



VISION 2030 RESEARCH

# REMOTE FIRST



## THE REMOTE FIRST WORLD

### VISION 2030 SCENARIO ANALYSIS - I

In January 2025, the RES Forum released a research paper that considered many of the challenges and possibilities that mobility might encounter by the year 2030.

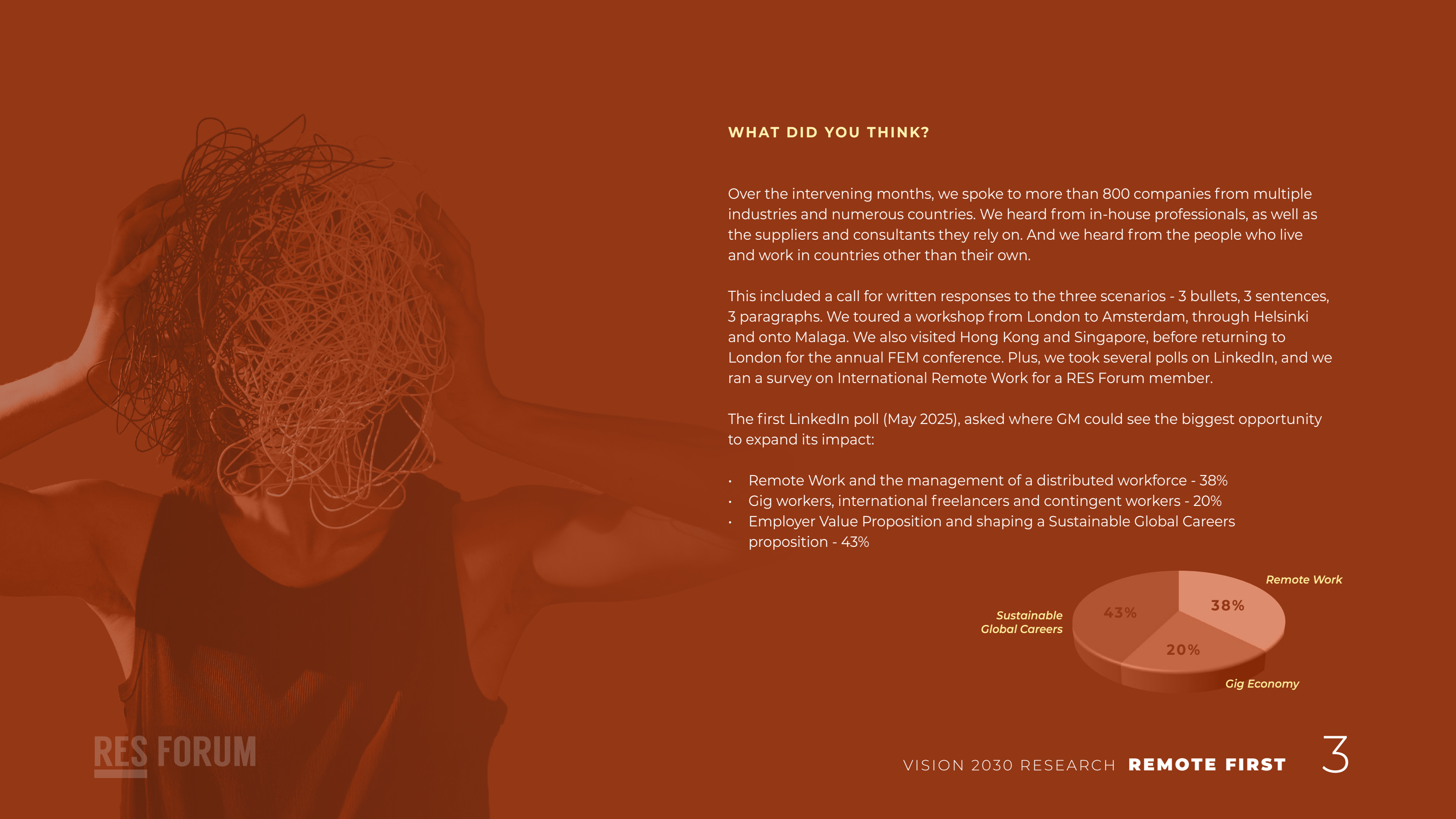
#### *Vision 2030 - the future of Talent Mobility*

The key output from this research was a focus on three scenarios:

- The remote-first world
- Gig economy dominance
- Sustainable, global careers

Based on interviews with a broad mix of Global Mobility (GM) and HR experts and leaders, each scenario attempted to predict the world of international work in 2030. Written as a guide for mobility professionals to help them navigate this potential future, each scenario came with its own set of self-assessment criteria. These were intended to gauge readiness for the given scenario, and help mobility professionals devise effective strategies to manage under those circumstances.





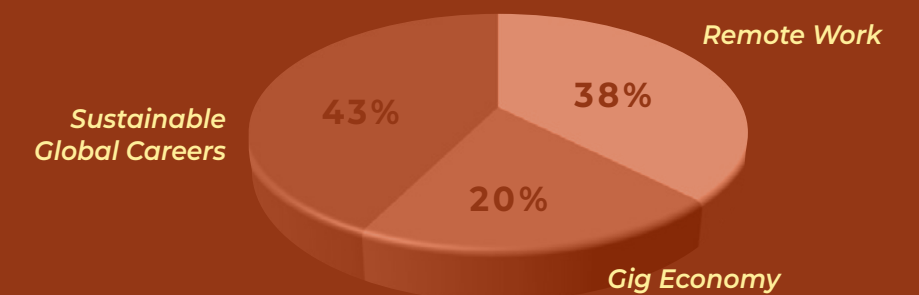
## WHAT DID YOU THINK?

Over the intervening months, we spoke to more than 800 companies from multiple industries and numerous countries. We heard from in-house professionals, as well as the suppliers and consultants they rely on. And we heard from the people who live and work in countries other than their own.

This included a call for written responses to the three scenarios - 3 bullets, 3 sentences, 3 paragraphs. We toured a workshop from London to Amsterdam, through Helsinki and onto Malaga. We also visited Hong Kong and Singapore, before returning to London for the annual FEM conference. Plus, we took several polls on LinkedIn, and we ran a survey on International Remote Work for a RES Forum member.

