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**The emerging model shift in
global talent mobility**

We've all heard the request: A "one-stop shop" where mobile workers are supported by a "single point of contact." Many enterprises have asked for it, and most service providers have tried at one time or another to deliver it. There are variations—"single point of coordination", "counselor", and "case manager"—but all speak to the same theme. We must find a way to streamline talent mobility.

This appetite for change is well founded. Workforce mobility, once limited to particular roles and industries, is now a widespread business and HR imperative. The volume, goals, and types of movement have multiplied. So, too, have the customary risks; organizations face ever-expanding financial, logistical, and regulatory hurdles. Co-sourcing and outsourcing solutions proliferated in response. An industry once underpinned by a few specialized vendors now features dozens of providers with varying combinations of experience, resources, and skill. In short, today's businesses have more mobility, more challenges, and more choices than ever before. The drive to simplify is instinctive.

The "single point of contact", or SPOC, gained traction as a way to reduce noise amidst stressful conditions. The appeal is clear: one cross-functional expert guides an employee side-by-side through the entire process of his or her move. In practice, however, this model typically falls short. Mobility may outstrip the support model with its broad range of personal needs, sensitive concerns, interdependencies, pressures, and risks. Experience shows that no single person can navigate this environment as effectively as a well-organized team.

It is time to reframe the conversation. The goal should not be one point of contact, but rather the best contact(s) at the right moment(s), working together toward a common end. This is why many organizations are retiring the SPOC concept and replacing it with a powerful new model: a carefully selected and highly collaborative vendor network.

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From convention to reinvention

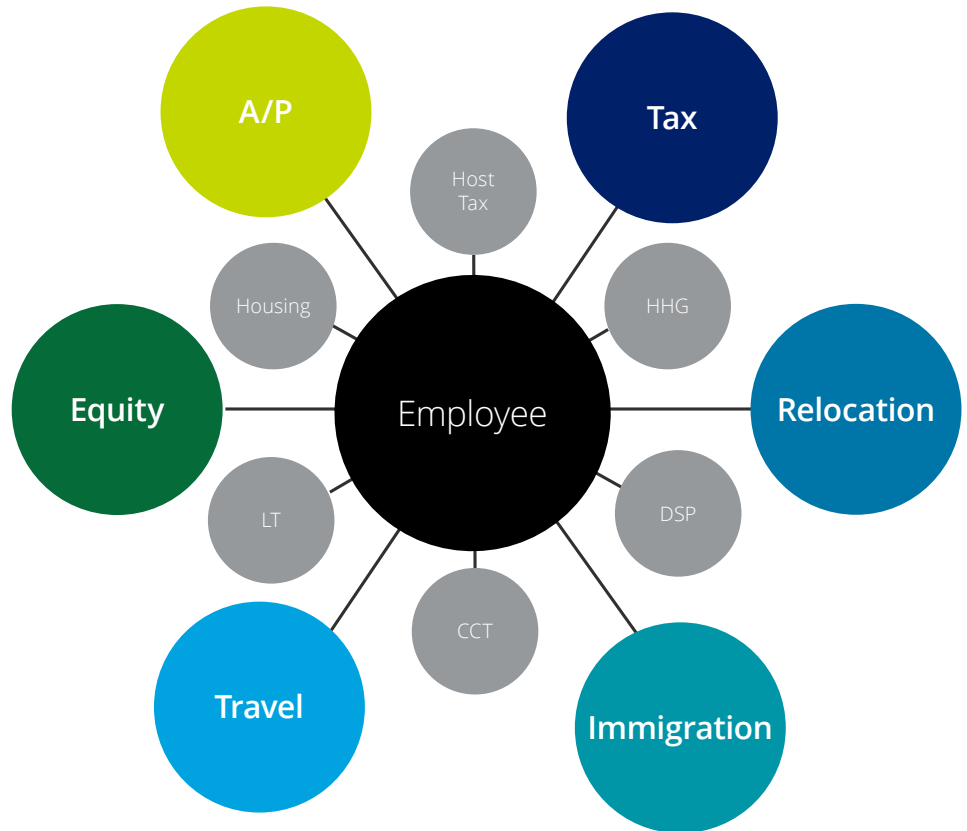
Conventional model

For decades, mobility support was characterized by an assembly of discrete vendors operating largely in isolation.

In this model, the individual is introduced to the mobility process through a one-time policy briefing and orientation. He or she is then contacted by the remaining vendors—immigration, household goods, destination services, cultural training, home tax, host tax, among others—each of whom arranges an introductory call and provides a data request list for the employee to complete. Interaction with the company's internal mobility function may be limited to exception requests and escalations.

