

The Fast-Changing Landscape Of Mobility Management Technology

The rigid models of traditional companies aren't always adequate when competing in the new global talent ecosystem. That's why companies are trying to leverage the ebb and flow of international talent by reinventing themselves as platforms for talent. In other words, companies are becoming smart, network-based, flexible platforms designed to match skill supply with work demand while maximising human creativity and ambition. This requires a degree of reinvention for both mobility management teams and HR in general.

At a people level, mobility managers will increasingly see their roles shifting from relocation management to more-integrated talent mobility management, with a greater involvement in issues of strategic cost management, resourcing/recruiting and talent pool management.

In terms of technology and operation processes, mobility management is moving from manual tasks, rigid reports and in-person services to process automation, enhanced employee experience and elements of self-service.

Mobility technology needs to adapt to this platform logic, and new solutions are emerging to help manage complex mobility programmes by bringing together all aspects of an organisation's international and domestic assignments, along with data, in one place. This platform approach provides an interactive, configurable, real-time data and content experience while simplifying workflows, lowering costs, reducing risks and tracking the return on investment.

This article examines the trends leading to the development of new mobility technology and what organisations need to consider when implementing new solutions.

New Technology Adoption Is Gathering Pace

HR teams responsible for managing employers' expatriate workforces have traditionally used a wide range of technology to help them with expatriate administration, from simple Excel spreadsheets, word-processed templates and email messages, to robust suites of cloud-based

integrated databases, calculators, employee websites and monitoring tools that can turn almost any aspect of the assignee experience into data.

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Although nearly two out of three employers surveyed (60%) still rely on Excel and Word to manage their programmes, that percentage is down from 71% in Mercer's same survey four years earlier. Use of outside vendor software varies significantly by region, ranging from a high of 40% of surveyed employers in North America to 21% in Europe, only 9% in Asia-Pacific and 3% in Latin America (source: Mercer's Worldwide Survey of International Assignment Policies and Practices, 2017).

The impact of technology and the growing expectations of new generations of expatriates

is already being felt in day-to-day operations. Companies and HR risk being outpaced by digital changes as individuals witness the fast evolution of technology at home - an evolution not always matched by the slower development of technology in the workplace. These technological developments go hand in hand with a business need for real-time mobility data reporting, improved compliance and the use of metrics and analytics to support decision-making.

Factors Influencing Mobility Management Technology Needs

When adopting new technologies, a number of factors should be taken into account to evaluate requirements and potential challenges:

- Mobility Programme Size and Complexity**
 How many assignees and moves are initiated each year? And how many different types of moves (long-term, short-term or even commuters and extended business travellers) should be managed with the system? What about future development? What can be anticipated based on current business expansion plans for the coming years?
- Organisation Model**
 Is the mobility function centralised globally, partly decentralised between different hubs/expertise centres or fully managed by the local HR team in each country? To what extent should the system be in-house or outsourced? What are the key functionalities that need to remain in-house? (Often, it's those linked to policy governance and communication.)
- Stakeholder Requirements**
 How will the different stakeholders involved in the mobility process be integrated? The system will be used by the mobility team/HR, but what about other parts of HR (talent management), line management and the assignees themselves? How will they connect to the system and benefit from it, and what are their expectations?
- Approach to Governance and Compliance**
 Will the new system facilitate compliance and governance by allowing tracking of assignees, flagging deadlines and tracking important issues?
- Cost Management**
 Can the new system help assess the real total cost of mobility, including full assignment management costs (budgeted

and actual)? Will it help generate process efficiencies and increase employee satisfaction, and can these benefits be quantified? Articulating a clear business case and showing the added value of a new system to management is a prerequisite for success.

- **Changing Employee Expectations**

The unique characteristics of the new generations are sometimes exaggerated, but many companies say employees are increasingly requesting to manage at least part of their relocations themselves. A full self-service solution isn't suitable for all employees; keep in mind that younger generations are no better-equipped than their predecessors to deal with difficulties and financial issues linked to an international career. Flexibility and self-service approaches need to be balanced with duty of care and complemented by detailed guidelines, practical support and education. Technology needs to facilitate this balancing act.

