



SHRM[®]

SOCIETY FOR HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Research Quarterly

Published by the Society for Human Resource Management

Global
Talent for
Competitive
Advantage

THIRD QUARTER-2010

Global Talent for Competitive Advantage

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on global talent—from global mindset, cultural awareness and adaptability, to key aspects of global staffing, spouse and family challenges, mobility trends, safety and security, and retaining global talent of repatriates—all essential for proactive global HR executives and their teams. Based in research and recent case studies, the article presents views of global HR professionals in the field, with examples of what their companies have done to address global talent challenges. Both new and seasoned global HR professionals will find this article to be of value for workforce planning of global talent.

Introduction

In a closely connected world, today's economics have changed how organizations do business. The pivotal point of competitive advantage now focuses on attracting, developing and keeping the right talent. As Dr. Vladimir Pucik, professor of strategy and international HR at IMD Business School, states, "Ask any senior executive in a company that operates across national boundaries, irrespective of national origin, about the major source of tensions in his or her job, and the answer most likely will be the same—the ever-increasing *complexity* of business problems he or she needs to tackle[...] Complexity in the competitive environment drives the need for more complex business strategies, building and sustaining global organizational capability [...] and the critical building blocks for this capability are all very closely linked to people, their mind-set, and behaviors—creating an important new domain for the HR function."¹

This article addresses many aspects of global talent essential for proactive global HR leadership, from global mindset and cultural adaptability to staffing mobility trends, and safety and security. Beyond the scope of the article are areas such as international employment law, immigration/visas,

unions, benefits and compensation practices, tax implications, pensions, and global HRIS systems.

Global Business Practices and Global Talent

Global talent is rising to the top of the talent management agenda for HR professionals and their organizations. A leader in organization culture change, Dr. Donald T. Tosti notes that "global competition is creating an evolutionary process in which a common core of business practices and behaviors will guide the most successful organizations. One key difference between biological evolution and this business evolution is that business leaders can take action now to be sure their organizations will be among those that thrive in the global environment"² (see Figure 1). As highlighted in the Towers Perrin study, *Winning Strategies for a Global Workforce*, "the 'boundaryless' busi-

ness environment will continue to drive changes in where a company does business, and what it needs from its people to compete efficiently in existing and emerging markets."³

Thus, the increasing fast pace of change requires that companies thoughtfully strategize their global workforce planning to remain competitive. According to the 2010 McKinsey Global Survey, executives worldwide believe that the most important global development in the next five years is the shift of the global economic activity from developed to developing economies with the growing number of consumers in emerging markets. Corporate challenges center on being able to find the right talent to meet the company's strategic goals, particularly in view of low birth rates and the aging workforce in many developed economies. The survey found that less than 40% of executives were

Figure 1 | Top Global Expansion Business Practices

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|--|
| Evaluate policies and programs to ensure organizational objectives are met. |
| Align global business objectives and needs. |
| Identify a group of qualified potential candidates. |
| Plan for long-term career paths. |
| Establish criteria to measure assignment success. |
| Require completion of a minimum of one assignment as a condition of executive advancement. |

Source: Adapted from Brookfield Global Relocation Services. (2010). *Global relocation trends: 2010 survey report*. Woodridge, IL: Author.

confident about having the talent needed in the next five years to meet strategic goals. Many are looking for talent in three areas: emerging markets (44%), new talent entering developed labor markets (41%) and talent from developing markets moving to emerging markets (35%).⁴ Ultimately, the strength of an organization is in its global human capital and how it is optimized.

Global Mindset

A global mindset is the underlying foundation essential for success in today’s marketplace. According to management scholars Evan, Pucik and Barsoux, “global managers are defined by their state of mind.” That is, a global mindset is what allows one to work effectively across functional, organizational and cross-cultural boundaries. However, managers are not “born global.” It is through experience and learning that one acquires a global mindset and the necessary global skills.⁵ Developing global capabilities takes time and is one area where HR can work with management to foster alignment of strategy through the organization (see Figure 2). Dr. Pucik refers to the term “global brains,” that is, the need for managers to be able “to balance competing business, country and functional priorities

that emerge in international management process.” The advantage of “think globally, act locally”—a phrase that illustrates the concept of a progressive global company—is being able to tap into global capabilities and skills with the goal to satisfy the needs of local customers. Thus, gaining global capability is both about broad concept learning and specific acting/doing.⁶