The first LinkedIn poll (May 2025), asked where GM could see the biggest opportunity to expand its impact:

- Remote Work and the management of a distributed workforce - 38%
- Gig workers, international freelancers and contingent workers - 20%
- Employer Value Proposition and shaping a Sustainable Global Careers proposition - 43%



## **VISION 2030 / SCENARIO 1: THE REMOTE-FIRST WORLD**

*Remote work has evolved from being a temporary solution during the COVID-19 pandemic to becoming the predominant mode of employment. A large portion of the global workforce now operates from various international locations, often far from their organisation's headquarters. The traditional office model is largely phased out, with companies embracing virtual collaboration tools and digital platforms to maintain productivity and connectivity. This shift has brought about significant changes in how organisations manage their employees, maintain their culture, and ensure compliance with varying international regulations. The Remote-First World requires organisations to rethink their strategies for talent management, technological infrastructure, and employee well-being, all while navigating the complexities of cross-border work arrangements.*



## THE MOST WIDELY REPLIED TO, AND THE MOST DIVISIVE

From a LinkedIn Poll that we ran in July 2025, it would appear that the majority of people broadly support remote and hybrid work - in one form or another. Multiple written contributions and workshop responses, however, tells us that the reality isn't so clear cut.

### **Remote Work: long-term solution or short-term fix?**

One of the scenarios from our Vision 2030 study suggests a future where globally distributed organisations and remote work will become the norm.

The responses we have since received clearly show that not everyone agrees.



### WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON PERMANENT REMOTE WORK AS A LONG-TERM MODEL?

- A** - Absolutely - remote-first is the future of work
- B** - Definitely not - long-term success demands in-person collaboration
- C** - Both - hybrid is the answer
- D** - It depends - company origins, culture and leadership style matter

THE RESULTS...

**A - Absolutely**

48%

**B - Definitely not**

4%

**C - Both**

23%

**D - It depends**

27%



## VISION 2030 CONCEPT GRID

To help guide the conversation during the various in-person workshops, we shared a concept grid that picked key points from each of the three scenarios. This both summarised some key trends, and spelled out some useful opportunities. Some of these topics will feature heavily throughout the paper. Others are worthwhile considerations to bear in mind as you read through the opportunities and challenges identified among the many contributions we received.

PILLAR	KEY CHALLENGES / TRENDS	AI OPPORTUNITIES	SUPPLIER ECOSYSTEM EVOLUTION
<b>REMOTE WORK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hybrid, not fully remote</li> <li>• Harder to track productivity and engagement</li> <li>• Cultural challenges</li> <li>• Immigration / tax complexity (digital nomads)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AI-driven productivity and collaboration analytics</li> <li>• Virtual onboarding and cultural immersion tools</li> <li>• Automated risk assessment for tax / immigration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coworking and digital HR service providers</li> <li>• Integrated payroll, compliance and relocation platforms</li> <li>• Cybersecurity and digital workplace partnerships</li> </ul>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the aftermath of COVID-19, it felt as though remote was set to become the predominant mode of work. Over the preceding years, this enthusiasm has cooled significantly. Based on our research, it seems safe to say that hybrid has become the preferred choice among many organisations.

Significant questions remain over policy, process and governance, particularly where international remote work is concerned. Issues around tax, immigration and intellectual property sit alongside cyber security, duty of care and permanent establishment risk as chief concerns. In all cases, company culture remains a hot topic - both in terms of opportunity and risk. Elsewhere, learning and development, career progression and employee integration are considered to be major challenges, particularly where fully remote models are concerned.

As for GM, the opportunities to extend influence are broad and varied. In many organisations, processes and policies still need to be produced, and governance is up for grabs. Company culture needs a place of ownership, particularly in companies that favour a more remote model. Above all, businesses must find the right tools to manage compliance, particularly where there's an international element. Given their existing insight, knowledge and experience of managing complex and ever-changing compliance, GM is best placed to lead this aspect, both from a strategic and an operational perspective.

As one contributor put it, "remote, hybrid and in-person - all three options are on the table." Each organisation must choose which option works best for them. GM has a unique opportunity to deliver the right solution. Done well, and that cherished seat at the top table will be comprehensively consolidated.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF REMOTE WORK

### *In the 21st Century*

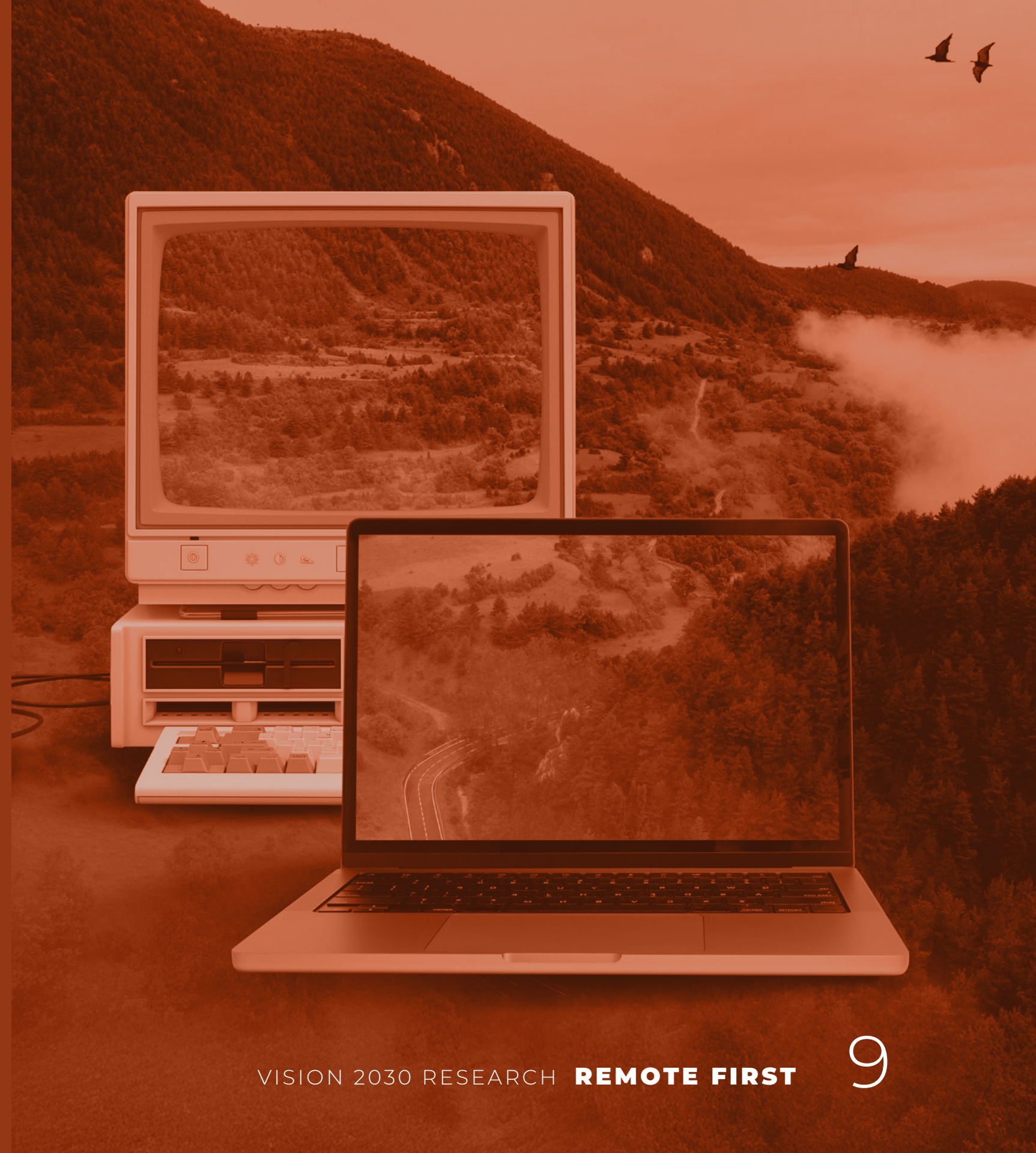
Remote work - even as we know it today - is fairly new. Taking its first steps in the early noughties, the proof of concept was severely tested when the pandemic swept the globe in 2020. With little warning, huge numbers of people were forced to do their jobs from the comfort of their own home. In many cases, sharing desks (sometimes even screens) with children who 'remote-learned' alongside them.