- **Company-Specific History and Past Practices**

Stakeholders' views on mobility and technology are often influenced by previous experiences. A number of technology solutions and processes may have been tried in the past - some of them successful, others not. Although the people in charge of these previous solutions might be long gone, the perception of mobility management technology within the company could still reflect their experiments. Understanding the specific history of mobility and technology implementation within the company helps mitigate such concerns and prejudices.

Mitigating The Biggest Headaches Of New Technology Adoption

Adopting new technologies can lead to improvement, but experience shows that such changes can involve significant effort from the talent mobility team.

Some of the biggest headaches reported by management include integration, configuration, change management, project management and reporting.

Other significant headaches involve HR organisational redesign, HRIS vendor selection and building the business case.

Existing Technology Solutions And Integration

For the mobility team, being strategic means interacting with other departments. Mobility shouldn't be managed in isolation from the rest of the business. From a technology standpoint, this implies a degree of system integration.

It is rarely possible to implement a new

solution without taking into account the existing systems used by HR and the rest of the business. Information should flow from one system to the others smoothly without manual intervention or uploads. How new and existing systems should interact with each other will soon become a burning implementation issue if not well-planned in advance.

System integration is also a precondition to providing real, in-depth analytics, drawing from sources of data spread between different systems and business units (mobility, HR and talent management systems but also finance and other parts of the business).

Although technology cannot solve all issues, integrated systems can help bridge the gap - between departments in general and between mobility and talent management in particular.

But integration isn't just a question of system compatibility. It involves effective implementation and configuration.

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Implementing And Configuring Systems

Implementations that last months can be challenging for small teams that still need to manage day-to-day activities during the transition period. Implementation activities shouldn't be underestimated and need to be included in the calendar and operation planning.

Additional tasks not linked to the technology itself but still important for

a successful implementation need to be anticipated. For example, harmonising existing policies and eliminating inconsistencies is often part of the pre-implementation process. Data migration can be a challenge due to formatting and labelling inconsistencies. Required data may be hosted in different systems and in different countries. The data might not have been not recorded for a sufficient period of time or captured consistently. Without preparation work and support from IT, it will be difficult to access relevant information. Moving data between systems and integrating them might also lead to data privacy issues that need to be reviewed by compliance and legal teams.

All these efforts require strong leadership support and efficient project management.

Staffing Level And Expertise

The best system in the world won't deliver added value if users aren't properly trained to use it or if it's perceived to be too complex to use. The objective is to have autonomous users who can operate without requiring assistance from other teams (like IT) and who can leverage the features of the new system (automation of certain processes) to free up time to focus on more-strategic business issues. Adoption of new technology implies upskilling the mobility team - not necessarily to turn mobility professionals into IT experts but to familiarise them with tools and methodologies, such as analytics and agile management, not previously part of their day-to-day tasks.

Leadership Involvement

Are the senior leaders taking the right steps to make this organisational change work? Securing leadership support early enough to promote change is part of the de-risking exercise that will limit potential problems and friction between mobility stakeholders down the line. This is crucial for a strong business case.

Preparing The Business Case: The Added Value Of The New Generation Of Mobility Management Platforms

Adapting To The New Realities Of Mobility

Years ago, mobility management was dominated by the opposition between traditional expatriates sent on long-term assignments and employees localised in the host destination. Many tools and approaches were designed to support this dichotomy. The current talent mobility landscape is far more complex due to the globalisation and diversification of the workforce as well as the multiple forms of mobility: long-term assignments but also short-term moves, permanent relocations, locally hired foreigners, commuters, extended business trips, employee-initiated moves, or even moving jobs to people as opposed to moving people to jobs. Furthermore, some of the future

assignees might not be in-house employees - the rise of the expatriate gig worker will require more agility from talent mobility teams.

These evolutions are transforming the purview of mobility teams and forcing them to consider new approaches to compensation, career and process management. Mobility technology needs to reflect these changes.