For HR professionals to foster global mindset in their organizations, they, too, need global experience and perspective. A recent study by the Society for Human Resource Management explored the most important competencies for senior HR leaders. The results show consensus about global HR leader competencies ranked highest among the four regions in the study: 1) effective communication; 2) strategic thinking; 3) global intelligence/global mindset; and 4) cross-cultural intelligence. These findings provide a pathway for aspiring HR leaders to benefit from training and development opportunities that focus on expanding competencies for advanced HR roles. In addition, this information can be used for long-range succession planning to prepare junior HR professionals for future global leadership roles.⁷ Competen-

cies also provide a “road map” for global HR. One resource that helps to clarify the use of global competencies is the Lominger Competencies, which focus on seven specific competencies: global business knowledge, cross-cultural resourcefulness, cross-cultural agility, assignment hardiness, organizational-positioning skills from remote locations, cross-cultural sensitivity, and humility (mostly Asian and Northern European contexts).⁸

Brad Boyson, SPHR, GPHR, a senior-level Canadian HR practitioner and a member of the SHRM Global Special Expertise Panel, currently lives and works in Dubai, UAE. His views on global mindset are of both practical and philosophical importance. Boyson observes: “HR practitioners from developed nations often have a harder time adopting a global mindset because, at least historically, they’ve seen globalization as a natural extension of what they are already doing. However, as globalization itself introduces different ways of doing business and economies of scale based upon different socio-economic systems, HR practitioners from developing nations have an advantage in terms of adopting and applying a global mindset, as they have always been forced to look ‘abroad’ for better or more advanced ways of doing things. This habit of looking outward first and then applying a localized solution defines an *applied* global mindset. Unfortunately, all too often, HR practitioners in developed nations tend to solve problems by trying to impose a local best practice beyond national borders without ever realizing it is a localized practice. To be fair, it’s easy to assume something is globally applicable if you haven’t personally worked within an alternative system before, especially the

Figure 2 | Global Mindset Versus Traditional Domestic Mindset

| Personal Characteristics | Traditional Domestic Mindset | Global Mindset |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Knowledge | Functional expertise | Broad and multiple perspectives |
| Conceptual ability | Prioritization | Duality-balance between contradictions |
| Flexibility | Structure | Process |
| Sensitivity | Individual responsibility | Teamwork and diversity |
| Judgment | Predictability | Change as opportunity |
| Learning | Trained against surprises | Open to what is new |

Source: Adapted from S. H. Rhinesmith. (1993). *A manager’s guide to globalization*. Burr Ridge, IL: Business One Irwin.

dichotomy that exists between developed and developing economies.”

To promote the understanding and use of global mindset, a company university can be a strong tool. AGCO Corporation, one of the world’s largest manufacturers and distributors of agricultural equipment, is an example of a global company that strategically focuses on training for global mindset. AGCO’s vision is to provide high-tech solutions for professional farmers feeding the world, with the mission to achieve profitable growth through superior customer service, innovation, quality and commitment. Officially formed in 1990, much of AGCO’s growth has been through acquisitions, leading to a myriad of products, systems, processes, attitudes and approaches to doing business. In 2004, AGCO announced a new global brand portfolio made up of Challenger®, Fendt®, Massey Ferguson® and Valtra®. The key to AGCO’s continued success is maintaining the integrity of each of its brands in relation to customers, dealers, vendors and employees under the umbrella of one company. Toward this goal, AGCO developed a strategy, through AGCO University, to share the global message of

one company one mindset throughout the organization. The AGCO University offers courses to nurture and develop a global mindset that focuses on meeting the needs of the customers by providing diverse products and services as one company, as well as having a local focus where appropriate (see text box below).