Enter a new age. The office dismissed in an instant. Smart attire dispatched from the waist down, where casual clothes dominated. Zoom made the move to ubiquity as conference calls fought for screen space alongside family quizzes. And the business world quickly adjusted, as work from home became The New Normal.

"What began as a temporary response to the COVID pandemic has evolved into a lasting shift toward more flexible and remote working models," said a Senior Global Mobility Manager in their summary of this major change to working life.

Of course, the pandemic didn't last forever. Gradually the world reopened and people drifted back to the office. Some businesses adjusted their remote work policies to suit the next New Normal. Others mandated a full return to the office. While not necessarily reaching avalanche status, the slide away from remote has gathered pace in the years since.

From the responses we've received, it seems that a schism opened in the business world throughout the early 2020s. Fledgling companies, and those that hatched during, and since, the pandemic are far more likely to remain remote first. Their more established counterparts, particularly those with a large physical footprint, are more keen that their offices are filled with actual footprints. Preferably, those belonging to their employees.





## **WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT REMOTE WORK?**

*Based on our many conversations, there were several recurring positives linked to remote work, both for the employee and the employer. Many of these relate to flexibility and freedom of choice. Cost savings and environmental benefits were also widely recognised.*

## FOR THE EMPLOYEE

Unsurprisingly, flexibility tops the list of employee benefits. The freedom to organise work around life and family is a huge advantage. This also has a knock-on benefit for the employer. According to the Head of GM Operations at a global telecommunications business, "employee engagement surveys consistently show that flexibility is one of the top drivers of satisfaction and retention."

Next to flexibility, work / life balance was widely recognised as a positive of remote work. A Practice Leader of a Global HR business, who started working remotely as far back as 2014, said that "no longer trying to beat traffic to get to afterschool care pick up on time," made her a "better mother and a better employee." In return, she has remained a dedicated member of her team, as well as "a trusted resource and mentor," who supports other colleagues as they move into remote roles.

Cost savings were broadly seen as a benefit for employees. Removing the daily commute and reducing requirements for childcare allows people to cut some significant monthly spend. Writing on LinkedIn, one commentator added that, for many - particularly working parents - remote "isn't a lifestyle perk. It's economic survival." With monthly commuting and childcare costs mounting to triple figures, remote work could make a significant difference for many families.

As well as the apparent freedom to live and work anywhere in the world, there are certain groups for whom remote and hybrid is particularly important. "People with elderly parents or young children, and people who are neurodivergent, benefit from the freedom and flexibility of remote work," continued the Head of GM Operations. They go on to say that, for these groups, it is "unrealistic and unreasonable" to expect a full return to the office. "Do that," he warns, "and you'll lose them, plain and simple."

## FOR THE EMPLOYER

As we've already seen, flexibility is considered to be a leading driver of employee satisfaction and retention, offering a boost to the Employer Value Proposition (EVP). What's more, a Menti poll run during RES Connect Helsinki, placed employee flexibility as the second "most impactful GM trend" for the remainder of 2025.

More broadly, it was considered that remote work can be a useful weapon in the war on talent. Not only is it a draw for many employees, it also attracts a wider, more diverse talent pool, and allows employers to extend their search beyond traditional geographic boundaries. In some cases, even beyond borders. Although, more on that later.

Cost savings were also considered a potential employer benefit. During the Vision 2030 workshop at IBIS 2025, one participant revealed that their organisation implemented remote work as early as 2005, "with substantial cost benefits."

Several contributors suggest that employers can use remote work as a chance to review location strategy. Either by moving to a cheaper location or downsizing their office to allow for fewer employees on site, businesses are able to make substantial savings.

## **OTHER OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS**

"Remote work is a great mechanism to *promote sustainability*, because you're removing employee commutes to and from the office."

This view, from a Director of GM and Immigration in North America, was supported in several Vision 2030 workshops. And it makes sense. Reducing the commute not only helps save money, while promoting a healthy work / life balance for the employee, it also has an environmental benefit. Considering the potential for virtual international collaboration, the possibilities for sustainability are increased substantially.





## Building a thriving remote workforce: **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

**WRITTEN BY GINA GROVER, PRACTICE LEADER,  
ADVISORY SERVICES, WEICHERT WORKFORCE MOBILITY**

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### REMOTE WORK.

When you look at it as two words in the English language, it seems like a pretty simple concept. Yet, when examined as a talent management tool, it takes on great complexity and can even stir up some controversy.

There are at least two prevailing points of view to remote work:

1. People who feel it leads to reduced productivity and isolation, and
2. Those that tout its flexibility and work-life balance.

No matter which side of the argument you're on, it's clear that remote work is here to stay. In response, we must adapt our once traditional ways of managing talent to accommodate people who work remotely.



