

“We are way too small for global mobility!” Are you, really?

Part One – The talent management side of Mobility

By Dominique J. Herrmann, Founder, Primaxel LLC

“A small company like ours cannot afford the bells and whistles of global mobility. So much must be in place just for a few people... And then, there is the cost! And it’s all so complicated...”

This is what many small and mid-size companies with international – sometimes, global – operations often have to say about

In this two-article series, we examine how smaller and mid-size companies with global reach can approach a light-weight but yet effective mobility program

global mobility. Yet, lightweight global mobility programs in smaller structures can have significant impact on business, culture and talent.

Start with the big picture

Imagine that you are a Lead People Officer in your company, a relatively small but key player in a niche market. You have just concluded a meeting with your CEO, who has asked you to *“get started with a mobility program that will raise our profile in the marketplace, especially as we expand into new markets.”*

This is not the first time the topic of international mobility has come up. In previous meetings, a clear vision for international expansion has emerged. To date, most of the strategy has been achieved



via alliances with local players and distributors, as well as minor acquisitions. But now, it is time to solidify progress, and expand organically. It is time to move into higher gear.

The key to success in establishing a mobility program is linking it with global business and people strategies, reflecting talent management and a consolidated operational people plan

As you reflect on this challenge, you realize it is also now time to begin unifying elements in different corporate locations that reflect the personalities of local leaders, and local cultural traits. You know that effective

leaders shape culture and vision to reflect their true beliefs. In other words, it is time to focus on forging a corporate culture. International mobility can be one of the enablers.

Your next step is to understand more about the global business strategy and its people implications from line and infrastructure management.

During conversations with these business leaders, you identify:

- Their strategic international expansion business agendas, in the context of the overall vision;
- Corresponding talent implications, in terms of capability and capacity gaps in each location;
- Their perceptions of the most important global organizational values and behaviors, going forward.

Translate business needs into people moves

Back at your desk, you prepare a consolidated operational plan for implementation that outlines:

- Capability and resourcing needs for each location;
- Opportunities for “cross-fertilization;”
- International movement of people for each location (including from/to headquarters) in terms of international assignments inbound (i.e. to a location) and outbound (i.e. from a location). At this early stage you are just looking for a handful of highly successful key moves that will establish a track record;
- Hiring plans for each location, including replacement needs based on anticipated turnover.



You then validate this plan with business leaders, identifying opportunities for talent sharing.

When this is complete, you present your consolidated findings at a management committee meeting, ensuring there is overarching shared support.

Make some fundamental program design decisions

As you begin to develop your own program, ask yourself questions that will set the tone from the outset. These include:

- How open do you want the mobility program to be? Should people be encouraged to volunteer for assignments, or is it all about getting a tap on the shoulder? Both?
- Is your company willing to encourage and provide assistance for people who want to move permanently to another operational location? If so, should there be a job board of open positions worldwide?

Your mobility framework should address basic decisions regarding international people management. These include what support is given to people raising their hands for assignments, and how to mentor international assignees

- To what extent does the company see international assignments as necessary for advancement to senior positions? To what extent are “global skills” a requirement in senior ranks – now, and in the future?
- Is there a strong commitment to include international assignments in formal

development plans? Are such plans developed with strong involvement of the individual? Is mentoring by someone very senior a component of the individual plan? If so, who has this task?

- As the Lead People Officer, will your role include helping to remedy issues and mediate challenging situations?



In the next issue, we will examine the policy, compensation and support package and logistics sides of your small, lightweight, and highly beneficial mobility program. ♦

Note: The situation described in this article is fictitious, but representative – albeit in an oversimplified manner - of what smaller organizations with global ambitions go through at some point during the course of their international development.



About the author
Dominique J. Herrmann helps organizations identify and implement global human resources and mobility strategies, policies and processes in support of their global business ambitions. He can be reached at dh@primaxel.com. More information and contact details at www.primaxel.com.