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is essential for business success. An important HR function is to promote linking future career paths and global business success with cultural competence. This is particularly helpful for managers who interact with people globally—whether working with different employee groups, establishing and maintaining business partnerships, and/or developing and expanding the company’s global customer base. Cross-cultural intelligence—the ability to switch between ethnic and/or national contexts and quickly learn new patterns of social interaction with behavioral responses—is needed to work effectively in multicultural environments. Ideally, global managers are motivated to acquire new behaviors and skills and understand the benefits of learning from different cultures.⁹

As discussed in the *SHRM Research Quarterly*, “Selected Cross-Cultural Factors in Human Resource Management,” cultural competence begins with a solid understanding of one’s own values and how they shape cultural identity. One is then better positioned to discern and appreciate cultural differences (see Figure 3). This is important, as decisions in the workplace are influenced by cultural viewpoints, beliefs and assumptions. For example, lack of cross-cultural sensitivity in the performance appraisal process can result in a negative impact on communication, employee morale, teamwork and turnover.¹⁰ To be successfully implemented and effective, HR benefits programs, such as pay-for-performance, team-based pay, stock options and/or executive compensation, are highly dependent on cultural context. Therefore, variations in norms and values within and across cultures must be taken into consideration.¹¹

In his book *Working GlobeSmart: 12 People Skills for Doing Business Across Borders*, author Ernest Gundling, Ph.D., emphasizes the importance of relationship building and global leadership. Dr. Gundling presents a model of 12 key global people skills—for interpersonal, group and

AGCO University creates a structural conduit to provide employees with skills, education and continuing development to facilitate the achievement of AGCO’s key objectives and strategic initiatives. The following courses, just a small part of the global curriculum, aim directly at ensuring that employees are of one mindset when acting and interacting on behalf of the company.

- *Code of Conduct Training* – Reiterates and demonstrates how employees are expected to behave in the workplace when encountering other employees, customers, dealers, vendors and visitors to the locations.
- *Anti-corruption Training* – Explains what it means to act as an agent or representative for the company. Every country and locale has an accepted culture of conducting business. The information contained in this session demonstrates the impact of conducting business in a fair and equitable manner and how the morale, productivity and profitability of the company are driven by the actions of its representatives.
- *Values Training* – Introduces employees to the Core and Business values of AGCO. Both serve as guiding principles for employees and provide an overall guideline for all activities as members of the AGCO team.

the organization—ranging from establishing credibility, building global teamwork and negotiating, to strategic planning, transferring knowledge and managing change. Whether in the headquarters of a multinational corporation or in the foreign office of a global corporation, global people skills are critical for global business.¹² In the multicultural organization, for example, effectively managing global virtual teams requires keen cultural awareness to establish productive working relationships. As noted in the 2010 *SHRM Research Quarterly*, “Successfully Transitioning to a Virtual Organization: Challenges, Impact and Technology,” when working with global talent spread across different regions, countries and time zones, communication can either be an enhancer to promote trust or a derailer if a lack of respect for different styles of communication is perceived.¹³

Working globally can require a period of transition, with the inherent new challenges of relationship building and cultural awareness. Peyman Dayyani, SPHR, GPHR, a member of the SHRM Global Special Expertise Panel, has 17 years of experience in HR management and global roles in the Middle East and Africa. He shares his observations: “The comfort of face-to-face relationships and habit of having uninterrupted meetings in a relaxed office suddenly changed for all of us who had to learn to manage people and operations across different time zones. We were working with less developed regions of the world, where phone lines were interrupted and noisy, Internet connections were slow and video conferencing was, in many locations, a dream to have. Travel bans and security risks were

some of the realities we had to face. Our people needed to overcome these challenges with new competencies, such as learning to be more patient, becoming more active listeners (rephrasing sentences a number of times) and being more aware of word usage with people for whom English was their second language. Since we did not have the luxury of body language and emotions to convey the message, effective communication was our most challenging task.”