# BUILDING A THRIVING REMOTE WORKFORCE: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

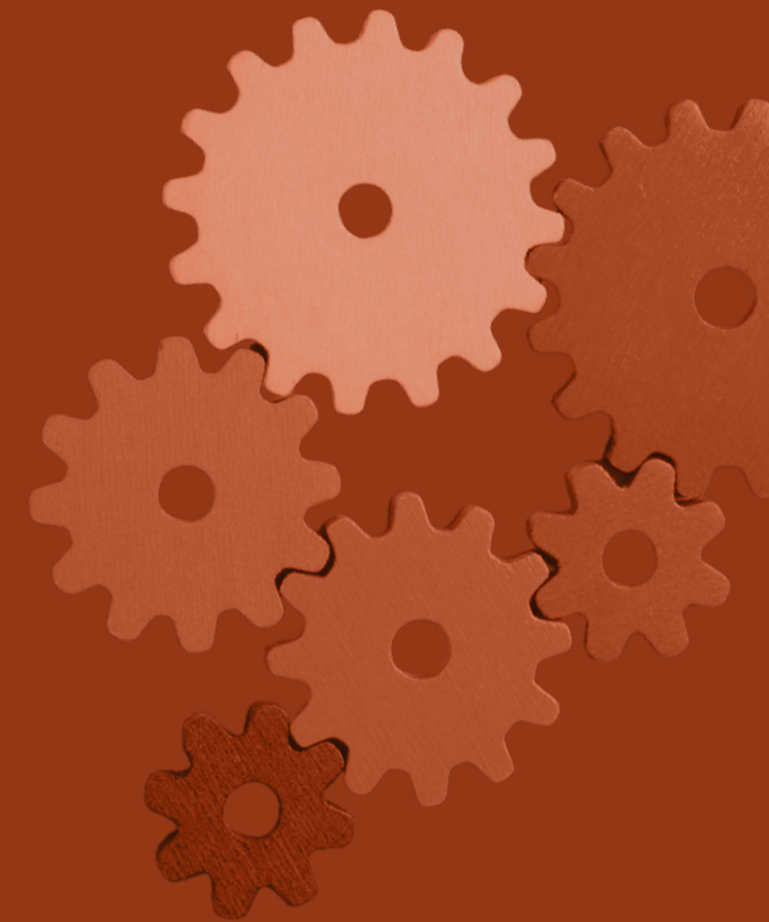
BY GINA GROVER, WEICHERT WORKFORCE MOBILITY

## PEOPLE HAVE CHANGED, MOBILITY MUST ADAPT

As global mobility teams have gained that much coveted “seat at the table”, so they are tasked with designing solutions that go beyond the transactional programs of the past, to meet the evolving needs of modern employees.

In my experience working with clients to create programs, flexibility is a dominant force behind initiatives like domestic short-term assignments, remote and hybrid work policies, and gig work policies. The traditional 3-year long term international assignment is no longer financially feasible for many companies. Besides, it’s not the talent attractor it once was.

Dual career partners and familial responsibilities are keeping employees closer to home. Mobility programs are recognizing that, to get talent where it’s needed, more flexible options must to be made available. Commuter work arrangements and virtual assignments, for example.



# BUILDING A THRIVING REMOTE WORKFORCE: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

BY GINA GROVER, WEICHERT WORKFORCE MOBILITY

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

It appears that many mobility leaders are adapting to the needs of their employees. Leadership, meanwhile, can struggle to maintain and grow their company culture with a workforce that is no longer all in the same building, let alone in the same time zone. To draw in fresh talent and continue thriving, organizations need to focus on purposeful and intentional leadership that extends past the boundaries of the workplace.

### Set the right tone from day one

A new employee is not the only party that needs to make a good first impression. The onboarding process sets the tone for a company's culture and sets the expectation for a trusting relationship. Employees need to learn the behaviors that best reflect the company culture.

- Should they meet with their team on a weekly basis?
- Do they have the flexibility to adjust work hours to meet family obligations?

These conversations are critical to help employees, both new hires and "veterans" alike, adapt to their new role.

### In it for the long-haul

Continuing to foster trust and communication are key to maintaining company culture.

- Opportunities to collaborate both virtually and in-person should be valued by both leadership and other members of the organization.
- Recognizing behaviors that reflect the company's culture encourages further positive behavior across the enterprise.
- Cultivating non-work-related collaboration, both in team meetings and groups dedicated to discussing similar shared interests, gives employees the feeling of community, and encourages conversation and collaboration beyond members of the same team.

These types of environments lead to new ways of thinking and can offer support to employees who may, at times, feel isolated.

# BUILDING A THRIVING REMOTE WORKFORCE: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

BY GINA GROVER, WEICHERT WORKFORCE MOBILITY

## A RIGHTFUL PRIVILEGE

When I first started as a remote employee in early 2014, it was a way to balance my work responsibilities with my home-life responsibilities. No longer trying to beat traffic to get to afterschool care pick up on time made me a better mother and a better employee. The support provided by my company was invaluable. I knew I had to ensure that I both continued to make my contributions at work, and be available as a trusted resource and mentor, as more colleagues became remote workers.

I viewed remote work as a privilege. Now it seems to be viewed (by many) as more of a right. Successful companies and successful remote employees see it as a combination of both. With the rise of digital nomad visas and greater technology solutions, cultivating company culture across borders will be key to maintaining and growing a thriving talent community.





## SO, WHAT'S WRONG WITH REMOTE WORK?

There were several recurring negatives relating to remote work. For the employee, these relate to mental health challenges, as well as concerns over personal development and career progression. For organisations, the risks largely revolved around culture, communication and compliance, particularly in relation to international remote workers.



## FOR THE EMPLOYEE

The most common argument against remote work relates to social isolation and loneliness. On the face of it, this carries significant concerns for mental health. However, the issue runs deeper, with recent research finding direct links between loneliness and poor physical health.

In addition to the risks linked with social isolation, an Exec Director at an HR Services business in Asia references the blurring of lines between home and work, and the potential mental and emotional strain this can cause. Furthermore, an HR SVP based in the APAC region, goes on to talk about the risk of "burnout" as a result of employees finding themselves unable to switch off.

Particularly for younger and less experienced employees, remote work presents a challenge when it comes to mentoring and learning. An established mobility leader in the tech sector observed that younger employees can "miss out on training, learning by observing others in the office, and social interactions." Similarly, the Head of Business Development for a global transportation business commented that "skills such as public speaking, conflict resolution, and interpersonal communication often emerge from in-person interactions." These are lost when employees avoid the office, leading to a long-term impact on professional growth.