Typical complaints about the conventional model include an overwhelming contact list, disparate to-do lists written by different providers, and repetitive information requests. Often, this model also lacks a strong project manager, leaving the employee as de facto coordinator. This can be a tremendous burden, given that he or she typically has no professional mobility experience, may have no project management experience, is often in the process of changing roles, and has a surfeit of move-related personal and family tasks to complete. It also introduces significant risk. Lack of skilled coordination increases opportunity for delays and miscommunications in an arena dominated by regulatory filings and time sensitive deliverables.

1.1 Conventional model



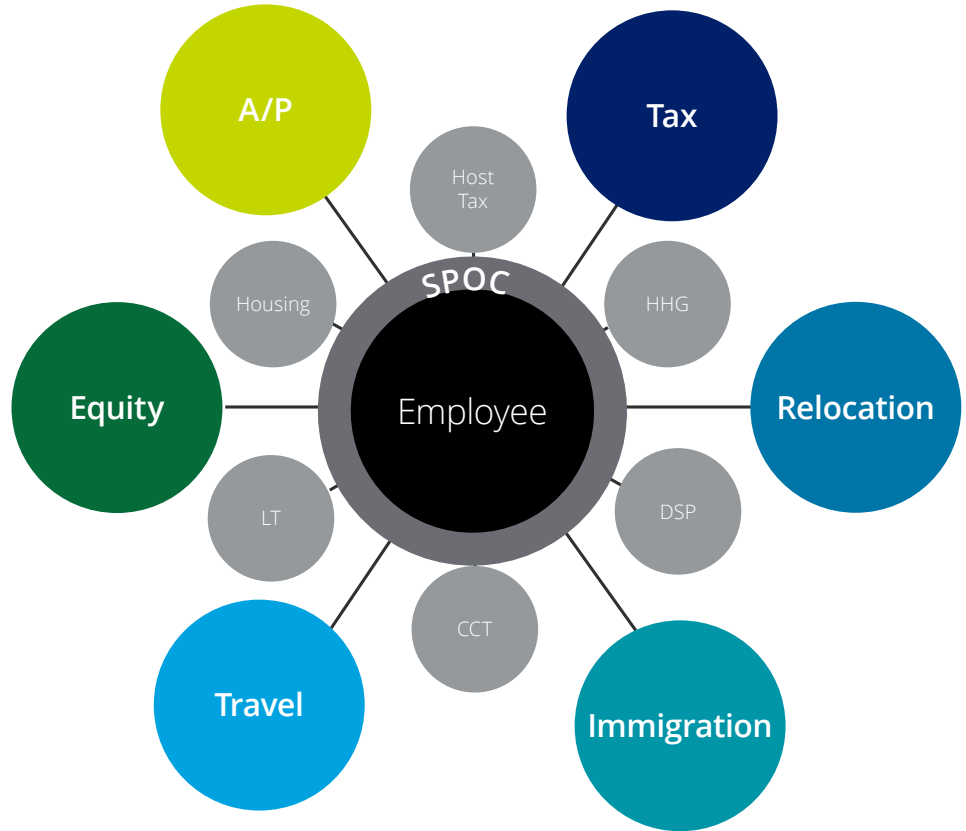
SPOC model

The SPOC concept arguably arose as a reaction to the conventional model. Wouldn't it be great, the industry reasoned, if a single skilled professional could manage the employee's move from start to finish?

This approach tends to work on a limited basis—a global tax coordinator, or a lead relocation counselor—but rarely succeeds at scale. The SPOC model can manifest in one of two ways. In the first, the employee continues to interact directly with the multitude of disconnected vendors, but the SPOC facilitates introductions and remains a universal point of contact for all questions. In the second, less common, model the SPOC acts as a buffer between the employee and the other vendors. This may involve actually participating in the downstream vendor meetings alongside the employee, and/or relaying subject-matter-specific questions and answers between the individual and the appropriate expert(s). Here again, the company retains ownership of the policy, exceptions, and escalations.

Viewed in this context, the SPOC model is a slight improvement over the status quo. Yet it's hardly transformative, and creates new problems as it solves others. On one hand, the SPOC reduces points of contact and "noise" for the individual and increases the opportunity for coordination (albeit manual) across the vendors. On the other hand, it adds a layer of communication—not ideal when handling critical communications or advice on a time sensitive basis. One could also argue that it prevents employees from having real-time discussions with the experts who could most effectively address their specific questions and challenges.