Global Staffing

Global staffing is defined as “the critical issues faced by multinational corporations with regard to the employment of home, host and third culture nationals to fill key positions in headquarter and subsidiary operations.”¹⁴ Generally, there are three types of international employees: 1) parent-country nationals (PCNs), 2) host-country nationals (HCNs), and 3) third-country nationals (TCNs). When leaving the country, the PCN is typically referred to as an expatriate or assignee, and upon returning home, a repatriate or returnee. Organizations take different approaches to global staffing, from using local hires to relocating talent to other locations. Organizations also draw on a number of global staffing options, such as international

commuters, local hires, globalists (those who spend their careers going from one international locale to another), internships (temporary immigrants or trainees), frequent business trips, second-generation expatriates, and returnees (those who return to their home country, already selected or hired by the firm).¹⁵

International assignments are primarily learning-driven or demand-driven. Learning-driven refers to management development, knowledge transfer and also socializing locals into the company’s corporate culture and values. Demand-driven are those that use assignees, often in roles of general manager or director, to assist in specific situations, such as subsidiary startup, technology transfer, rolling out new products and/or organizational control.¹⁶

Due to the increased focus on global competition for marketplace share and profit, global relocation trends mark key changes in global staffing. The Brookfield 2010 *Global Relocation Trends* survey report (previously conducted and published by GMAC Relocation), a well-known resource for global mobility trends, provides detailed data on employee and family-related relocation issues as well as strategic business concerns. This study has

Figure 3 | Factors in Cultural Differences

| |
|---|
| <i>Communication:</i> Verbal and nonverbal |
| <i>Group Dependence:</i> Degree of importance of the individual or group |
| <i>Hierarchy:</i> Consideration/perception of rank in relationship to others |
| <i>Receptivity to Diversity:</i> Country of origin, race, gender, religion, ethnicity |
| <i>Relationships:</i> Important for business relations/interactions |
| <i>Space:</i> The degree of space and privacy needed for personal comfort |
| <i>Status Attainment:</i> Perceived level of success |
| <i>Time:</i> Adherence to schedule |
| <i>Tolerance of Change:</i> Perception of control of one’s future/destiny |

Source: Adapted from Henson, R. (2002). Culture and the workforce. In K. V., Beaman, Ed. *Boundaryless HR: Human capital management in the global economy*. Austin, TX: IHRIM Press Book.

been conducted annually for the past 15 years and thus references trends over time.¹⁷ The top objectives for international assignments, ranked in order of importance, are: 1) filling a managerial skills gap, 2) filling a technical skills gap, 3) building international management expertise/career development, 4) technology transfer, 5) launching new endeavors, 6) transferring corporate culture, and 7) developing local business relationships. In today's business environment, there is now greater central oversight for global mobility, with 96% of relocation assignment policy decisions made globally at company headquarters. The study found that a majority of companies (89%) gave a high rating—good or very good—on the return on investment of expatriate assignments.¹⁸ In addition, short-term assignments (less than one year) are becoming more widely used than the past two- to five-year expatriate assignments, primarily due to cost, family support and repatriation challenges.

Effective global staffing requires a clear understanding of why employees accept international assignments and why they turn them down. The Brookfield study revealed that the value of the international experience on the employee's career is the number one reason for accepting an international assignment: 33% of respondents said expatriates were promoted faster; 28% believed that they more easily obtained positions in the company; and 28% changed employers more frequently. Assignment refusal continues to focus on family concerns (83%), spouse/partner career (47%) and location/quality of life (25%). The two major factors contributing to assignment failure were spouse/partner dissatisfaction (65%) and inability to adapt

(47%). Further, certain locations were found to have the highest rates of assignment failure: #1 China; #2 India; #3 United Kingdom; and #4 United States. The reasons for these failures varied by country: China was due to language, cultural adjustment and the high expense to live in major cities; India, due to accommodation issues, security, cultural differences and living conditions; the United Kingdom, due to difficulties adjusting, family issues and culture; and the United States, due to expat compensation, family reasons, the school system and job performance. In some cases, the assignment ends with an early return—due to family concerns (32%), accepting a new position in the company (21%), completing an assignment early (17%) and cultural adjustment challenges (8%).¹⁹ Since the investment for international assignments is significant, such data are of great value when planning for global staffing and global talent management.

Cultural Adaptability

The value of cultural adaptability for success in international business cannot be overestimated. A key role of the global HR leader is to provide training and dialogue to both educate and support global management and staff to be better prepared for cultural challenges. Whether on international business travel, an expatriate assignment or managing a global team, culture has an impact on relating to others. Clearly, the learning curve can be steep but also worthwhile. Dayyani, of the SHRM Global Special Expertise Panel, points to credibility as a value of expatriate work: "In a very short time of almost two years, I had to travel to more than 40 countries and put on half a million miles of air travel, learning many new

competencies, from building trust across cultures to becoming a wizard of many electronic gadgets—and ultimately was able to get connected and establish communication in various platforms to home office and remote places. The most worthy take-away was gaining credibility to lead geo-dispersed teams."

