

GETTING TALENT MOBILITY RIGHT

IT IS CRITICAL TO GET MOBILITY RIGHT AS BUSINESSES BECOME EVEN MORE GLOBAL IN NATURE.

GLOBAL mobility can do wonders in helping organisations meet their business objectives and develop rich layers of leadership, according to PwC's recently published study *Moving People with Purpose – Modern Mobility Survey*.

"Mobility programmes have become a necessity for organisations wanting to attract, develop and retain

their talent in this current competitive talent landscape," said Anil Shivadas, Executive Director, PwC South East Asian Consulting Services, via e-mail.

He said that organisations with a regional or global presence and which operate on a leaner structure would expect their staff to be ready to fly off to another country on short notice and for shorter periods of time to ensure

they have the right talent, at the right place and at the right time.

Mobility could also be an incentive in talent retention. "For the younger generation who seek opportunities to travel for work, mobility programmes are key in attracting and retaining them within organisations," he said.

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STRATEGIC MOBILITY

Talent today is no longer a purely operational issue, but a strategic concern.

How can mobility programmes and teams match mobility to business needs and strategies?

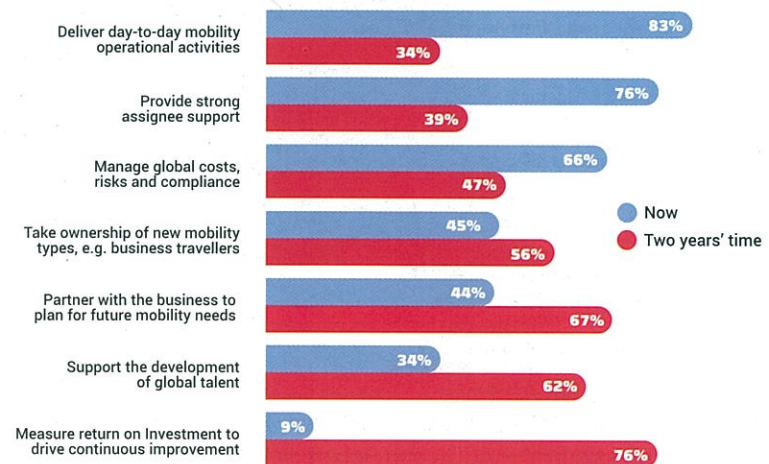
What activities does mobility do today and what is expected in two years' time? (From "Moving People with Purpose – Modern Mobility Survey")

According to the PwC survey, only 57% of participants agreed that their mobility policies meet business needs. Even then, respondents acknowledged that the focus of mobility policies may be too narrow, where the focus is restricted to employees on formal international assignments despite the much wider definition of a mobile workforce.

What would make mobility more effective in terms of enhancing business performance? "For starters, it's important to have a structured mobility policy and process in place to ensure that all aspects are addressed (such as per diems, allowances, travel entitlements, tax implications and approval processes)," said Anil Shivadas, Executive Director, PwC South East Asian Consulting Services.

A structured mobility policy and process will help organisations effectively manage mobility costs and will create a positive experience for staff who are on overseas assignments. It will also help seamlessly integrate "mobility" into the day-to-day operations of an organisation and form part of its culture, which would be critical in attracting, developing and retaining talent in this highly competitive talent landscape which is highly beneficial to any organisation, he explained.

Predictive HR analytics is also key in managing talent strategically, as it enables organisations to identify future talent requirements, trends and risks. With insightful data, organisations will be able to leverage mobility programmes as a strategic means to meet future talent demands and mitigate identified talent risks.



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UPWARDLY MOBILE ACCOUNTANTS

Given international demand for accountants and finance professionals, it's not surprising that these are a mobile bunch. According to "International Talent Mobility – A Global Quest for Finance and Accounting Professionals", a survey developed by ACCA and Robert Half concentrating on finance, accounting and banking professionals and focussing on respondents from Hong Kong and Singapore, finance and accounting professionals are very mobile, with employees expecting to move to a different employer or role within the next two years.

Could this account for the tremendous turnover of accountants and explain why employers find it so hard to find the right fit for their organisation? 93% of employers in Hong Kong and 97% of employers in Singapore state that it's a challenge to recruit financial talent with the right skills, compared to 67% of global employers.

One answer to the talent conundrum? Look abroad. 30% of Hong Kong companies surveyed said that new recruits will most likely come from outside Hong Kong, whereas 51% of Singaporean

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employers said so. But it's not a perfect solution. While employers need to hire talent from abroad, they do realise the challenges involved – relocation costs and lack of knowledge of local accounting practices, mostly.

