Equitable talent mobility

How global talent mobility can extend its influence to reach its organization's broader DEI goals
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Shifting the focus from actions to outcomes

The pandemic shined a light on racial injustice, disparities in health care, and socioeconomic outlooks across systemically disadvantaged groups in the United States. In the past year alone, reported hate crimes surged in the United States, particularly against Black, Asian, and Jewish people. This increase in violence and intolerance, which reveals the undeniable effects of racism in our society, has led organizations to feel a heightened responsibility to lean in. While there has been a sustained focus over the past several decades on diversity and inclusion (D&I), and those efforts have created more diverse and inclusive cultures, the economic or social reality for Persons Excluded due to Ethnicity or Race (PEERS) in the United States has remained stagnant—hence the focus now on equity along with D&I. Equity is the outcome of diversity, inclusion, and anti-oppression wherein all people have fair access, opportunity, resources, and power to thrive, with consideration for, and elimination of, historical and systemic barriers and privileges that cause oppression.

In this paper, we will explore how global talent mobility leaders can understand the makeup of their mobile workforce and determine how to create and sustain a culture that leads to more equitable outcomes for workers from all identity groups. We will center our initial exploration on the experience of Black workers, a community that has suffered the consequences of systemic racism in the United States for more than 400 years. From there, we will ask:

How have these changes and the focus on equity affected talent mobility? And, what role can talent mobility play in supporting an organization’s diverse, inclusive, and equitable culture and talent priorities?

Figure 1. As organizations declare aspirations and make both internal and external commitments, actions related to diversity, inclusion, and anti-oppression have increased. That alone isn’t enough. Organizations must prioritize actions that drive equity and individual belonging for all, as well as hold people accountable for delivering those outcomes.
The need to change

There is limited data on the participation of Black individuals and other PEERs in talent mobility (the movement of talent either across borders or within an organization). Exploring studies in other areas of the talent experience of Black professionals, however, can provide useful insights that highlight the challenges of Black workers. In a 2017 meta-analysis spanning more than 25 years, scholars examined all field studies from 1989 to 2015 that explored discriminatory hiring practices. Each of these 24 studies used fictionalized candidates (either by resume or in person) to assess racial differences in hiring preferences (a total of 55,842 applications submitted for 26,326 positions). Aggregating data from each study, scholars found that White candidates received 36% more callbacks than Black candidates—a trend that remained unchanged over 25 years.5

When Black individuals living in the United States are hired, they are also more likely to face hurdles around equal treatment, pay equity, and other forms of bias. A 2020 report of 232 articles, 76 books, and 14 government and think tank reports on organizational discrimination found that Black individuals in the United States were provided fewer opportunities to establish informal networks and mentors, creating additional barriers to upward mobility within organizations.6 This report also found that meritocratic performance evaluations were frequently shown to be prone to bias, disproportionately providing lower compensation packages to Black individuals living in the United States than their White colleagues.7 These findings also mirror broader US income inequalities, with Black men earning 87% of what the average White male worker earns,8 while Black women earn only 63% of this same amount.9

Within organizations, bias across the talent experience can create barriers to mobility for Black workers. Workers, especially Gen Z, and public and private investors, are demanding change.

Fortunately, many indicators suggest that there are increasing shifts in sentiment regarding the need to address racial inequity in the United States.

• Of the surveyed Gen Z population, 90% support the Black Lives Matter movement.10
• Additionally, 94% of that generation who were surveyed expect companies to take a stand on important social issues.11
• 90% are more willing to buy products that benefit the environment or society.11
• It’s not just Gen Z expecting companies take action. In the broader US population, 67% of job seekers (and 89% of Black job seekers) report that a diverse workforce is important when considering a job offer.12

Furthermore, many public and private investors are increasingly demanding that organizations act on racial equity in the workplace and that companies disclose annual data on the composition of their workforce by race and ethnicity.13
Systemic change is needed to combat systemic racism. Achieving equitable outcomes will require a coordinated and sustained effort across the entire organization, and talent mobility must do its part. Today, the global talent mobility function is an enabler of business and talent priorities such as people development, succession planning, and innovation and growth. A global career and international experience are consistently recognized as enablers of leadership development and career progression. However, DEI and talent mobility are generally disconnected within organizations, and diversity across talent mobility program participants is limited. A 2016 Deloitte survey found that only one in 10 organizations reported global mobility teams participating in DEI discussions and planning, while fewer than 15% said they track and report DEI data for global mobility. While it is likely that talent mobility programs have evolved in the past five years, a lack of recent data indicates that this disconnect may still be a significant issue. This slow progress in enabling the mobility of Black individuals and other PEERs might be a symptom of a lack of sponsorship and equitable experiences across the broader organization. Then, when those workers are selected, additional challenges can stem from a lack of focus on considerations unique to their identity.