At the same time, while technology is an important tool to help keep global talent connected to their family and friends, it cannot fully alleviate culture shock. Culture shock is experienced in many ways and in various degrees, no matter one's level of experience working and living in different cultures. Thus, global managers must be knowledgeable about the symptoms and challenges of cultural adaptability. In her book *Breaking Through Culture Shock: What You Need to Succeed in International Business*, Dr. Elisabeth Marx presents a culture shock triangle for all types of global assignments—from the short-term business traveler to the long-term assignee. This is a valuable tool for global HR managers involved in preparing and developing managers to work abroad or on global teams. Psychologically, global employees experience the following three levels of culture shock:²⁰

- *Emotions*—coping with mood swings and the stress of the transition (goal: to achieve contentment).
- *Thinking*—understanding foreign colleagues (goal: to develop a way of thinking that is culturally effective—change perception/interpretation of behavior and events).
- *Social skills and identity* (goal: to develop a professional and social network, effective social skills and an international identity).

While employees today know that they are responsible for their own careers, the global context brings with it different opportunities, with unexpected and substantial influences on one's life. The impact will be experienced broadly, from personality to career success, with many learning opportunities on the journey. One expatriate study found that 91% of managers interviewed perceived a positive impact on personality—becoming more open-minded, confident, tolerant and patient, as well as having a broader outlook. According to 82% of managers, there were many positive influences on career, including faster career progression/promotion, gaining more senior roles, and improvement of strategic thinking/negotiation and international skills. Yet, in some cases, managers found that their company did not take full advantage of their experience when they returned. When their international experience was discredited, employees left their organizations to find opportunities where global talent was wanted (see text box).²¹

Changing Employee Attitudes

A new study by Towers Watson has important implications for global talent pipelines. The 2010 Global Workforce Study, *The Shape of the Emerging "Deal,"* explored the evolution of the employment relationship worldwide and how people now relate to their companies and work. The findings highlight how the global recession and changing business models require employers and employees alike to reconsider their assumptions about the world of work. The results reflect significant issues that will likely influence decisions to invest in global talent for years. Key findings

common throughout the global sample are that employees have:²²

- Greater desire for security and stability.
- Concern about their ability to ensure their long-term financial and physical health and well-being, as well as career and performance.
- A preference for job security over mobility for career growth.
- Low confidence in the interpersonal aspects of leaders and managers.

"I grew up, it broadened my horizons and I developed a need for travel and a thirst for knowledge. I felt more flexible and self-sufficient. At the beginning, I was more reserved, but after I adapted, I became more outgoing."

"I learned a lot about dealing with headquarters and the experience was a major stepping stone in my career. I also developed a broader expertise in transactions."

"My experience has not helped me to progress in my own company but has made me much more marketable outside."

Source: Adapted from Marx, E. (2001). *Breaking through culture shock: What you need to succeed in international business*, 2nd ed. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

To establish a new employment proposition, the ideal is that each organization, with its own unique vision about its people, can bring together traditional and new approaches to workforce management. It is recommended that organizations 1) foster greater self-reliance by the employee, 2) create a greater personalized work experience—to better align with how people add value to the organization, and 3) strengthen the flexibility and agility of the company's management style, structure, processes and delivery of workplace programs.²³ As HR leaders work with their organizations to identify, develop and staff global talent, it is valuable to keep in mind the changing employment relationship for the long-range sustainability of the company.

Spouse and Family Challenges

For global staffing assignments, the burden of adjustment often falls to the spouse/partner and family. Whether for international business travel, unaccompanied short assignments or the traditional assignment of two or more years, the spouse/partner and families of traveling employees experience challenges. The main family issues are cross-cultural adaptation, dual-career marriages and education of the children. In

recent years, elder care has emerged as a critical factor influencing decisions to accept global positions. To help ensure the success of the assignment, both for cost and results, global HR functions have gradually increased spouse and family support. Increased support is often the result of input collected internally from assignees and their families as well as from external research studies. According to the Brookfield 2010 *Global Relocation Trends* survey report, among organizations that do offer cross-cultural support, 55% provided training for the entire family, 38% for assignee and spouse, and 4% for employee only. Many companies offer programs for the spouse/partner: 85% offer language training, 38% provide education/training assistance, 34% sponsor work permits

and 31% assist in career planning. In addition, 8% have provisions to assist assignees with elderly family members.²⁴ These types of statistics are valuable benchmarks for global HR in order to develop, change and/or expand policies and programs for global workforce planning.