For employees of all ages, another challenge comes with taking on a new role, particularly when joining a new company. "Having started two roles since 2020," explains a Senior Client Relationship Manager in a global immigration firm, "it has definitely been more challenging to transition and integrate into a new role and organisation when working from home." For younger employees, with less experience in the workplace, this could be an even bigger challenge.

## FOR THE EMPLOYER

The issues around physical distance affect the employer as much as the employee. Communication, collaboration, and idea generation are all cited as challenges for employers of a remote workforce. Building skills, sharing knowledge and developing employees requires in-person interaction. Particularly where younger employees are concerned, it was felt that a dispersed workforce would inhibit the organisation's ability to share skills and knowledge through regular interaction and person to person mentoring.

Although not always presented as a risk per se, company culture is a major focus for respondents whose organisation has adopted a remote first policy. It is certainly clear that a dispersed workforce doesn't naturally lend itself to a cohesive culture. Indeed, it seems that a great deal of effort is needed in this area in particular.

When the remote worker crosses an international border, an entirely new series of challenges are set in motion. Compliance is a huge risk, as is tax, immigration and payroll. Pay equity and compensation strategy can be a concern, particularly where a remote worker sets themselves up in a country that otherwise has lower wages. Equally challenging are the risks around digital security and data sovereignty, as well as concerns over geographical provenance - and associated tax implications - of intellectual property. Finally, many respondents mention the risks linked with Permanent Establishment issues.

Our International Remote Work survey, which focuses largely on policy, uncovered a great deal of inconsistency with governance. Where organisations are still developing (or are in desperate need to update) their remote work policies, the approval process can easily become unmanageable. Where there is an international element, this burden sits squarely with GM, adding to their tax, compliance and immigration headaches.

## OTHER RISKS AND CHALLENGES

In his "alternative tale of a remote first future," the CEO of a global hospitality business raises the prospect of social and community disruption. "Petty neighbourly disputes have become commonplace as the claustrophobia of home working causes friction," he muses.

Meanwhile, another senior exec talks about "a broader trend of societal disconnection," as more people conduct more of their lives from the comfort of their own home. "While technology enables convenience," they say, "it also risks fostering an environment where people are less inclined to interact with their communities or engage in shared experiences."

More prosaically, it was noted in several contributions that remote working simply doesn't lend itself to all cultures and industries. In their piece, the SVP from APAC explains why Eastern cultures, with their more collectivist approach, don't view remote work as favourably as the more individualist West. This sentiment was supported during workshops in Singapore and Hong Kong.



REMOTE WORK



## REMOTE WORKING IS NOT ALWAYS AS SIMPLE AS IT SEEMS

WRITTEN BY SEEMA KAUL, GLOBAL MOBILITY  
AND DOMESTIC RELOCATION MANAGER, DRAX

## REMOTE WORKING IS NOT ALWAYS AS SIMPLE AS IT SEEMS

BY SEEMA KAUL, DRAX

With digital fluency and a strong orientation toward cross cultural experiences, remote working has become almost a perquisite for many in today's workforce. With this comes a strong emphasis on flexibility, work life balance and purposeful work, allowing for career progression and stability.

However, international remote work brings with it many complexities which are expensive, time consuming and involve risk. All of these make it prohibitive for companies to adopt this work model on a wider scale without restriction.

Some of the complexities that need assessing before approving remote work requests, include:

- Tax compliance
- Social security requirements
- PE issues
- Immigration compliance
- Employment law
- Data protection
- Cybersecurity
- Duty of care
- Travel and health insurance
- Increasing global emergencies / unrest

An additional layer of complexity is added when you consider the variances by country.

# REMOTE WORKING IS NOT ALWAYS AS SIMPLE AS IT SEEMS

BY SEEMA KAUL, DRAX

## NOT ALL OPPORTUNITIES ARE EQUAL

Digital roles, where minimal physical presence is required, are more adaptable to international remote settings - especially where there is a clearly defined guidance in place. Equally, roles requiring in-person presence such as those in manufacturing, laboratory research, client facing, etc. will continue to be ineligible for remote working.

With all the above implications, many smaller or more traditional companies are likely to treat international remote working as means to address exceptional requests, such as allowing someone to be with family in their country of origin, or for executive cross-border hires. Larger and resource rich organisations have the benefit of running these programs more widely. Although, they still face compliance challenges.

## A SIMPLER APPROACH TO REMOTE WORK IS POSSIBLE

Managing these new ways of working will prove tricky without suitable technology particularly to assess, approve and track on an individual basis.

If regulatory, operational, and financial barriers to international remote work can be improved, the model becomes significantly more viable and attractive for employers to adopt, which will be particularly beneficial in the war for talent.

## HYBRID WORK

### *The current New Normal?*

According to a Head of GM Operations, "the argument over remote work is over. Essentially, hybrid has won the day." This view was supported by many respondents, who felt that hybrid offered an acceptable balance between the risks of remote and the constrictions of being confined to the office full time.

Addressing many of these shared concerns, a Head of Business Development warns that it's "essential to approach this shift [to remote work] with caution and foresight." However, "by adopting a hybrid approach and prioritizing employee well-being and cultural cohesion," he continues, "we can create a future of work that is both productive and humane."

Continuing the theme, a Director of GM and Immigration from North America makes the case that remote work won't entirely replace the office. For all its positives, "in-person collaboration is still beneficial and, depending on the nature of the role, necessary." For them, a global hybrid model provides the best of both worlds. Improving cross-border compliance, supporting collaboration, driving diversity, building loyalty, and supporting the employee.

In her piece, the owner of a South Africa based relo firm envisions a world where "hybrid isn't a compromise - it's a strategy." Here, employees "divide their time between remote work and collaborative office days." This model offers flexibility without losing the benefits of in-person collaboration. Plus, this approach can be tailored to meet the demands of the business, and allows for the individual needs of the employees.

If we hop off the carousel of New Normals and allow our heads to stop spinning, if only for a few moments, it's clear that compromise is required. Yes, some organisations will demand a near-complete return to the office, as is their right. Others will adopt a truly remote-first approach - and they'll attract the employees who prioritise the flexibility and work / life balance this provides. In between, where the majority sit, hybrid provides a happy (or, at least, suitable) compromise. How it looks - and what the individual employees demand - is a matter of choice. This could be where battles are won and lost in the never-ending war for talent. If, indeed, this is a battleground that you choose to enter.

