

# Key Trends in Global Mobility

**The RES Forum is an online community of senior in-house International Human Resources Professionals with over 500 members in over 30 countries. One of the Forum's core aims is to facilitate information exchanges between forum members on policy and practice within HR Global Mobility through member e-surveys and email exchanges.**

March 2014 saw the launch of the third RES Forum report, authored by Professor Michael Dickmann of the Cranfield Business School, on key trends in mobility. The 2014 report is an amalgamation of all RES Forum member information exchanges over the last 12 months, amounting to 50 member e-surveys and 250 spot emails exchanged between the Forum membership.

However, the report is so much more than an amalgamation of data – it not only aims to analyse the 'real life' information and data from the RES membership but overlays that reality with both academic and professional research on global mobility, incorporating research on both international HR and strategic talent management. In the report itself we can therefore see theory compared to practice over a number of key areas touching the mobility world, including compensation, organisational development, talent management, programme compliance and technology.

So what are the highlights of the report? These can be broken down into 5 key themes as follows:

## The Role of the Mobility Function

From the information provided on the role of the mobility function we can almost feel the tension between the mobility function and the broader HR function, as the global mobility function fights to position itself as a strategic rather than a service orientated support function.

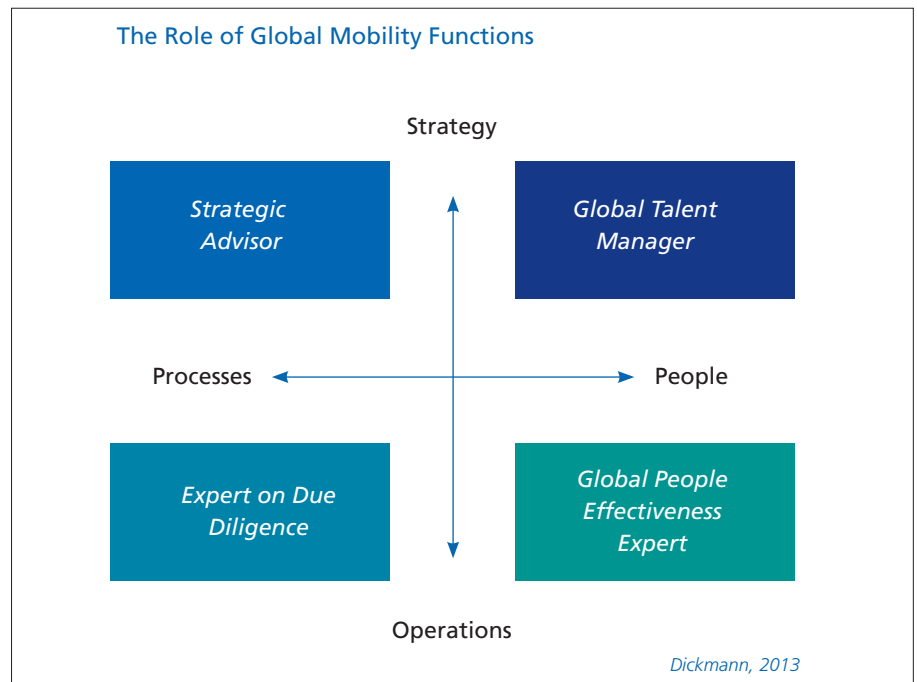
The core view of the function entails four main value propositions: due diligence and programme compliance, expert on global people effectiveness, an inherent part of global talent management and global mobility as strategic advisor to the business. An unusual, major trend is to use international assignments for organisational transformation and restructuring. This adds a further, strategic

dimension to the work of global mobility departments.

The global mobility function knows where it needs to be, but how can it get there? At the RES Forum, our opinion is that there is only one route to that strategic positioning and that is through greater alignment of the mobility function with the talent management function in HR. The mobility function forming part of a Reward function might give mobility technical kudos, but in doing so it risks becoming a dark science of technical but confusing concepts rather than an easily accessible, strategic lever of talent management for organisations. Forming part of shared services takes the global

and institutional knowledge, leading to more effective organisations. Also having employee development (international or domestic) as a meaningful opportunity for employees to grow their careers, allows companies to focus less on financially expensive rewards and more on an intangible, but ultimately rewarding and engaging, element of their package, through which employees can grow their careers.

