



FUTURE-PROOFING MOBILITY

Now is the time to leverage new technologies and adaptable policies

By Matthew Bradford

Global mobility is anything but predictable. Yet while faced with constant change and disruption, there is much employers and their relocation service providers can do to safeguard their plans against inevitable shake-ups.

“Like so many other industries, the global mobility market has been – and will continue to be – impacted by disruption and change for many years to come,” says Joe Cardini, president of Bristol Global. “Similarly, the speed at which we can forecast and react to the multitude of forces that present a steady flow of disruption and change can determine our ultimate success or failure.”

Those forces range from demographic trends to geographic shifts, and they are changing the rules and expectations around relocation. Moreover, new and evolving technologies are fast transforming the logistics around mobility in terms of how assignments are planned, executed, monitored and measured.

“Adapting to all these disruptions requires agility, constant curiosity, and a desire to never stop learning – attributes that should be highly sought after and nourished throughout our industry,” Cardini notes.

The need for agility is not lost on the relocation community, and in response, many are leveraging technology to provide more flexible end-to-end mobility support. For some, that means using advanced data analytics to craft relocation packages that can adapt to an individual assignee’s evolving needs; for others, it means implementing programs that can better assess and predict market or regional conditions and keep all stakeholders engaged when it comes to immigration, tax laws and other compliance issues.

“Everyone frets about robots, artificial intelligence or what have you, but we tend to think technology makes us more human,” says Bob Rosing, president and CEO of Dwellworks. “Today, we can use data analytics, machine learning, and automated systems to help us find patterns, see opportunities, fix errors and waste, and connect with more people faster, more frequently and more meaningfully.”

Mobile technologies and ‘smart’ online systems are also valuable for building live, supportive networks where assignees can access the people, resources and services they need on their terms. These networks can be crucial to keeping all parties informed and ready to react to both long- and short-term changes that may impact mobility.

Adds Rosing: “We would do well to accelerate our adoption of technology and use it both to make our operations more efficient and effective, and to enable us to communicate more meaningfully with our clients. We need to ‘disrupt’ to the point of seamless communication and information exchange, with positive feedback cycles and meaningful, fact-based product development if we want to stay relevant in a high-demand talent management environment.”

FLEXIBLE PROGRAMS

In addition to adopting high-tech resources, future-proofing mobility relies on programs and policies that can roll with the punches. According to Taryn Kramer, vice president, Global Consulting, Sirva Worldwide

Relocation & Moving, “When we talk about flexibility and agility these days, we’re really talking about two things: the level of support you are providing for each of your relocation components and how that support is being delivered.”

To that end, Kramer has observed employers moving away from one-size-fits-all packages towards tiered or customized packages that grant assignees more choice over the support they receive, thereby addressing potential issues or needs that may otherwise fall under an employer’s radar. “It’s about swinging that level of choice over to the employee to decide what they’ll need to have a successful assignment,” she explains. “That enables them to say, ‘This program is a larger priority for my family, so I’d rather allocate more of my relocation budget towards this component of support versus this other component.’”

Giving employees more agency over their relocation may contribute to a more flexible mobility strategy, but doing so presents a challenge for program administrators. What was once a predictable and repeatable process can become an exercise in program customization that can make it more difficult for mobility leaders to plan ahead.

Nevertheless, says Kramer, “Programs that don’t incorporate this flexibility into their structure will find themselves dealing with lots of exceptions. It’s beneficial for mobility program leaders to recognize the need for this flexibility and not only incorporate that into their policies, but make sure their systems, process and vendors are agile enough to manage and administer a truly adaptable program.”

It pays to have help when it comes to immigration, tax and regional law compliance. This is where building strong vendor partnerships can provide mobility stakeholders and employees with the resources to navigate changes throughout an assignment. “Gone are the days where mobility professionals are a jack-of-all-trades and experts in all components of mobility,” says Kramer. “Today, we need to be able to leverage subject matter experts whose sole responsibility is to keep up with those compliance requirements, or local vendors who can provide a level of ground support at the actual destination that you as a relocator can’t replicate. As an employer, you need that vendor network to stay agile and continually enhance the mobility experience.”

Mobility is a moving target. Market trends and geopolitical activities can make

it tough to predict future conditions, while generational shifts make it difficult to pin down today’s relocating employees. As such, Cardini says, “There is simply no room for complacency in any business, not least of which in the global employee mobility market. The disruptions we’re talking about are just a few of many out there, and all of them require a tremendous degree of vigilance and agility to overcome on behalf of everyone involved in the relocation process.”

Certainly, adds Rosing, as organizations take steps to future-proof their mobility strategies and reap the benefits of a more global and flexible workforce, now is the moment to leverage the technologies, partners and more adaptable programs to keep everyone on the move. “It’s a challenging time, but it’s a fantastic time to gather information, listen to customers, expand your customer base, and provide meaningful services to high-value business contributors going through a transition.” ■



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