## INTERNATIONAL REMOTE WORK

### *A minefield of tax, compliance and immigration concerns*

***"Between domestic remote work and international remote work, the main risk lies with the latter."***

This comment, made during our Vision 2030 workshop at IBIS 2025, was echoed throughout the majority of the contributions and workshops.

"The biggest issue I see is that many organizations still underestimate how complicated it is when people work across borders." In this, a GM consultant captures a recurring theme. "Tax, immigration, and employment rules are different in each country," he continues, going on to point out how easy it can be to slip into non-compliance.

As well as compliance, this consultant also highlights the challenges that businesses can encounter when working across time zones. "When teams are spread out globally, it often means people end up working odd hours, and there is a delay in communication." What's more, this lack of proximity has a knock-on effect for managers who "can lose touch with what's happening in their teams."

Another regular concern related to Permanent Establishment risks. Here, there is an almost universal agreement that 30 days should be the limit for any employee working remotely across borders. "A 30 day limit on international work from anywhere is often

treated as the safe choice," says the CEO of a GM tech platform that supports international remote work. "It is the line that feels comfortable from a compliance perspective," they continue, "helping avoid the complexities of tax residency, immigration and permanent establishment risk." The problem, according to this particular contributor, is that any less than 30 days can impact an organisation's ability to attract talent in this highly competitive market.

A GM Leader in the tech sector summarised some other common concerns about the practical aspects of International Remote Work. Data security, corporate tax, and employee work authorisations are all themes that frequently crop up amongst the responses. Tax is particularly vexing for this writer, who comments that, "The Global Compact on minimum corporate tax helps illustrate the dilemma here." Agreement within the global community clarifies that "companies should report the correct revenue in the jurisdictions in which they operate." According to this writer, some small, entrepreneur-led companies don't do this, "even while championing their ESG credentials on their websites and marketing materials."

The same contributor goes on to say that the future for International Remote Work will continue to be difficult. "Until jurisdictions not only relax immigration rules with things like digital nomad visas, as well as relaxing corporate tax, payroll, and social security rules, we will continue to have a world where cross-border remote work is superficially available but, in many ways, impractical in practice."





## Global mobility in a remote-first world: **BALANCING FLEXIBILITY AND COMPLIANCE**

**WRITTEN BY A SENIOR GLOBAL MOBILITY MANAGER IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY**

As a global mobility professional within a large international travel organisation, I've witnessed first-hand the transformation of the world of work. What began as a temporary response to the COVID pandemic has evolved into a lasting shift toward more flexible and remote working models. At our organisation, we've embraced this change through the launch of a programme that enables employees to work from another country for up to 30 days per calendar year, provided they meet key principles. These include not basing themselves in any of our offices abroad and avoiding countries identified as high risk from a safety or security perspective. Alongside this, we're also seeing growing openness to supporting employee-led international relocation requests, reflecting our commitment to flexibility, employee experience, and global connection.

These evolving models of mobility bring incredible opportunity, as well as a new set of challenges across digital infrastructure, compliance, culture, and employee support. Here's how we're navigating it.



# GLOBAL MOBILITY IN A REMOTE-FIRST WORLD: BALANCING FLEXIBILITY AND COMPLIANCE

BY A SENIOR GLOBAL MOBILITY MANAGER IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

## 1. DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE: BETTER THAN IT'S EVER BEEN, BUT STILL ROOM TO GROW

We've come a long way since the early days of the pandemic. Tools like Microsoft Teams are widely used and nearly everyone shares their video to build a sense of presence. File sharing through OneDrive is seamless, legacy drives are being phased out, and mobile access to systems is secure and user-friendly. Our intranet provides a single source of truth, and shortcuts are working to make it easier for employees to find what they need.

For remote workers, the onus is on the individual to ensure they can work effectively from their chosen destination. In the unlikely event that an employee arrives at their destination and encounters technology or access issues, we have clear parameters and FAQs in place outlining the next steps - typically the use of annual or unpaid leave. Since the programme launched in 2021, we've not received any reports of this being a problem.

That said, we recognise that when IT issues arise, remote workers can feel isolated. Although we have a responsive service desk and some channels for flagging issues (e.g. Teams alerts), there's no known central global platform for widespread notifications, meaning people may be unaware there's even a wider problem. Improving visibility and communication during tech disruptions would be a real win for distributed teams.

## 2. CROSS-BORDER COMPLIANCE: A GROWING PRIORITY

The compliance landscape is becoming more complex by the day, and we're not fully there yet. We don't currently have a global business travel platform, which makes managing risk across jurisdictions more difficult. However, we're aware of this and are actively working on it.

I recently conducted a global compliance risk review and presented the findings to senior leaders. While cross-border business travel is currently seen as a low-risk area, pre-travel authorisations and immigration checks are increasing, especially across the EU and UK. The message is clear: this can't be ignored much longer.

Thanks to strong relationships, our HR colleagues are becoming more proactive in flagging cases to the Global Mobility team, often through informal conversations or our presence in team meetings. We're seeing positive progress, but there's still an opportunity to formalise this into a more consistent, embedded process.

We have a clear, well-governed process. We know who's using the programme, we track average travel durations and home / host countries through a live Tableau dashboard, and we conduct regular reviews with internal stakeholders.

# GLOBAL MOBILITY IN A REMOTE-FIRST WORLD: BALANCING FLEXIBILITY AND COMPLIANCE

BY A SENIOR GLOBAL MOBILITY MANAGER IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

## 3. CULTURAL COHESION: INCLUSION, FLEXIBILITY AND CHALLENGES ACROSS BORDERS

Our cultural ethos is “Come as you are”, and this genuinely plays out in our approach to flexible and remote working. Virtual events and hybrid formats are helping to connect people who may never meet in person. For example, we recently ran a panel for working dads as part of an Employee Resource Group, which was streamed live for anyone to join remotely. Town halls are also regularly streamed and recorded, and our learning and development offering includes self-paced and virtual events like speed networking sessions, helping remote colleagues stay connected.

We tend to avoid EOR solutions or third-party employment models, as we believe they dilute our culture and employee connection. If we don't have an entity in a country, we generally decline the request to relocate to another country.

With a new UK policy shift (coming into effect in September 2025) encouraging employees to return to the office 1 - 2 days per week, we may see new pressure points emerge in our model, particularly with requests for longer-term remote or international working. We're watching this closely.