In addition, work/life balance is growing in importance in today's society. A key driver of employee satisfaction in developed countries, work/life balance is now becoming a topic in emerging markets and developing economies. It encompasses quality of life due to greater demands in the workplace, changing roles of men and women, different family structures, increased focus on health in families and changing demographics.²⁵ Two recent studies about families and global assignments highlight the challenges around work/life balance and the interlinking importance of work, family and communication. Conducted by The Interchange Institute, *Voices From the Road* and *Voices From Home* consider the impact of unaccompanied international assignments on the lives of employees and their families. The studies found that the partnership of the employee, family and organization is very important, both from work and personal perspectives. The Institute's founder and executive director, Anne P. Copeland, Ph.D., notes that "companies should not assume that, just because the spouse is staying at home, there are no family or personal problems. Although unaccompanied assignments work for some, many families are still disrupted and distressed by the uncertainties and unpredictability of the assignments, the financial strain, and the absence of one partner."

Voices From the Road examined factors related to positive outcomes of international assignments among nearly 1,500 employees working in 57 countries on five continents. Personal factors (mental health, substance abuse, marital issues) and work outcomes (attitudes about work, ability to get work done, willingness to take another assignment) were considered. Among the top contributors to the success of an assignment were the degree of involved decision-making of the employee and spouse about the assignment, choice about assignments, HR policies (such as family-friendly policies), family support services and financial support from the company.²⁶

Voices From Home considered the views of the spouse. The study participants were 88% female, with citizenship from 21 countries and spouses working in 17 countries. The study found that financial costs were an issue—only about one-third said they had adequate financial support during the assignment, and many cited new financial costs. Higher levels of satisfaction and better adjustment were reported when assignees and their spouses had input about the timing of home visits and when there was less ambiguity about the length of the assignment. It was also discovered that when couples felt pressured into accepting the assignment, there were more negative outcomes, such as depression for the spouse and behavioral issues for the children. The study recommends that organizations support and facilitate professional counseling for couples and/or connections with support networks of those in similar situations. Managing challenges may be alleviated by advice and tips from experts and peers with these

experiences.²⁷ Both studies, available at www.interchangeinstitute.org, are valuable resources for global HR professionals seeking to improve international assignee success.

Miguel R. Olivas-Luján, Ph.D., a professor at Clarion University of Pennsylvania (USA) and Tecnológico de Monterrey (Mexico) and a member of the SHRM Global Expertise Panel, points out, "While the literature attributes a large percentage of expatriate failure to lack of spousal adjustment, children's needs should not be overlooked. Children in the toddler and younger ranges might be the ones that end up adjusting more smoothly, as their language skills are still in formation and they are not embedded in social circles that will be missed in the new location. On the other end of the spectrum, those in their teenage years often show the opposite characteristics (fully developed language skills and a high degree of social embeddedness), which correlate with higher difficulty in adjusting to their new environment." Dr. Olivas-Luján, a published scholar on cross-cultural business issues, notes, "The newest forms of telecommunication technologies—in particular, social networking sites and the diffusion of teleconferencing gear—can have both positive and negative effects on their users. On one hand, using these technologies to stay in touch more frequently with extended family and friends may lead to missing them less and to continued social support to adjust to the new environment. On the other hand, the combined facts that the ability to communicate with family and friends more frequently exists, yet distance precludes other types of interpersonal interaction, might exacerbate the negative effects of culture shock.

Research is needed to illuminate this emerging issue.” He emphasizes the importance of coping mechanisms: “Effective coping mechanisms such as ensuring early buy-in or conceptualizing the experience as an exciting possibility that will bring about benefits to the family as well as to each individual might make all the difference in the way the family members adjust during the expatriate assignment. This is important to minimize the detrimental effect of a family-to-work conflict spillover for the assignee. Besides, shouldn’t the family be a major beneficiary of all career moves for the assignee?”