1.2 SPOC model



Collaborative network model

The network concept dissolves barriers among service providers, requiring and incentivizing them to perform as a unified team.

Here, the employee is encircled by a suite of diverse mobility specialists. Members in the network collaborate with the employee, and with one another, empowered to share information and problem solve within established guidelines.

The impact on worker experience can be transformative. As mobility advances, it is increasingly unrealistic to expect that one contact—or even one vendor operation—has the skills to address every possible variable during a move. He or she would need to be a bona fide specialist in customs, immigration, insurance, travel, equity, home sale, employment law, and tax, among others. If not, the value to the employee would be greatly reduced. The network model eliminates this generalist role and substitutes direct access to skilled professionals.

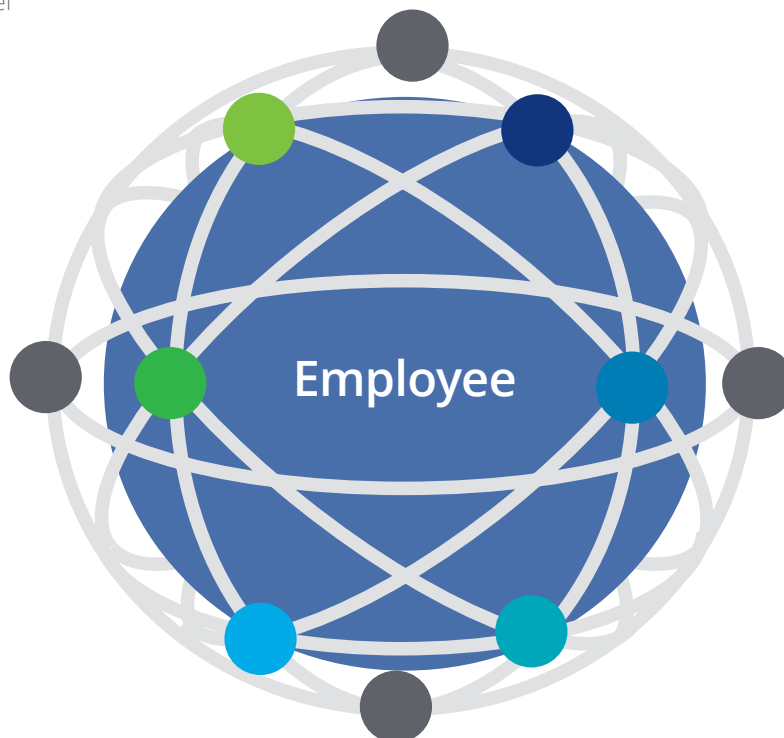
This solution embraces the size of the network and heightens its impact. Rather than obscuring the number of providers, it increases transparency, showcases strengths, and enables the employee to navigate the landscape effectively. When executed successfully, this model offers mobile workers the best of both worlds: direct access to subject matter specialists when they need it, and minimal disruption when they don't. Individuals are able to tailor their own experience based on how they interact with the network.

Heightened vendor cooperation also elevates the corporate mobility role. The conventional and SPOC models require tactical supervision: managing “noise,” mediating disagreements, solving problems. A well-formed vendor network, by contrast, shifts this responsibility to the providers and makes them more accountable to one another. The mobility function still owns the policy, escalations, and exceptions; however, time formerly spent on operations can be refocused on strategic endeavors.

The collaborative network is not about having the smallest number of contacts. It is about selecting the best contacts for critical competencies, and positioning them to engage seamlessly with employees.

Individuals are able to tailor their own experience based on how they interact with the network.

1.3 Collaborative network model



Case study: Empowered problem solving

Consider an international transferee whose visa application has been delayed.



Conventional model. The immigration firm informs the employee of the delay. The employee contacts the recruiter to determine his new start date, the shipper to reschedule household goods removals, the hotel to revise check-in date, the travel desk to rebook flights, etc.



SPOC model. The immigration firm informs the SPOC of the delay. The SPOC notifies the other vendors and updates the employee. Any follow-up—“How does this impact my kids’ school applications? Can I take a business trip in the meantime?”—is channeled back and forth among vendors, SPOC, and employee until all parties’ needs have been met.



Collaborative network. The immigration firm works closely with other parties supporting this move, and notifies them of the delay. The recruiter records the new start date, the relocation firm adjusts removals, hotel check-in, and flights. Each individual provides a confirmation to the employee—and the network—when complete.