For example, Black workers may have concerns about moving to areas with complex histories of racial injustice (and the resulting challenges around building or finding Black communities for themselves and their families); finding jobs for their spouses that could affect their standard of living, and/or safety and treatment of Black people, especially for their children. Black workers may also have concerns about navigating office dynamics where they may have to reestablish networks and/or leadership with a different set of norms, practices, policies, and processes that may be susceptible to bias. It may also be challenging to negotiate fair and transparent benefit packages without concern of being perceived as “difficult,” among many other reasons typically noted among PEERs and women during compensation negotiations, and losing the opportunity entirely. Further, we have observed that mobility programs in certain industries (by viewing the mobility opportunity as a co-investment) shift part of the relocation cost burden to workers, which could result in a disproportionate rate of PEER professionals self-selecting out due to historical wealth gaps and a lack of resources or support to share the investment.

Despite slow progress, in the context of the broader societal and associated organizational call to action, talent mobility is beginning to recognize the role it may play in supporting its organization’s DEI values and addressing areas of systemic racism and unconscious bias. Historically, the focus centered on recruiting a diverse group of professionals. Now, infusing DEI into talent mobility presents a unique opportunity to support Black workers and other PEERS and is critical to retain and grow top talent across identity groups on a global scale.
Infusing DEI into your organization’s mobility strategy, program, and function

So how can talent mobility tackle this challenge? It can approach it by focusing on the identification and design of changes enabling equity across these three dimensions:

- Building blocks
  - Strategy
  - Policy
  - Process

- Ecosystem
  - Leadership
  - Vendors
  - Mobility team

- Enablers
  - Feedback channels
  - Analytics
  - Communications
Building blocks

**Strategy**
Establishing or reimagining a talent mobilization strategy requires organizations to:
- Identify or reexamine the core value proposition of the talent mobility function with a DEI lens;
- Define the strategic priorities to create a more equitable and inclusive mobility program; and
- Develop the road map to align to your organization’s DEI goals and objectives.

There are three critical questions to ask to enable the strategy from a DEI perspective:

01. Why does the mobilization of talent matter for the organization’s DEI philosophy and mission?
02. What DEI guiding principles are required to make critical decisions during program design?
03. How can the experience of a diverse set of identities—people who are either interested in mobility or have had a global experience—inform the realignment of the program to meet its DEI objectives?
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Building blocks

Policy
Once the strategy is defined, organizations can evaluate how their mobility policies are keeping pace with the evolution of DEI by examining whether:

01 The program provides flexibility through core/flex or other employee choice models to support a diversifying talent landscape with unique employee needs;

02 All employees are provided equitable treatment and access to talent mobility experiences (check out Deloitte's "Driving workforce equity with the internal talent marketplace" blog which highlights how an internal talent marketplace can build more transparent access to opportunity);

03 The program considers the potential influence of unconscious bias in designing or approving benefit packages;

04 In consultation with legal council, policy exceptions by gender, race, ethnicity, or other employee identity characteristics are tracked to understand differences (e.g., are women negotiating less or men negotiating more to make moves work?) and whether other diverse groups’ needs are being considered; and

05 The program specifically identifies and intentionally addresses the needs of professionals of specific identity groups who have been historically oppressed or marginalized in new and unique ways (to counterbalance the systems of oppression inside and outside of an organization). Examples of anti-oppressive approaches to achieve equity could be targeting a larger proportion of PEERs to participate in programs than their representation in the workforce to address the current imbalance within talent mobility, providing special incentives, and offering stretch roles and assignments for participants in order to attract a more diverse pool of interested individuals.
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Building blocks

Processes
Considering the questions below from a core process and technology perspective can allow organizations to evaluate and enhance their service delivery model from a DEI perspective.

01 Are mobility processes reviewed and designed to promote transparency, objectivity, and equity?

02 Do the current processes effectively meet the needs of a dynamic and diverse workforce?

03 Are there consistent and equitable criteria established for roles and selection?

04 Are processes followed and executed consistently?

05 What technologies or tools are used to identify and mitigate bias?
Ecosystem

From an ecosystem perspective, mobility leaders can examine whether DEI objectives are aligned across the major stakeholder groups: leadership, vendors, and the mobility team itself.

**Leadership**
Do the leaders making mobility candidate and participant decisions reflect the inclusive leadership traits necessary to diversify the population?

**Vendors**
Consider whether mobility vendors are aligned with the DEI supplier diversity goals of the broader organization. Have expectations with vendors regarding inclusive resources, tools, and interactions been set? Are employee-facing vendors providing education to their teams around cross-cultural intelligence, unconscious bias, etc.?

**Mobility team**
Does the composition of the mobility team and internal partners reflect the organization’s DEI values? How inclusive is the team of diverse backgrounds and views?
Enablers

Enablers will inform and facilitate the execution of your DEI changes. Consider the feedback channels, analytics, and communications needed to support the transformation of the program.

**Feedback channels**
Understanding the experiences of a diverse set of employees at the program level can help increase diverse participation. Active feedback channels from employees can help mobility programs be more flexible and responsive to the evolving DEI landscape. Are there channels in place, and are they activated?

