

# The professional guide to an effective international assignment programme – 9 essential factors to consider

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With businesses increasingly operating globally, the growing demand for talent and rising activity in emerging markets, companies are sending more employees on international assignments. Your employees are therefore more mobile than ever!

Living and working abroad can be life changing and highly exhilarating for anyone. It can open your mind and thoughts about the world we live in and its different cultures. Although it can be quite an experience, it can also involve risks that can impact not just the expat, but the company itself, if robust processes are not in place. **But what makes an international assignment a success?**

## Factor #1 – Assignee Experience

The process of expatriation is complex and involves many specialist functions. It is important to have **up to date Global Mobility policies** to ensure consistency of application. The package has to be established taking into account home and host country tax and social security issues to ensure compliance. Immigration requirements are vitally important and if not handled correctly may **cause delays and frustrations**.

The softer issues of home and school search will have a major negative impact if not handled professionally. Culture and Language training should be arranged to ensure that the assignee and family settle into their new environment as quickly as possible and ready to go. The processes and activities need to be clearly defined to manage the expectations of Assignees, line Managers, HR teams and 3<sup>rd</sup> party Suppliers.

## Factor #2 - Selection of the Employee

International assignments take place for several reasons. e.g.

- a significant problem arises in a subsidiary - troubleshooting
- the company is expanding their offices in another country and does not have the required skills and experience locally
- talent management reasons/personal development
- Personal request of the employee

Depending upon the reason, selecting the right employee to do the job is crucial.

Companies want the **highest possible Return on Investment**, therefore choosing the right people involves identifying those who are dedicated and motivated to succeed, are more likely to adjust to the foreign culture and environment and do not have external pressures such as schooling, dual careers, health issues, aging parents.

Do you have a clearly defined selection process? There are Cultural adaptability tools available to support your selection process. The employee's family also plays an important part in the success of the assignment. This depends on the **attitudes of the family at the time the offer is made to relocate**, and the ability of the family to adjust during the global assignment.

## Factor #3 – Training – Culture and Language

Training will prepare the assignee and family and help them settle into their new environment quickly. An important part for a company's success is its employees' ability to understand, **appreciate and adapt to other cultures** and to **develop a global mind-set**.

It is essential to ensure that international assignees are sufficiently trained to get the most out of the benefits in terms of advancing the individual's career, but to also add value to the organisation. **Lack of investment** in these areas on the part of the employer is one of the leading reasons for **assignment failure** and **premature repatriation**.

## Factor #4 - Country Background and Research

It is important to provide country background and deliver significant research to the assignee and their family (such as the laws, climate, population, currency, crime rate, etc) so they can prepare themselves.

Providing such information can **help reduce risks** such as prosecutions and criminal liability in relation the assignee, criminal liability in relation to responsible corporate officers, fines, penalties and a variety of other punishments.

A benefit to the assignee for having information such as the country economy, currency and culture can be in terms of better business relations. Depending on the company's services or product, as their ideas or work put in during

the assignment could be a bigger success than planned if having the knowledge and ability to work around the **country's desires and needs**.

## Factor #5 - Cost Effectiveness

Almost all organisations are challenged to make their Global Mobility programmes cost effective. By cutting the costs to a bare minimum may lead to **employee dissatisfaction** and **assignment failure**. It is more effective to examine housing and schooling costs to ensure that they are cost efficient and provide an **acceptable benefit**. Finding the most tax effective way of putting the salary and benefits package together will very **often achieve cost savings**.

## Factor #6 – Documentation

It is important that the **'secondment' letter** reflects the full terms and conditions of the assignment in accordance with the Global Mobility policy. Furthermore, any tax planning opportunities taken must also be reflected in the letter.

## Factor #7 – Zero Costs of Non Compliance

Immigration and Tax authorities worldwide take a close interest in globally mobile employees as they are **seen as an easy target for non-Compliance**. The costs can be very significant in terms of unpaid Tax and Social Security (both

home and host countries) as well as the fines and penalties that will be imposed.

Failure to meet Immigration requirements may **result in deportation**. In both cases corporate reputation can be damaged irreparably.

## Factor #8 - Business Strategy

Whether to outsource or not?

Once an in-principle decision has been taken to outsource global mobility projects, then a clear strategy must be developed. This must include detailed consideration of which elements of the process to outsource.

This list may extend beyond the obvious "technical activities", such as immigration services, tax planning, pay determination, contract preparation etc. to devolution of responsibility to the external provider for maintenance of the primary record base, with the employer having online access.

As well as detailing the functionality, the employer should at this stage define the nature of the service required. How much of it must be delivered face-to-face? Who will manage the process internally and who will deal with the external provider on a day-to-day basis?

What functions should be retained internally and who will provide them? This leads to the inevitable question of whether existing team members can be released to concentrate on other activities where they can provide much more benefit to the organisation.

The strategy should take account of each stage in the process, from identification of potential providers, to their briefing, tendering,

consideration, short-listing, the formalisation of a service level agreement and the transition to full implementation.

The plan must allow realistic time-scales and provide for appropriate levels of internal consultation and participation. If it does not, then **anxiety is likely to develop and this can spread well beyond the HR department and unsettle line management, assignees and their families**.

Once an outline service specification and strategy have been developed, potential service providers can be identified who prima facie have the ability to deliver the services required. These may include organisations who undertake to provide all the required services themselves, as well as other specialists who manage other third party suppliers on the employer's behalf.

## Factor #9 - Selection of the Supplier

Ideally, the employer will have defined the selection criteria carefully, noting which of them must be met, as an absolute minimum, and the relative importance of other criteria. Ideally, the criteria should focus on **deliverables** rather than delivery methods.

There may be an intuitive preference to select a provider who will take responsibility for delivery of every aspect of service themselves, on a one-stop shop basis. But those who do not may well be able to demonstrate an excellent track record of managing other third party suppliers so that, for the employer, the service is seamless.

Some criteria may seem fairly basic, but are important none-the-less. Providers must be able to **demonstrate that their systems are robust and secure, and that disaster recovery systems are in place.**

Employers who have devolved responsibility to third parties for the maintenance of both electronic and paper records need the comfort of knowing that they can be recovered and replicated in case of need.

The provider will want to know that data can be recovered if for some reason their own systems fail.

IPM Global Mobility provides support and solutions for all the challenges listed in this guide — and more. So remember: when you need help, we're ready to give you a hand. Let us hear from you! Good luck with your international assignments program.

IPM Global Mobility team.

## About IPM Global Mobility

If you are faced with managing your Mobility Programme, or are grappling with the technical problems, or associated compliance issues, you should consider outsourcing to specialists like us.

Organisations, which want to focus on their core competencies, understand the benefits of outsourcing an activity that often proves to be disproportionately resource-hungry when handled by those who cannot devote their full attention to it.

We are recognised as a leader in the provision of fully integrated outsourced global assignee management solutions.

We provide comprehensive relocation support services to a wide range of clients and their assignees including those expanding operations to overseas locations for the first time, those experiencing a surge in global mobility from emerging markets, through to multinationals with an established global workforce.

## Questions? Get in touch!

We are always here to inspire and help, so don't hesitate to contact us if you run into any problems or have any questions along the way of your international assignment programme.

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