Why now?

Traditional mobility models have upheld the industry through decades of tremendous growth. However, in the current environment, three factors are raising expectations and driving companies to innovate.

Talent

Companies must strive to stand out in today’s competitive global market. Worker mobility is now an HR advantage as much as it is a business need. Offering intriguing opportunities and a world-class, well managed mobility experience is an excellent means of attracting, retaining, and developing future leaders. Conversely, a program with a poor reputation can harm the company’s brand and deter candidates from entering the mobility process—or even the organization.



Technology

Recent technology advances have not just changed the way we do business; they’ve transformed how we share ideas and consume information. Workers are habituated to mobile devices, native applications, interconnected platforms, and real time alerts. Traditional mobility approaches seem outmoded as the environment grows more complex. Harnessing the vendor network to streamline data flow and modernize communications is more in line with current user experience expectations.



Information

The rise of Big Data has lifted organizational expectations and challenged definitions of success. Mobility programs are increasingly evaluated on quantifiable metrics such as global survey feedback, total annual spend, performance against budget, and return on investment. Gathering reliable data across disparate vendors systems can be a daunting challenge. However, when vendors are required to share and centralize information as part of their core operations, milestone tracking is more holistic, and analytics become more accessible and accurate.



Cultivating integration in your network

At its core, the collaborative network model represents a change in outlook. Participants must be motivated to relax traditional boundaries, share information, and partner across organizations as a collective unit. There are several ways companies can stimulate this attitude shift and drive positive behavioral changes.

Build the best network

For organizations seeking to develop a strong cross-vendor team, it is crucial to source the right players. Participants should elevate experience, mitigate risks, and mesh with company culture.

There is no universal formula—no “right” number or combination of process partners—for success. Each program’s strategy, size, industry, geography, and policy types drive unique support needs. Provided that vendors meet an organization’s specific criteria, perform well in core competencies, and embrace collaboration, the network concept can thrive.

The strength of the network lies in its connectedness, not its component parts. This stands in stark contrast to the conventional and SPOC frameworks, which naturally favor consolidation of services and reduction of touchpoints (even at the possible expense of service quality).

Share the vision

A best-in-class team needs a well-defined purpose. All parties in the collaborative network should understand their shared strategy, goals, and definition of success, as well as the broader organizational culture, values, and priorities. Only then can behaviors be tailored to serve these unique objectives.

The vision announcement can set the tone for future interactions. For example, some organizations might hold a live launch event to promote in-person relationship building; others may prefer a video conference to advocate the use of virtual meeting technology. The key is for the sponsoring leaders to adopt, exhibit, and reinforce the desired community mindset.

The strength of the network lies in its connectedness, not its component parts.



Rethink governance

Another key to spurring a cultural shift toward integration is to manage the team as one. This means setting clear expectations, rewarding acts of partnership, and discouraging competitive behaviors.

For example:

- Revisit service level agreements (SLAs) and key performance indicators (KPIs). Do they recognize and encourage cross-functional teamwork?
- Promote self-governance. Found a vendor advisory board with balanced representation and impartial or rotating chairpersons. Direct the board to hold regular meetings on key topics and report out to client program stakeholders.
- Identify potential barriers to information sharing, such as attorney-client privilege or required consents. Educate all parties regarding protocols. Establish controls to protect sensitive information and avoid improper disclosures, and protocols for managing data breaches.
- Set clear boundaries. Define what matters the network can address independently, and when they should escalate for company assistance.
- Discourage competition. Remind vendors that, while they may compete against one another in the external marketplace, rivalry has no place in this context. Parties should be penalized for any actions that undermine the transparency, trust or confidentiality of the network.

Foster relationships

Trust and respect are crucial for removing barriers and enabling teamwork; however, nurturing these qualities across organizations may require extra effort.

