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Companies need a global workforce, and global mobility, now more than ever. They are sending an increasing number of people abroad, in a wider variety of roles, for many reasons: to prepare for and respond to opportunities in global production; to promote research, development, and innovation; and to improve customer sales, service, and growth. At the same time, global market uncertainty is putting companies under tremendous cost pressure. That makes it imperative for leaders to carefully manage their global mobility investments — and to realize an appropriate return on them.

Yet a surprising number of companies continue to handle international assignments the way they did decades ago. Then, most assignees were senior-level managers from the headquarters country sent to help establish operations in new markets, and each assignment was handled as a special event with expectations for broad, high-touch service. Today, companies' global mobility programs may offer only a handful of assignment types that fail to reflect the growing variety of the company's global talent needs. Some managers may give little thought to aligning the company's

An effective global mobility program should:

- Provide guidance to businesses on mobility-related decisions to help align assignments with business and talent objectives
- Deliver a spectrum of HR services, coordinate physical moves, maintain compliance, and deliver services to assignees
- Integrate global mobility and talent management practices by deploying employees to suitable positions when they return to their home countries
- Use an appropriate mix of internal resources, external service providers, and technology tools to deliver cost-effective, high-quality service

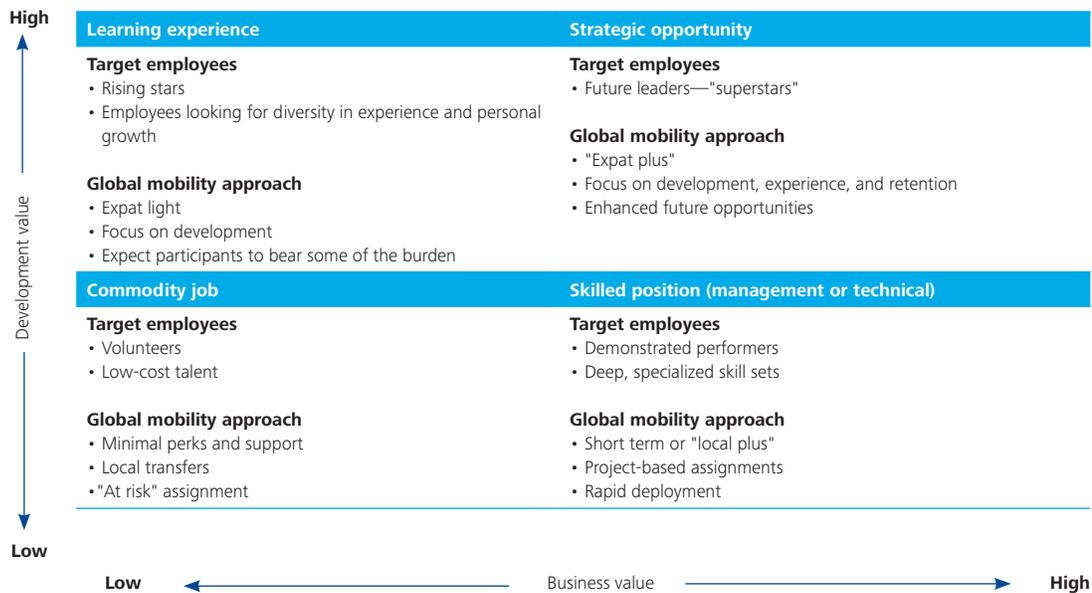
investment in an assignment with the expected business benefits, or to the effect an assignment may have on an employee's career development. Operationally, international assignments may be managed end-to-end by dedicated global mobility personnel, even if some of the work could be done more efficiently by the company's "mainstream" HR or talent functions.

Global mobility

Many companies can enhance the value of their global mobility efforts by taking a more thoughtful approach to planning and managing international assignments. Doing so requires a formal global mobility strategy that articulates the program's business and talent management goals, and then tailors the company's investment in each assignment to the value the assignment is expected to generate. Further, companies should look for opportunities to integrate their

execution of global mobility with their "mainstream" HR or talent infrastructures, reserving global mobility specialists for the particular activities that require them. The result can be a global mobility program that supports the business as a strategic asset instead of simply reacting to individual opportunities as they arise — one that delivers high-quality service that is cost-effective, consistent, and relatively easy to use, manage, and administer.