THE LEAN APPROACH – INTERNAL MOBILISATION

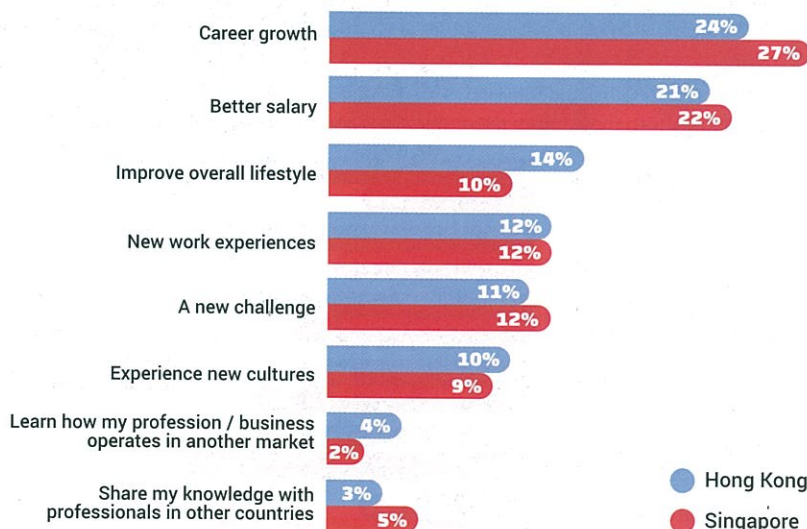
Apart from tapping foreign talent, employers might also relocate existing talent to plug talent gaps in markets where sourcing the right people locally can be complex. "Mobile talent plays a role in helping us achieve "talent on demand" and coping with our business' varying requirements without a hefty increase in cost. To stay competitive and to enhance operational efficiency in today's challenging business environment, many organisations are adopting a very lean approach to their structure. Staff are regularly mobilised internally within the organisation or from one country to another to support peak demands in the business," said Mona Abu Bakar, Head of Recruitment, PwC Malaysia via e-mail.

WHAT DO ACCOUNTANTS WANT?

Even as mobility trends become more prominent, research shows that accounting and finance professionals are actively seeking international exposure.

A report by ACCA and ACRA, "Current Attraction and Retention in Larger Accounting Firms" found that a significant number of employees (82%) are interested in overseas secondments. Savvy employers might want to boost job satisfaction and retention by facilitating more

What is the most important reason you would like to work overseas?



(Source: "International Talent Mobility – A Global Quest for Finance and Accounting Professionals" – ACCA and Robert Half)

MEASURING MOBILITY BENEFITS

A key consideration for business is figuring out how to measure the impact of global mobility programmes.

However, measurement of the efficacy of mobility programmes is an area where many companies fall short. Of the 193 organisations surveyed by PwC, 31% couldn't track how many of their employees worked internationally each year.

Despite this knowledge gap, organisations plan to introduce new types of mobility – such as talent swaps, developmental moves, strategic moves, local plus moves and international rotation - and increase the numbers of their mobile workforce within the next two years, which would probably complicate tracking and measurement even more.

"Although it is difficult to measure the full benefits of mobility programmes, organisations which want to effectively compete for talent cannot afford not to have a structured mobility programme," warned Anil Shivadas, Executive Director, PwC South East Asian Consulting Services.

MEASURING THE COST AND VALUE OF MOBILITY PROGRAMMES

"Like most HR or talent-related initiatives, the full benefits of a mobility programme will be difficult to measure as it involves quantifying non-tangible benefits (e.g. increased staff engagement) and opportunity costs for not having such programmes (e.g. lack of innovation). Measuring the full benefits is a challenge as more organisations are implementing mobility programmes to meet specific business and talent strategic objectives (leadership development and succession)," argued Shivadas.

PwC's report *Moving People with Purpose – Modern Mobility Survey* estimates that by 2017, over 50% of survey participants will still not be able to accurately measure the cost of their mobility programmes, or their value. Even though managing cost seems to be very high on the priority list, only 67% of respondents calculate and approve the cost of an assignment before it begins, only 31% compare the actual cost of an assignment against budgeted costs, and only 8% are able to accurately quantify the total cost of their mobility programmes.

Employers haven't even factored in return on investment (ROI) of mobility programmes. Today, only 9% of respondents are able to measure return on investment – and by 2017, only 49% expect to be able to do so accurately. Solid data and effective metrics would be needed to measure the ROI. The challenge is two-fold: getting access to the right data, and freeing up resources within the mobility team to take on the challenge of measurement.

opportunities for secondment. Meanwhile, employers would gain from a more diverse and culturally-exposed workforce.

SELECTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Is everybody suitable for an overseas assignment? Mona encourages interested candidates to demonstrate flexibility, sensitivity, intelligence and adaptability. "Lack of global acumen, cultural agility and learning agility in an organisation are probably among the bigger challenges when it comes to talent mobility."

"Being receptive to change,



learning on the go, having an international perspective, being able to appreciate and cope with differences in the way business is done in different parts of the world or in different organisations and industries is now a key competency for people in organisations that want to remain relevant and competitive in a challenging and uncertain operating environment," she said. ■