

# Right Person, Right Role, Right Place: Promoting Global Mobility and Attracting Talent

Getting the right person in the right role in the right place has been a mantra for Global Mobility professionals for a long time. It neatly sums up a key focus for the Global Mobility function as an enabler, partnering with the business to move the talent which is helping to execute on the organisation's strategic objectives. Changes in the way organisations approach performance management coupled with the deployment of better technologies to facilitate performance management are helping organisations to ensure that they are consistently checking all three boxes not just for the length of an assignment but throughout an employee's career with a company. This process is engaging employees with the organisation, enhancing their experience in the workplace and improving their output. Happy, productive employees. Global Mobility has a significant contribution to make to this process in ensuring that the key skills required for expatriate employees are embedded into employee development and performance management processes.

## Identifying the Right Person

The traditional annual or bi-annual performance appraisal process is suboptimal in supporting the process of identifying the right employee for an international assignment. Whilst there are candidate assessment tools available, most Global Mobility professionals we talk to admit that, especially for business critical assignments, identifying the right person is typically a line management decision. The challenge here is that the decision making process used by a line manager is likely to be somewhat flawed. The line manager will



potentially be in a position to intuitively know who the right person for a given assignment would be given their assessment of the skills required to meet the assignment objectives. That intuition can then be supported and reasoned backwards by evidencing performance appraisals. Given the absence of any other data this isn't an unreasonable process and the line manager should be in a position to know their employee well enough to make the right judgement. There are two factors however that are not accounted for in this process. First, the line manager may not have accounted for their own cognitive biases and secondly, they may not have accounted

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for their own imperfect memory as relates to the performance and skills of the employee.

Some social, decision-making, belief and behavioural biases are more commonly known than others. The halo and horn effects have been more widely documented

in business literature as have concepts such as stereotyping and hindsight bias. Fundamental attribution error (an over-emphasis on personality-based explanations for behaviours and under-emphasis on situational influences), recency bias, selection bias and the Semmelweis effect, are just a handful of possible biases which may influence a line manager in the performance management process and identifying the right candidate for an international assignment. Arijit Goswami and Jatin Pandey's recent paper looks at how credit attribution bias "leads to repeated and continued acknowledgment and disproportionate allocation of benefits to one or two individuals in a team" (Goswami and Pandey, 2019).

Equally worthy of consideration is how are memories are formed, stored and potentially distorted. The concepts of false memory and the misinformation effect address the issue that not only do our brains misremember events but are entirely capable of storing fictitious events, as memories. As Dr Julia Shaw says in her book *The Memory Illusion*, "Any event, no matter how important, emotional or traumatic it may seem, can be forgotten, misremembered, or even entirely fictitious" (Shaw, 2017). Daniel Simons, co-author of *The Invisible Gorilla* states, "We think that we see, notice and remember far more than we actually do" (Simons, 2011).

These unconscious behavioural flaws add more weight to the argument that the traditional top-down observational performance assessment is inadequate in a modern organisational setting. For Global Mobility professionals it opens up the question of how international assignments are resourced.

## Self-Identification

Before we leave this subject it's worth considering the influence of biases on self-initiated moves. Generally, we are seeing an increase in the number of self-initiated moves and this is widely attributed to younger generations in the workforce. Issues arise for both the employee and employer in this scenario when the self-initiated move doesn't work out. Here, rather than the line manager being responsible for selecting the right individual with the right skills for a role, the employee is self-identifying. Whilst the corporate organisation is likely contributing very little to the move from a

financial perspective, the chances are that the requested move has been agreed on the basis of talent management and employee retention. The disruptive effect on the organisation and the employee when this doesn't work out can therefore be significant. Organisations we've spoken to recently have been able to provide plentiful examples of self-initiated moves failing. The challenge for Global Mobility is providing the right tools and support for the employee to make a candid self-assessment as to whether or not the move is right for them. The employee for their part may be influenced by an over-confidence bias akin to the Dunning-Kruger effect.

### Digital Solutions

MIT Sloan Management Review and McKinsey & Company published a research report earlier this year entitled "Performance Management's Digital Shift" (Schrage, Kiron, Hancock, Breschi, 2019), which points to several key trends which should be of interest to Global Mobility professionals.

Sounding a death knell for the traditional performance appraisal which assesses past performance, the report highlights the future of data-driven performance management with a focus on continuous feedback and skills development. The report draws attention to forward-thinking organisations using artificial intelligence to "nudge" employees with data-driven recommendations both in relation to performance and professional development. This is a positive development from a Global Mobility perspective as it heralds a more scientific approach to filling roles. With better data on the skills available in the organisation, managers can draw on a global pool of talent from within the organisation to match the role vacancy. Moreover, an emphasis on feeding-forward will help employees with a desire to work in another country, better understand their own skillset and those desirable to manage successfully in other cultures. Compare this to a check box or the question on the annual appraisal asking whether or not the employee is globally mobile. Next role repatriation planning and utilising skills gained whilst on assignment, mainstay areas typically cited as a cause of post-assignment attrition, have the potential to be better managed with this type of technology and people-analytics. The report takes the example of IBM which has developed its own AI to predict which employees are likely to leave the company, estimating that the improvements in employee retention have saved the company in the region of \$300 million.

This design for the future of performance management is in lockstep with the generational shift in the workforce. As Venne and Hannay conclude in their paper on Generational Change, the Modern Workplace and Performance Appraisal:

"A focus on the developmental aspect of performance management in order to improve future performance with the goal to increase productivity, build skills, and develop competencies makes more sense in today's workplaces given cultural/generational and career pattern shifts" (Venne and Hannay, 2018).

### Bridging The Gap

Whilst the technology the MIT Sloan Management Review and McKinsey report talks about is very real and being used, it admits that start-up companies have been quicker to adopt this type of technology as they haven't been held back by legacy HRIS systems. Many Global Mobility professionals will point out that GM is very much a downstream beneficiary of technology if it does indeed benefit at all. Respondents contributing to a recent RES Forum survey reported that financial investment is seen as the largest inhibitor to the application of AI in Global Mobility (Bader & Schulz, 2019).



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In practice, organisations are taking more practical steps to create awareness around Global Mobility and to get the right person in the right role in the right place. As we've discussed in previous articles, policy flexibility is one lever corporates are using as an enabler. Awareness can be raised through FAQs for line managers and employees on intranet pages, whereas some organisations utilise community tools such as Yammer. Small changes can potentially make a difference in terms of positioning Global Mobility such as locating mobility information under the careers section of the intranet and providing information on competencies for managing internationally.

### Conclusion

There's no doubt that with the right systems in place, a data-driven approach to developing and assessing the right skills for an international assignment can only lead to a more scientific approach to filling roles and self-reflective assessment of an employee's own abilities

to work in a different cultural environment. Continuous feedback should help facilitate a better understanding of assignment success and drive down instances of assignment failure. The capacity for organisations to use mobility more effectively as a career development, employee engagement and retention tool is unquestionably available given a willingness to take a different approach to performance management as well as to embrace new technologies.

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