Global mobility framework



Source: Deloitte

Global mobility

Global mobility strategy

Aligning global mobility strategy with business and talent strategy means designing it to support both the organization's business goals — what it wants to accomplish in the marketplace — and its talent development goals — what it wants its key talent to learn about working in a global environment. In this way, global mobility evolves from a check-the-box exercise to a key driver of business and talent development strategy.

One tool that can help leaders better align their global mobility strategies with their overarching business and talent strategies is the global mobility framework shown on the previous page. The framework is built around two specific dimensions — business value and talent development value — which reflects the fact that different assignments

can have different value for the business, as well as different value for helping employees develop new skills and capabilities. By categorizing assignments into the four quadrants of the Global Mobility Framework, the framework can help leaders:

- Articulate the nature and extent of the value they expect to gain from the company's global mobility efforts, which may/can make it easier to set expectations for assignees and measure their performance against expected results
- Decide what proportion of the company's assignments should fall into each category, depending on the business' current and anticipated future business and talent development needs
- Determine what kinds of employees would be most appropriate to send on which types of assignments

Spotlight on technology

Using technology effectively to support global moves can help reduce costs while improving service quality and compliance. It can also help business leaders make better, more informed mobility decisions. An effective global mobility program requires a well-developed and integrated technology platform that can:

- Facilitate employee and manager self-service
- Support compliance
- Provide dashboard reporting for program performance
- Give leaders an integrated view of global talent demand
- Give leaders a single, overall view of workforce information — including data on international assignees, who tend to be the most expensive segment of the workforce
- Drive in-depth analysis of expatriate data

Global mobility

Global mobility execution

In an age when many organizations have made substantial investments in HR infrastructure and operations, the time is ripe for the global mobility function to shift many of its routine administrative responsibilities to HR Shared Services or operations. This can not only reduce costs and improve service quality by giving the appropriate tasks to HR and talent specialists rather than to global mobility generalists, but also free the global mobility function to focus on deploying global talent more strategically.

One particular challenge in this regard is to determine which activities require the specialized capabilities of the global mobility function, and which activities can be integrated with the company's broader HR infrastructure. Experience guides ways to divide the work in three areas:

Global mobility service delivery. It takes specialized capabilities to deliver appropriate global mobility services to business leaders. These services should center on helping business leaders understand how to apply the global mobility and workforce strategy when making decisions about individual assignments and the overall mobility program. One area where the specialized skills of a mobility professional can be particularly valuable is in helping executives plan assignments, select candidates, and manage the return on investment.

Global employee rewards. A strategic global mobility function is a logical home for subject-matter specialists — a place where they can work with a company's Total Rewards function to help design rewards programs and policies for different types of assignments and to help customize rewards for special situations. On the other hand, although expatriate rewards programs may require specialized insights to design, they can often be administered through the same HR processes and systems that serve nonmobile employees. For example, it may not be necessary for a global mobility function to maintain processes that parallel or even duplicate those already in place for local benefits administration.

There is a contrast when delivering services to assignees. Integrating global mobility service delivery with broader HR processes and infrastructure can create a number of opportunities to reduce costs and increase value by handling both global and local employees with a single operating model. In particular, companies may be able to leverage their "mainstream" infrastructure for basic HR support services such as benefits enrollment and life event reporting. Companies also can benefit from mechanisms that allow international assignees to stay plugged in to their home-country talent management processes.

Global mobility

Technology. Companies should work to reduce any specialized global mobility applications that are not integrated into the HR and talent workflow, or which require significant resources to operate and maintain. Greater integration of global mobility drivers with a company's HRIS is critical to creating global mobility processes and systems that are affordable, practical, and scalable to meet increasing future global mobility needs. A high quality HR technology infrastructure should include the ability to track, manage, analyze and make strategic decisions on the global mobility workforce in a way that is consistent with how the organization manages nonglobal employees. The business needs are the same, so the technology tools to support those needs should have the same capability. That said, global mobility programs may

require some limited specialized internal controls and processes for certain purposes, especially compliance. Payroll, immigration, and off-cycle compensation adjustments and delivery are all areas where an international assignment can have significant implications for compliance and where technology can play a major role in gathering, organizing, and correctly reporting the required information.

Given the central role of global growth across all aspects of business in the coming decade, developing and executing a strategic global mobility program should be a top priority. Organizations around the world should be prepared to integrate global mobility into the overall strategy of the organization and execute the program seamlessly. Most importantly, they should develop continuously global talent to drive long-term shareholder value.