural differences within a multinational workforce has to be carefully managed and appropriate induction, cultural awareness training etc., should be put into place to build a successful working team in-country, irrespective of differences.

Mobility

As companies grow globally and more companies enter the international marketplace, the reasons for international assignments continually change with greater expectations for all parties concerned. All global companies search for the best talent in their workforce from wherever the talent is located and, as a result, assignments are no longer predominately assigned from the Head Office and can be identified from any of the local organisations worldwide locations. In all mobility cases it is important to ensure that the international assignment is perceived as an important part in career development and talent management. This leads into the process of mobility and how this is managed – as some mobile employees are still known to feel that "it is merely a question of out of sight and out of mind" - however, let's think whether or not there are other factors in the work location. The possible cause for concern for most employers, and the intention, is to develop a more strategic perspective within global companies. As research has highlighted over the years, a mobile workforce can be more damaging to the organisation and be more difficult to resolve than managing employees in an equivalent home country position; as we all know managing employees away from the home base is much more difficult to manage 'at a distance'. Monitoring deliverables, coaching performance and developing others are key skills, which are necessary for success in any business.

The dilemma is that the business requires a consistent approach i.e. the process of managing a global workforce should be embarked in broadly the same way everywhere, but there

must be sufficient flexibility to tailor goals, objectives, and an approach to specific business needs that are operating overseas in a variety of usually international markets.

The desire to have a united employer around the world underscores the need for an integrated approach, which provides consistency across companies whilst providing flexibility in terms of accommodating the differing needs of company units. As the saying goes: 'Think globally', 'Act locally' or should it be 'Be Inclusive and Act Globally'.

It is apparent that any steps to remedy this situation have to be part of the company integrated strategy for employee mobility. The stages must encompass all the elements in the global employee cycle – from recruitment and selection for mobility across many locations, to training and development, tracking and monitoring, compliance and managing risks and the challenges that the global employer and employee faces every day. It is also clear that all global organisations will have to be responsible in making the mobility process efficient and impactful to the development of the employee.

The organisation will emphasise a high level of commitment, particularly in utilisation of the process of global management, with senior leadership being prepared to act as 'coach and role models' for the success of the mobility process and willing to act on results, as well as comprehensive positioning, marketing and communication of the process of mobility programmes from commuter to short and long-term assignments and permanent local to local transfers. Design and implementation of the mobility programme should be managed as shared responsibility between Line Management and Human Resources Management; consultation and involvement are key to design and implementation of the components if the process is to be managed globally. The design of mobility of employees should be able to take into account of local needs and the bigger picture.

Employers should ensure that the mobile employee is highly committed to the organisation's global activities and is able to move from country to country as managers, gaining valuable experience.

The objectives of the company can be achieved to ensure that the global management style can initially be measured by pre-assignment on-boarding programmes being implemented as

the process of initiation into different culture. Understanding cultures and local workforce can help to build a strong business with a diverse organisation and both the employee and employer can gain. The ultimate goal is to achieve a global corporate culture sharing experiences and learning from each other which encourages all employees to play an increasing role when base in any location. The way forward is to build a framework of objectives and strategy to add value to your organisation.



Kim Miller has worked in Global Human Resources for approximately 25 years mainly with global companies. Managing the global mobility of local

employees and expatriates, specialising in Global HR/Expatriation, European Employment Law, International Total Rewards incorporating international global strategy, cultural awareness, change management, European HR and ER policies, Succession and Talent Management, Global Reward strategies, M&A, implementing best practice and being a very proactive business partner. Although mainly based in the UK – throughout Kim's career has been involved in major construction/civil engineering companies in the International Human Resources on overseas projects around the globe.

Kim joined Brown-Forman Corporate in 2004 and was the first HR Director, Europe outside the US and the current post is Director, EMEA Reward, Global Compensation based in London

Kim is degree qualified and FCIPD; specialises in International Expatriation, Global Total Rewards and European Employment Law. Throughout Kim's international career travelled and worked extensively from across Europe, Middle East, Far East and USA.

Also a regular speaker at International CIPD, ORC, ECA, Employment Benefits World conferences/seminars and authored numerous articles, eg, "Managing your Multinational Workforce". In 2003 nominated on the shortlist by Re:Locate for "Personality of the year" and "Inspirational HR Team of the Year" Awards.

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