# GLOBAL MOBILITY IN A REMOTE-FIRST WORLD: BALANCING FLEXIBILITY AND COMPLIANCE

BY A SENIOR GLOBAL MOBILITY MANAGER IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

## 4. EMPLOYEE SUPPORT: STRONG WELLBEING FOCUS

Support for remote workers is integrated into our overall wellbeing strategy and we don't differentiate based on location. We take a holistic approach, covering mental, financial, physical, and social wellbeing. Our Mind Matters Employee Resource Group is open to all employees globally, and while it currently has a predominantly UK-based membership, it offers access to external speakers, shared resources, and opportunities for connection for all.

Our global intranet features a full wellbeing section, offering everything from sleep tips to digital gym discounts, mindfulness exercises, and neurodiversity learning pathways.

Our international remote work programme has become a powerful enabler of work / life balance across our organisation. For many employees, the opportunity to work from their home country or spend extended time with family abroad has had a meaningful impact on their wellbeing, offering a level of emotional connection and flexibility that goes beyond what policies alone can deliver.

The value of the programme is reflected in our data: participation increased by 26% in 2024 compared to 2023, and the total number of international remote work days taken rose by 24%. Crucially, this growth has not resulted in any additional compliance risk, with the average number of days per employee remaining steady at 12.

Looking ahead, I believe global mobility will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping flexible, human-centred work models that align with the evolving expectations of a global workforce. While some organisations are focusing on a return to office-based work, there remains a strong demand for flexibility and cross-border experiences. Global mobility can act as a strategic bridge, balancing individual aspirations with business needs. As companies navigate complex compliance, cultural, and operational landscapes, a well-embedded mobility function can support not just movement, but meaningful connection, enabling businesses to remain agile, inclusive, and globally competitive.



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR GLOBAL MOBILITY TO EXTEND ITS IMPACT

A Client Service Delivery leader from a large GM consultancy firm, is bullish in his claim that, "far from diminishing its significance, remote work is poised to amplify the importance and scale of GM." He continues to say that, as a result of an increase in international collaboration, people and organisations are encouraged to "explore opportunities across the globe."

But what does all this mean for Global Mobility in practice? As our International Remote Work survey demonstrates, mobility is often faced with the prospect of managing compliance for a dispersed workforce without clear policies or well-structured governance. Rather than placing the burden on GM, it presents a clear opportunity for mobility to extend its impact and strategic importance within the organisation.

## ***Policies, processes and governance***

Among the many responses are several case studies where GM has taken the lead in developing policies, processes and governance for international remote and hybrid work. In collaboration with HR, immigration, tax and other relevant parts of the business, GM can develop suitable and practical solutions to the challenges identified throughout this report. At the same time, creating strategic opportunities to lead the implementation and governance of these policies.

GM is in a unique position to own this aspect of remote work. Business-critical factors such as immigration law, tax and international compliance, sit alongside employee considerations like career development, equitable pay and long-term employee satisfaction. Besides, there is a strong chance that implementation and governance will ultimately rest with GM, particularly for international remote work. Why not take the opportunity to own it from the outset?

### Some key considerations

- Eligibility and guardrails - who can work remotely; where can remote work be carried out; how long can employees work away from the office?
- Compliance and immigration - how do you ensure employees remain compliant with your tax and social security obligations; what permanent establishment risks are linked to international remote work; how do you manage immigration and visa considerations for employees (and where does responsibility lie)?
- Data and physical security risk - how can you balance productivity and systems access without compromising data security; which countries / regions represent risks to employee safety and how to monitor and / or restrict access to these locations?
- Approvals and governance - who is responsible for approving remote work requests; how do you manage ongoing monitoring and reporting; how do you balance flexibility and employee satisfaction against risk mitigation and control?
- Regional variation - not every region will be consistent, ensure policies are adaptable and region-specific.

Crucially, GM should create and share guidelines and policy documents, to include a concise global standard on international and domestic remote and hybrid work. This way, implementation and governance are simplified and risks are reduced. If necessary, provide in-person training and build dashboards to support ongoing monitoring, as well as to enable ongoing policy development.



## METRICS THAT MATTER

In developing policies and processes, it is essential to consider how their effectiveness can and will be monitored. As well as protecting the organisation against compliance risks, these metrics also enable GM to demonstrate its strategic importance to the organisation.

There are several areas where metrics can inform the ongoing development of policies and processes, as well as supporting future business cases for changes to these practices.

- Where is the business incurring risk and how is it managing compliance - exceptions by category and reason; days-at-risk avoidance; audit outcomes; completion of return confirmations.
- How to demonstrate talent outcomes against clearly defined objectives - project delivery / assignment success; ongoing career progression; demonstrable productivity metrics.
- How fairly and effectively are remote and hybrid work requests being managed and supported - engagement and inclusion scores; early-career onboarding and mentoring; availability and participation in purposeful-presence events.
- What is the business value and how can it be measured - customer service and delivery time and effectiveness; innovation delivery; cost to serve.



## **INTERNATIONAL REMOTE WORK READINESS CHECK**

*Having explored the opportunities and practical issues of international remote work. It is now time to apply this knowledge in your organisation.*

*Every organisation is different and what seems to be a practical issue for one has been turned into an opportunity by another. Acknowledging these differences, the first and most important step - before exploring practical issues and opportunities - is to understand the status quo in your own organisation.*

The RES Forum International Remote Work Readiness Check consists of 15 questions relating to the five core dimensions of international remote work outlined in our 2023 research paper "Work from Anywhere".

**Step 1**, answer all questions to the best of your knowledge. There are no right or wrong answers, they are simply a guidance for you to calibrate your organisation before investigating your efforts.

**Step 2**, follow the instructions provided at the end of the tool to calculate values for each dimension.

**Step 3**, add your values in the radar chart template (Figure 1) by marking your individual value on the respective dimension. Connect all the dots and, if you like, colour in the area for a straightforward visual overview of your international remote work readiness.

The larger the area, the more prepared your organisation is to exploit the opportunities and overcome practical issues with international remote work. However, beyond this, you can easily and quickly identify the dimensions in which you are doing well already.

If you feel like undertaking your own gap analysis, fill out the tool a second time responding in an 'ideal' (aspirational) mindset.

Charting the status quo and aspiration will highlight opportunities for improvement. Comparing diverse areas (functions, units) within your organisation can help you create a benchmarking approach for intra-organisational international remote work.

**Step One** - Answer each of the following 15 statements by adding a number between 1 and 7. 1 being strongly disagree, 7 being strongly agree.