**Analytics**
For mobility programs to keep pace with the evolution of DEI, they need to capture data, track their progress, and measure success along meaningful dimensions, both quantitative and qualitative. Metrics and KPIs by demographic group can help provide insight as to how success varies across groups over time. These approaches should be designed in consultation with legal counsel and in light of any legal/privacy considerations regarding demographic data capture in some countries.

**Communications**
In addition to determining transition plans and coordinating with the organization’s DEI team to roll out program and process changes, making opportunities transparent in the organization and proactively encouraging mobility to a diverse group of candidates is critical. Further, proactively making resources available that address unique and diverse needs, as well as publicizing success stories, is an important part of creating awareness, marketing the program, and leading by example across the organization.
Leading forward

Managing through 2020 and 2021 has earned talent mobility the right to be bolder—to reorient its mission and mindset toward shaping future success. By owning and rearchitecting an inclusive and equitable talent mobility experience and embedding DEI into the organization’s talent experience, talent mobility can drive new outcomes and create positive changes, from greater innovation to higher organizational performance.

And these positive changes and outcomes are not limited to inside an organization. Deloitte’s The equity imperative introduces the Equity Activation Model (see graphic on right), a systems-based view for how businesses can activate equity within and outside their own organization, structured around three primary spheres of influence of every organization: workforce, marketplace, and society.

In this paper, our focus is within the organization, where talent mobility touches almost every aspect of an employee’s talent experience (from recruitment, to compensation and benefits, to career development and performance, to learning and development, to succession planning) and can play an important role in activating equity within the workforce. However, mobility can also play an instrumental role in activating equity across the other spheres of influence. Within the marketplace, talent mobility leaders can incorporate high-impact, programmatic changes by aligning their vendor selection with their organization’s DEI initiatives. Or perhaps they may attend industry conferences to learn and share talent mobility best practices around equitable support for employees. Within broader society, talent mobility leaders may consider several approaches. They can potentially share resources with employees to make contributions prior to moves, such as organizations accepting furniture or other donations. Alternatively, talent mobility can consider providing guidance on volunteering in the destination country, enabling employees to build their local networks. There is so much positive impact that talent mobility leaders can make outside of the traditional purview of the role.

As we head into this next stage of economic recovery, talent mobility has a particularly unique and important role in actioning and leading the change we need to see. By embracing this responsibility for DEI, talent mobility can extend its influence and impact across the entire organization, align to a key C-suite priority, and push the organization towards its broader economic and social goals.
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Definition of key terms

Words can be powerful tools to include all identity groups and challenge systemic racism. We use the following words throughout our paper as part of our commitment toward diversity, equity, and inclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-oppression</td>
<td>The theory, strategy, and active practice of confronting individual and institutional power and privilege to consistently challenge and dismantle exclusionary and oppressive systems, policies, practices, and organizational values. Anti-oppression recognizes the pervasiveness and seriousness of oppression and actively seeks to challenge, eliminate, and prevent it. Antiracism is a type of anti-oppression.</td>
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<td>Belonging</td>
<td>The emotional outcome of being one’s full, authentic self as part of a group, resulting from an intentionally inclusive environment that fosters psychological safety and a diverse, anti-oppressive team or organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEI</td>
<td>The acronym DEI (for diversity, equity, and inclusion) represents the summation of activities and/or the formal function within an organization that focuses on supporting diversity, anti-oppression, inclusion, belonging, and equity aspirations and outcomes. Diversity, inclusion, and antiracism are distinct, but related; they can each exist without the others, but are mutually reinforcing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>The representation, in a group, of various facets of identity, including (but not limited to) race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, LGBTQ+ status, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, and age.</td>
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<td>Equity</td>
<td>The outcome of diversity, inclusion, and anti-oppression actions wherein all people have fair access, opportunity, resources, and power to thrive, with consideration for and elimination of historical and systemic barriers and privileges that cause oppression. Equality, by comparison, is when all people are treated identically, without consideration for historical and systemic barriers and privileges.</td>
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<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>The actions taken to understand, embrace, and leverage the unique strengths and facets of identity for all individuals so that all feel welcomed, valued, and supported.</td>
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<td>PEER</td>
<td>Acronym for Persons Excluded due to Ethnicity or Race, a term used to unite people who have been historically oppressed without insinuating that those individuals are “less than” or that their sole identity is one of exclusion or oppression. This term shifts the focus to the acts of exclusion and oppression while enabling individuals to disentangle their identity from it, unlike the terms “underrepresented minority (URM)” or “oppressed people.”</td>
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<td>Systemic racism</td>
<td>A form of racism expressed in the practices of social and political institutions. It is reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, employment, housing, health care, political power, education, and the criminal justice system, among other factors. Individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism together form a system.</td>
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Endnotes

2. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
15. Amis, Mair, and Munir, “The organizational reproduction of inequality.”