Our research shows that more than two thirds of organisations have a dedicated top talent strategy and almost half have a talent pipeline. There is also clearly a perception amongst mobility professionals that the effectiveness



mobility function even further away from any sort of strategic perception and positioning.

## Mobility in the Context of Organisational Development and Talent Management

A key emerging trend in the world of global mobility is the increasing role mobility plays in supporting organisational redesign and the movement of talent in the broadest sense – the concept is simple: having the right talent in place and developing your own talent saves the company money (not having to buy in expensive talent) and also improves organisational

of worldwide talent management is being supported by global mobility management. However, long-term career planning through global mobility for the leaders of the future is still in its infancy in many organisations.

## Global Mobility and Compliance Management

Our member surveys indicate that there is the ever increasing burden on mobility professionals in ensuring programmes are compliant with the multitude of areas which their world touches, including payroll, tax, social security, immigration and Sarbanes Oxley amongst others. When considering compliance one might also reflect on the

‘duty of care’ obligations of companies with internationally mobile employees.

Our research shows that employers take their duty of care very seriously and have drawn up emergency plans to respond to a variety of natural and political/security crises. In the event of a major incident, it is highly probable that international assignees and their families will be evacuated. About a third of all organisations would also evacuate all local staff. The willingness to proactively intervene, seeking to increase the safety and well-being of their employees, is an indication of a developed sense of corporate responsibility. However, again our research shows that many employers distinguish between local and overseas staff. While there can be sound reasons for this distinction, these multinationals leave themselves open to public scrutiny if there was a crisis in

which their measures backfired against their local staff.

Paternalism and duty of care are cyclical concepts in the world of HR mobility it seems, where companies struggle with empowerment, in offering flexible policy packages, versus the paternalism and arguably less-optimised prescribed policy rule book. The cynics on one side will tell you that ‘flex’ reads ‘chaos’, whilst the opposing opinion is that over-prescribed rules result in less engagement. Can we say with certainty who is right and wrong in this discussion?

### Compensation and Remuneration in Mobility Packages

Package design and the compensation elements of assignment packages are

always a popular area for discussion within the RES Forum. Some interesting information emerges from the RES membership during 2013 and into 2014, namely the continuing predominance of the ‘balance sheet’ as well as the emergence of global nomads or individuals who are on open-ended international commuter assignments.

One of our surveys assessed perspectives on fairness between international assignees and local staff. The data shows that more than half of organisations pay similar base salaries (international assignees – locals) but only a quarter have the same total compensation and benefit package. There is a moderate agreement amongst global mobility experts to provide more benefits to expatriates due to their special circumstances. Beyond fairness and package design considerations, global pensions remain an important emerging topic. Less than a quarter of corporations have a global pension scheme in place but almost half are interested in creating one.

### Global Mobility and Technology

Mobility technology is an area which we hear much about in the Forum as members look to technology to drive workflow and manage expatriate HR data as well as supporting and reducing the need for the Human Resources function to support programmes through systemisation.

We realise, from our research, that there is still a space in the market for a smart technology solution for smaller programmes (less than 30 assignees) evidenced by a majority of smaller programmes still using spreadsheets to manage their programmes.

**So overall we can see the key issues confronting mobility programmes and professionals in 2014 – we would be delighted to provide a full copy of the report for free to all IHRA subscribers. Please just quote ‘IHRA’ and send an email directly to our mail box: [res.forum@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:res.forum@yahoo.co.uk)**



**Andy Piacentini**  
 Partner, The RES Forum  
 Email: [res.forum@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:res.forum@yahoo.co.uk)  
 if you are interested in joining The RES Forum.