The Value Of Integration

An integrated approach for the mobility function, with a focus on global operating structure, technology, policies and processes, is an important element in an employer's effort to better align the mobility function with strategic business priorities.

From a practical perspective, one benefit of an integrated platform is the integration between mobility management and talent management, resulting in a greater focus on recruitment and retention strategies as well as on identifying skills gaps. Talent management issues constitute some of the biggest barriers to mobility: 24% of companies report difficulties with identifying the right candidate, and 21% report career management problems (source: Mercer's Worldwide Survey of International Assignment Policies and Practices, 2017).

Mastering Compliance Issues

An integrated mobility platform allows the mobility team to both act as an adviser to the business and anticipate risks and compliance issues. Compliance and risk management are often split between departments and geographies. Mobility professionals are essential points of contact and facilitators for these issues.

Managing Costs

As many employers (37% of participants in Mercer's Worldwide Policies and Practices Survey) think current conditions are too costly, traditional cost-cutting approaches, focused on reducing assignees' allowances and premiums or drastically limiting the number of expatriates, often fail to meet employers' objectives and could lead to lower assignee retention. Cost management needs to be reframed to integrate not just the cost of assignees' packages but the overall cost of the mobility function as well as the cost of attrition, failed assignments and missed opportunities. Capturing all these elements requires an integrated mobility platform.

Ultimately, the challenge of cost management is linked to the value of international assignments - and how to measure it.

Enabling Fact-Based Decisions: Cost Reporting, Metrics And Analytics

What is the real added value of global mobility for the business? All too often, the answer remains vague, and many assignments are initiated without strong evidence of actual benefit to the company

and the employee. The new possibilities offered by the rapid development of artificial intelligence have led to a growing appetite from management for detailed metrics and analytics. Eighty-three percent of respondents cited cost - and metrics-reporting as important or very important skills that will be required by mobility teams (source: Mercer's How Global Mobility Is Responding to New Dilemmas, August 2018).

Making sure the basics are in place in terms of metrics and cost-tracking is a first step.

But a real differentiator for HR professionals will be the use of new technology to develop meaningful analytics and turn the results into actionable suggestions to improve people management.

Delivering A User-Centric Experience To Increase Employee Satisfaction

The results of Mercer's Global Talent Trends 2019 study reveal a growing appetite for greater personalisation and the development of employee value propositions to address the needs of different assignee groups. The objective is not to create a new policy for each group or even discard existing segmented policies, but rather to understand how current approaches answer the specific requirements of each individual and how these approaches should be communicated.

New technologies allow companies to push information to their assignees that is both relevant and tailored to their specific needs. Users (assignees and their families as well as internal stakeholders) can access dynamic host-location information. Employee satisfaction can be monitored before, during and after assignments through online pulse surveys. Successful integrated communication can position talent mobility as a core component of a company's employer branding.

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Yvonne is the Mercer's Global Mobility Product Solutions Leader as well as the European Mobility Business Leader. She is currently leading the development of Mercer's new Mobility Management Platform – an innovative solution to help manage complex mobility programmes by bringing all aspects of an organisation's international assignments together in one place. Yvonne has more than 20 years of experience and has been instrumental in driving the implementation of mobility management solutions globally. She was leading the European Global Mobility Technology & Implementation Projects from 2012 - 2014. She played a key role in the design of international compensation solutions and Cost of Living approaches for a number of leading firms globally. She is a regular speaker at Mercer's Expatriate Management seminars and conferences around the globe.

Please don't hesitate to contact Yvonne to discuss about Mercer's Mobility Management Platform or other mobility matters.

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The focus of some of his recent projects was on identifying mobility megatrends/new management dilemmas, developing mobility analytics, fostering mobile talent diversity, developing international talent pools as well as on practical issues related to alternative assignee compensation models.

Olivier is also involved the organisation of several mobility events and is a prolific blogger on talent mobility issues. Articles from Olivier and other Mercer experts can be found at mobilityexchange.mercer.com

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