Safety and Security

Duty of care is a term that implies the (legal) obligation of an employer to safeguard its workforce. In the discussion of global talent, both the employer and the employee have responsibilities for safety and security. The breadth of duty of care widens in the global context to include risk management threats such as natural disasters, terrorism, crime, disease and political unrest, to name a few. Proactive strategic planning for the safety and security of a global workforce, including international business travelers and assignees, requires a partnership between global HR and other parts of the organization (such as risk management, global mobility vendors, the legal department). However, many companies may not be prepared to deal with unexpected situations and emergencies. Global HR can demonstrate leadership in this area by helping to ensure coordinated collaboration within the company for proactive and thoughtful policy and program management for safety and security.

Two recent publications highlight the importance of the respective

responsibilities of the employer and employee in terms of safety and security in cross-border work. Published by International SOS, *Duty of Care of Employers for Protecting International Employees, Their Dependents and International Business Travelers* recommends an integrated strategic approach for safety and security, focusing on three key perspectives: 1) legal, 2) corporate social responsibility, and 3) cost/benefit analysis. Best practices are considered, as well as the responsibilities of different stakeholders—government, senior management, HR and employees—for the health, safety and security of expatriates and their dependents, as well as international business travelers.²⁸

knowledge in four areas: 1) motivation to travel, 2) personal and interpersonal skills, 3) cross-cultural skills, and 4) security awareness.²⁹

Repatriation and Retention of Global Talent

With keen competition for global expertise, repatriates are an excellent source of global talent. Yet, repatriation, the final phase of the international assignment and a time of transition, is often challenging and rewarding on both the personal and professional fronts. As intercultural management consultant Craig Storti notes in his classic, *The Art of Coming Home*, “The ultimate context for understanding and appreciating reentry are the experiences that precede it. [...]

“The factors that lead to individual and organizational success in a global arena are complex and interact dynamically. Competence, confidence, humility and awareness create emotionally and functionally intelligent individuals—and, in aggregate, successful organizations.” — R. S. Leki

When HR professionals are preparing employees to travel for global staffing assignments, a practical tool to provide them with is a copy of *Travel Wise: How to be Safe, Savvy and Secure Abroad*. The author, Ray S. Leki, who has more than 20 years of experience working with company leaders and diplomats around safety, focuses on personal responsibility and internal competencies of the international traveler for a safe and successful journey. Using a comprehensive and holistic approach, this book provides a process to help one gain a solid understanding of one’s abilities and

Reentry, for all its minor and a few major annoyances, can’t begin to diminish the luster of an expatriate experience. Indeed, it is in some ways precisely because the overseas experience is so rich and stimulating that reentry becomes a problem.”³⁰

Once back home, many repatriates are eager to use their global experience. However, they can easily be discouraged by the positions available in their organizations, leading to low job satisfaction. As a result, some seek employment elsewhere, and then the company loses its investment to a competitor. The most recent data show the average annual turnover/

attrition rate of repatriates at 13%, the same as the historical average.³¹

Assignees often gain valuable global expertise, make important business contacts and develop strategic management skills. Repatriates who had a positive experience may consider other global roles, from coaching to consulting to another assignment. One way to avoid losing repatriate talent is through strategic global talent management. Therefore, it is recommended to hold repatriation discussions well in advance of assignee return. The 2010 *Global Relocation Trends* report found that 92% of companies had repatriation/re-entry discussions with assignees (as compared with the historical average of 73%). One quarter of respondents had these conversations before departure, 29% six months or more before return, 38% less than six months before return, and 8% did not discuss repatriation at all.³² By working with repatriates before they return, global HR leaders can find the right place to use their much needed skills and expertise for the benefit of the organization.

In Closing

For both the new and the seasoned global HR professional, global staffing holds many challenges and opportunities. With continuous changes in the marketplace, resources such as global mobility trends, expatriate studies, management research and economic indicators all serve to provide valuable information that can be factored into strategic planning for global talent management.

Endnotes

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ISBN: 978-1-586-44203-3