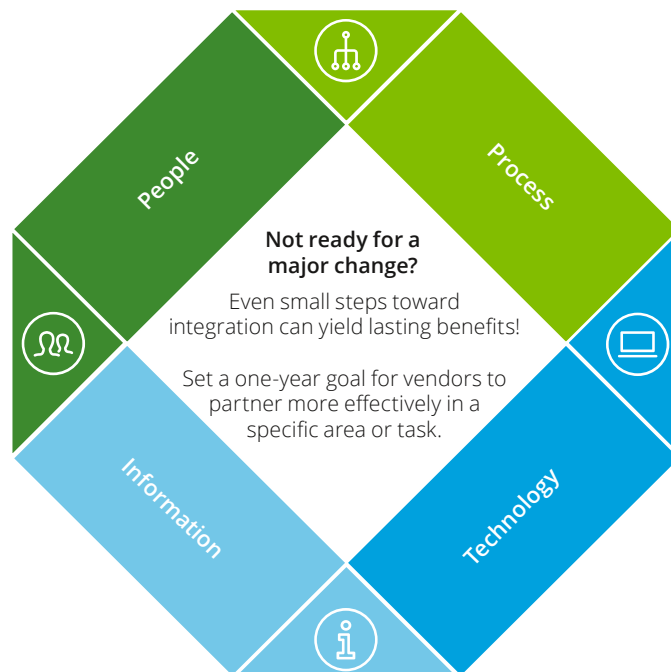
Encourage key players to spend time together. A monthly luncheon or video conference can help establish personal bonds. Assign cross-functional projects to people from different vendor organizations. Recognize exceptional effort and results, and celebrate them in a virtual publication or an informal awards ceremony. These are all low-cost, high-impact ways to boost morale and encourage partnership.

The role of technology

A shared technology solution is one way to enable communications and data sharing within the network: real-time information drives agility and responsiveness.

Many mobility management platforms are designed for multi-party use, and offer different user profiles to manage access levels across multiple vendor organizations. This creates the opportunity for centralized workflow and data storage.

However, a software implementation is certainly not practical for every program, and it is not central to the success of this model. Networked parties can still share data using web services, view-only system access, report exchange, SharePoint/Google Drive, or similar strategies.



Conclusion

In order to develop people and compete for top talent, today's employers must strive for a more seamless and gratifying mobility experience. Unifying the vendor team and creating a culture of integrated support can be accomplished in a relatively short period of time, at reasonable expense and effort, without changing program policy or infrastructure. At the same time, the resulting gains—successful moves and satisfied mobile workers—can yield enduring benefits for any organization.

It can be difficult to embrace changes to long-standing beliefs. For at least 15 years, many industry leaders have strived to achieve the SPOC ideal. The time and resources devoted to this effort were not lost; they no doubt moved the industry forward and benefitted many people. Yet past efforts are not enough to sustain a changing workforce with an appetite for global opportunities and real-time connectivity. Mobile workers expect and deserve more.

As we look to the future, it is essential that we challenge convention and drive innovation in mobility management. We must follow the lead of workforce, technology, and information trends to build on past progress. Today's talent mobility landscape features a strategic outlook, improved technology, and sophisticated data safeguards. Now, more than ever before, we are equipped to serve mobile workers in a new way: as a collaborative team that is stronger than the sum of its parts.

Credits

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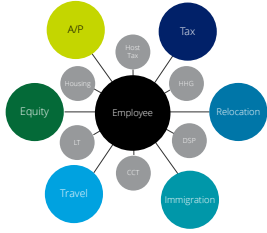
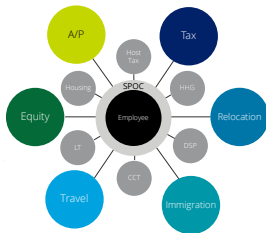

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Summary comparison of models

	Conventional model	SPOC model	Collaborative Network
Diagram			
Description	Employee works with several separate vendors to manage the move.	Employee works with a designated single contact who manages the move.	Employee works with team of specialists who manage the move.
Do vendors interact with the employee?	Yes	No	Yes
Do vendors interact with one another?	No	No	Yes
How many points of contact?	Greatest number	Smallest number	Varies based on need
Selection criteria	Choose vendors that best meet the needs in each functional area.	Choose vendor that meets the greatest number of criteria across all functional areas.	Choose best-in-class vendors aligned with the program strategy, culture and long-term vision.

Benefits of the collaborative network:

- Embraces, rather than downplays, the size and skill of the support system.
- Grants employee direct access to specialists; no “middle man”.
- Enriches experience; adapts to employee preferences and needs.
- Diminishes over-communication and duplicate requests.
- Increases service provider effectiveness without added cost or oversight.
- Elevates role of mobility function by enabling partnership among vendors.

Actions you can take to get started:

- Build the best network. Select best-in-class providers based on program specific needs.
- Share the vision. Make sure all participants understand the shared mission and goals.
- Rethink governance. Charter a vendor advisory team, and establish cross-functional performance metrics to promote cooperation.
- Foster relationships. Create opportunities for bonding and teamwork across vendor organizations.

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