

The Impact Of COVID-19 On Global Mobility

When the coronavirus pandemic hit, it impacted every industry, across the globe, but no sector felt the impact more greatly than human resources. Those working in international HR were left scrambling to manage talent across the globe and secure the safety of employees, before moving swiftly from crisis mode into planning for the long-term.

Now the policies and practices workforce management professionals have put in place have helped advance the industry – and all industries – in ways none of us could foresee just a few short years ago. The global mobility function has gained new status in multinational organisations and now we are ‘living with COVID’ the spotlight is on the sector, to see how these new policies and practices hold up and where ways of working will go from here.

So, Just How Did COVID-19 Shake Things Up?

The Employee Mobility Institute (TEMI) partnered with the highly experienced research teams from the University of Technology, Sydney and the University of Sydney late last year, on a research project to determine the impact of COVID-19 on global mobility within multinational organisations.

The research showed COVID-19 exposed patterns and magnified flaws in expatriate management. Policies and practices were rigid, and when it came to remote work, for the most part, not yet fully formed, and this made it difficult to respond quickly to fast-paced change in ways of working. Now we are ‘living with COVID’, a key feature of new policies and practices is controlled flexibility.

The research also highlighted that pre-pandemic there was a clear lack of customisation in safety and security protocols and not enough support for preventing and managing mental health issues, which were exacerbated during the pandemic. We are now seeing much more consideration of locational risks, cybersecurity and individuals’ personal situations, as well as greater support around employee wellbeing, grounded in the context of compliance.

While the number of expatriate assignments typically declined in the early stages of the pandemic, case numbers remained constant and the mobility practitioner’s role expanded and became more complex. With additional demands, workloads increased.

Requirements and expectations for remote work continue to change, and how practitioners attract and retain talent is inherently different in the ‘living with COVID’ landscape. Flexible work and virtual assignments are in high demand and employee wellbeing initiatives are increasingly important. Priorities and metrics remain in a state of flux as practitioners unfreeze, change and freeze again, and new technologies and equitable frameworks are playing critical roles in good workforce management. Having factors in place for determining suitability for remote work, and structures in place for effectively managing remote work so that it can function in a sustainable way, are also necessities.

In a huge positive, by forging new ways of working, new opportunities have arisen, including new ‘niche’ global mobility career opportunities. A ‘Chief Remote Work Officer’ role is emerging, alongside roles that focus on education and communication. These appear to aim to ensure there is common understanding across the organisation regarding the role of the global mobility department and the work it carries out, eradicating jargon and communicating clearly regarding policies and practices in a way all employees can understand. These roles might be more strategic than operational, recognise and act on issues of compliance to maintain the legitimacy and credibility of the department, and identify and communicate regarding potential personal and organisational risks involved in new ways of working.

The research by the University of Technology, Sydney and the University of Sydney, led by Dr Anthony Fee, Dr Mihajla Gavin and Hon Professor Susan McGrath-Champ, offered deep analysis that discerned both the work of global mobility and the broader ‘future of work’, providing unique lines of sight into the phenomenon of global work. The findings were revealed at a TEMI event last month, which can be viewed on TEMI’s YouTube channel.

ABOUT THE EMPLOYEE MOBILITY INSTITUTE

The Employee Mobility Institute (TEMI) is the Australasian talent mobility industry’s professional development body.

TEMI delivers training, networking and educational resources for global workforce management professionals. TEMI also produces the Australasian Mobile Workforce Awards program. The program sees involvement from local and multinational organisations from across Australasia each year.



DEBORAH DE CERFF

Deborah de Cerff is the Founder of The Employee Mobility Institute (TEMI). Her commitment and passion for supporting and strengthening individual and business mobile workforce capability has helped to create a connected, engaged and informed community of more than 2000 global talent mobility practitioners. Deborah has been instrumental in shaping the talent mobility industry in Australia throughout her career, introducing outsourced relocation management services and global mobility advisory services to the Australian business sector, providing strategic and operational global mobility support to major corporations for more than 30 years, launching the Global Mobility Professional (GMP1)[®] industry accreditation program for talent mobility professionals and the TEMI Australasian Mobile Workforce Awards Programme.