	Statement	Your Value
1 -	Digital technologies simplify the communication in and between our teams	
2 -	Our organisation uses highly efficient digital technology	
3 -	Our leaders believe that teamwork is possible without being personally present	
4 -	Due to digitisation, employees worldwide have greater possibilities to intensively communicate with each other	
5 -	Our top management team fully supports working from anywhere	
6 -	Our employees are generally highly energetic and positive - whether they work virtually or non-virtually	
7 -	Digital initiatives are actively promoted and implemented by top management	
8 -	Communication in our organisation normally is effective and efficient - irrespective of the means used	
9 -	Routine tasks that don't require creativity are taken over by AI / automation	
10 -	Employees in my organisation are often immersed in their work	
11 -	Leaders in my organisation support the use of digital media to increase promptness and flexibility	
12 -	Employees in my organisation are very enthusiastic about their work	
13 -	Necessary information is shared transparently between leaders and followers	
14 -	Digital applications are generally seen as an advantage for the work of our organisation	
15 -	Top and middle management are in total agreement about policies regarding remote work	

**Full scale:**  
**1 - strongly disagree,**  
**2 - disagree,**  
**3 - rather disagree,**  
**4 - undecided,**  
**5 - rather agree,**  
**6 - agree,**  
**7 - strongly agree**

**COMMUNICATION**

Add up your values for statement 1, 4, and 8 and divide this by 3.

Your result:

**DIGITAL MATURITY**

Add up your values for statement 2, 9, and 14 and divide this by 3.

Your result:

**DIGITAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

Add up your values for statement 3, 11, and 13 and divide this by 3.

Your result:

**TOP MANAGEMENT SUPPORT**

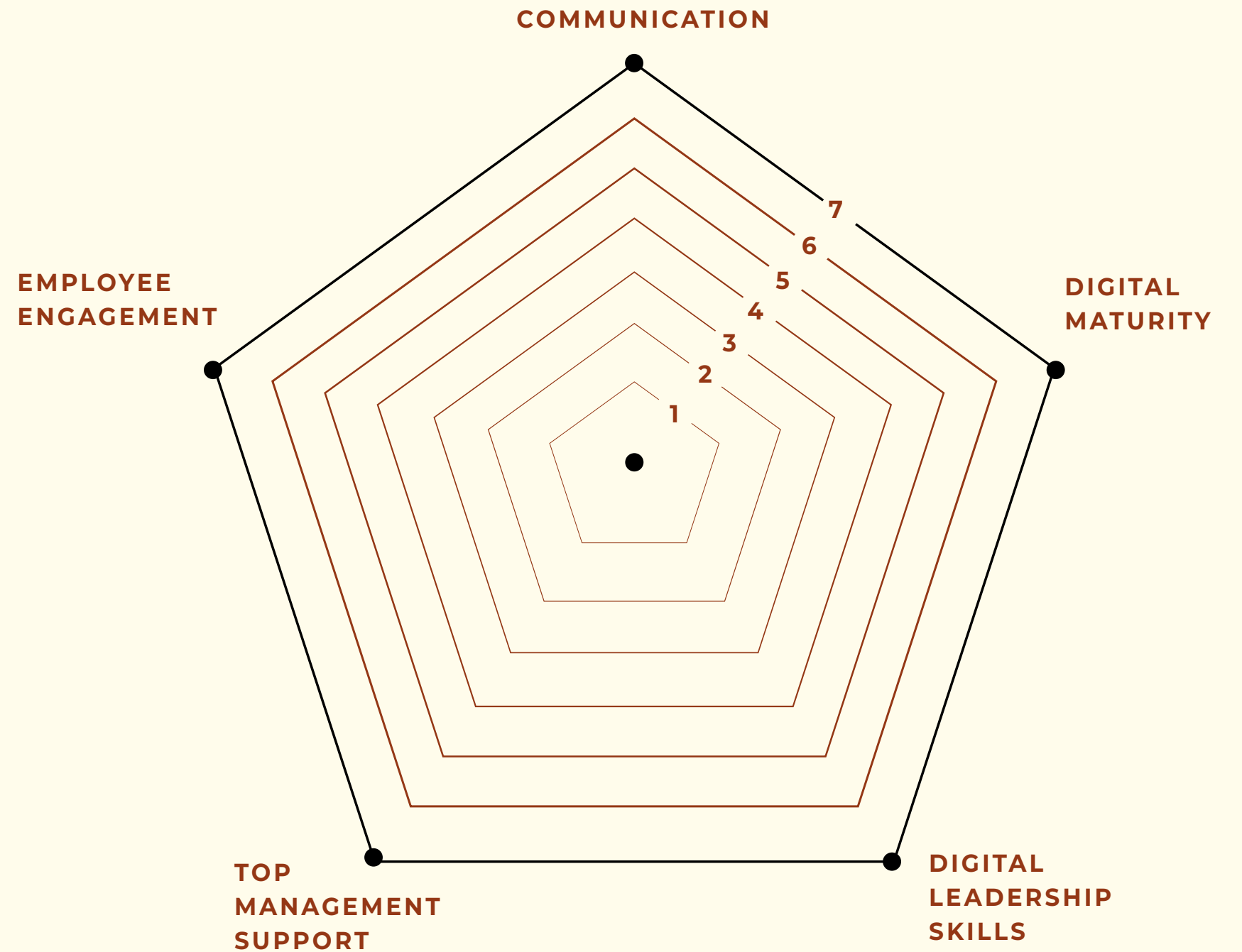
Add up your values for statement 5, 7, and 15 and divide this by 3.

Your result:

**EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Add up your values for statement 6, 10, and 12 and divide this by 3.

Your result:



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# RES FORUM

The RES Forum has the **tools**, **knowledge** and **community** to help mobility professionals keep pace with changes in the industry, and help the industry keep pace with the needs of mobility professionals.

Through research, analytics, eLearning, events, and policy templates and consultancy, we provide support and guidance to help mobility professionals navigate the ever-changing GM landscape.

We enjoy the exhaustive knowledge of our consultants, academics, Strategic Advisory Board and Technical Partners, as well as our international community of senior in-house HR and GM professionals, which includes 1,000 members in over 45 countries.

In conversation with leaders and experts from across the industry, our academics study the most pressing topics within the world of GM and cross-border working.

Then we share their collective insight to provide clarity, tools and advice to help our members through the many challenges they face.

The RES Forum is an independent organization. We are not influenced by external parties or third-party vendors.

References available on request.

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