

Talent And Mobility Alignment - The Next Frontier

At every global mobility conference in 2014, there was one common theme on the agenda: “Aligning Talent and Mobility”. Looking at the objectives of Mobility Directors now and over the next 12-18 months, it’s a safe bet that many of us have a goal of finding the elusive “alignment”....

Why Has Talent-Mobility Alignment Risen To The Top Of The Agenda?

In my view, three factors are driving this:

- The war for talent has become a huge priority for most businesses – not just at the HR level, but at the Board and Executive Committee as well
- Global Mobility functions have evolved (in many cases) from transaction driven support teams, towards strategic business partners
- The war for talent is truly global – so it makes sense to explore how Talent and Mobility can align.

Ok, But What Do We Mean By “Talent-Mobility Alignment”?

At those very same conferences discussing the topic, a common theme was that the answer to this question, and the solution to finding the key to alignment, is proving quite elusive. Again, what are the emerging trends?

- Mobility functions are starting to **functionally report into Talent** – this is a growing trend, moving many companies away from the traditional model of Mobility reporting into Reward, or in some cases shared services
- **Data analytics** is becoming increasingly important – the ability to provide the Talent team with powerful and insightful data on the mobile population which can then help drive an international talent plan
- **Pro-active assignment planning**, in partnership with Talent – mobility teams in some instances are starting to get on the front foot in terms of workforce planning, rather than the reactive tap on the shoulder to facilitate an assignment
- **Assignee selection** – Talent and Mobility teams are increasingly applying suitability and selection

methodologies to assignees – it takes more than just being “good at the job” to go on an international assignment and be successful

- **Specific Talent Programmes** increasingly have an international assignment as a key component – large numbers of employees are mobilised at the same time.

Let’s look at these emerging trends in a little more detail.

The Mobility Reporting Line

There is an increasing evolution towards Mobility reporting into Talent. The reasons for this will of course vary from company to company, but this trend is clearly indicative of the desire to find alignment, and the increasing criticality of mobility in Talent processes. Our role as mobility professionals is, in essence, a simple one: to mobilise talent across borders effectively, in a compliant and cost-effective way, and in support of the overall business strategy. There is a natural linkage between finding the talent (what we in Diageo call Talent Engagement), developing and planning the talent landscape (the Global Talent team) and mobilising (Global Mobility). The “alignment” should start to come naturally, as a consequence of the reporting line.

The counter argument is around the technical aspects of global mobility – moving talent across borders is highly complex and highly regulated: tax, immigration, compensation variables, interactions with the Finance function – all of these point to a strong need to be closely connected to the other major technical and highly governance driven part of HR – Reward.

Data Analytics

Increasingly, Talent functions are data hungry: they want to understand basic demographics (how many IA’s? Where are they?), diversity data (gender balance, emerging markets IA’s), attrition rates (are our assignees completing their assignments?), performance on assignment, and of course cost (how can we measure ROI if we can’t measure cost?).

In my view, the critical piece often

missed from analytics is what happens after the assignment. Does the IA get promoted? Leave the company? Go on another assignment? Where are they 2, 5 and 10 years later? To harvest this data would be a powerful indicator of return on investment.

Pro Active Assignment Planning

It must be the most common complaint of the mobility professional: “I’ve just been asked to move x and their family to Nigeria, by the beginning of next month.” Not enough notice, and a real lack of information around the context – why am I moving this person? A bigger challenge arises in the lack of foresight this reactive approach gives us – how can we forecast future mobility demand, with a reactive way of working? How can Mobility teams provide insight and expertise to the business, if we can’t see the demand?

The trend has to be towards a pro-active partnership between Talent and Mobility. As Mobility professionals, we can start with the ultimate question: “do you have to have had an international assignment in order to reach a certain level in the organisation?” If the answer is “yes”, then we can start to help the Talent function plan how many IA’s it will need to end up with a Talent pool large enough to fill the future leadership roles. Of course, there is a win-win here – from a business perspective, pro-active planning will provide huge opportunities to reduce cost, and the IA should have a better experience than scrambling to the airport, work permit in hand!

Assignee Selection

There is increasingly a debate around Mobility’s role in selecting assignees – although the most common model by far remains that selection is managed elsewhere, and deployment is managed by Mobility. That may well be the right model – selecting is a very different skill from deploying, after all.

But Mobility undoubtedly has a role to play in supporting good selection: we should be the members of the HR team who best understand how cultural fit (or lack thereof) can make or break an

assignment, how family unrest can do the same, and the critical role of safety and duty of care in certain locations. Mobility teams need to be pro-actively promoting the tools available to the business to assess cultural fit for example, – this is not to prevent assignments from happening, but to guide both the IA and the business towards cultural training, or to provide support for spouses. Again, the opportunity exists for Mobility and Talent to partner – enhancing the success rate of assignments, reducing attrition, and avoiding the inevitable costs (financial and emotional) of failed assignments.

Specific Talent Programmes

Increasingly, leadership development programmes involve an international assignment as a core part of the curriculum. In Diageo for example, our Future Leaders Programme (FLP) requires an 18 month assignment for all participants (about 30-50 per year high potential talent). The assignment is usually to somewhere outside of the employees comfort zone (from a developed to an emerging market for example,) and there is a heavy accent on championing emerging market talent.

For us, this was a fantastic opportunity

to combine most of these trends:

- We worked as equal partners with our Talent team to bring the international aspect of the programme to life – joint communications, co-hosted training sessions etc.
- We can report on any aspect of the programme – from cost, to demographics, to attrition
- We plan well in advance – our two teams plan the assignments at least 6 months before they kick off, and we work with Talent on the country combinations at an early stage
- Assignee selection and learning – we partnered with our cultural training vendor to provide assessment tools and guidance to all participants.

What Does The Future Look Like?

The alignment of Talent and Mobility remains, in my view, in its infancy. Over the next two years, I would expect to see more and more Mobility functions partnering closer with their Talent colleagues (with the possible reporting line changes as a backdrop as well). Mobility functions are and will continue to push for a more strategic role in the Talent agenda.

The “pull” from Talent will continue to be around the power of data, and the ability to add in the often complex colours of Mobility to the Talent landscape.

For Diageo, it's critical to get this right – our purpose as an organisation is to “celebrate life, everyday, everywhere” – we and our Talent colleagues have a powerful role to play together in bringing the purpose to life across our increasingly “borderless” organisation.



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Mobility experience, in a mixture of industry and Big 4 roles, and his CV includes 8 years at Rio Tinto Plc as Head of Global Mobility and Head of Expatriate tax, three years as Director in the EY Human Capital practice, and two years enjoying expatriate life with international SOS, based in Singapore. In his current role, David is responsible for all aspects of Global Mobility, leading a team of mobility professionals in London and Budapest. David is tax qualified with the Association of Taxation Technicians (ATT).

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