

The Data Analytics Journey

Until recently, mobility programmes suffered from a lack of sophisticated tools to track and process the huge volumes of data generated across the assignment lifecycle and its network of services and stakeholders. These disparate processes and systems quickly lead to cost overages, poorly managed relocations, compliance issues, and more. To be successful, mobility leaders not only need accurate data to progress moves and quantify their programme's value, but also to initiate more meaningful conversations within HR and other business stakeholders.

Now, as more companies adopt sophisticated technology tools to automate and integrate their global mobility ecosystem, the ability to consolidate, organise, and visualise data for real-time analysis is becoming a reality. The conversion of 'information noise' into actionable insight is easier than ever to achieve:

"Gone are the days of spending hours running a report, adding a million filters and then manually manipulating it to look like something visually meaningful. Now I have dashboards which provide me with a snapshot of the information that I need within seconds."

- Shona Edridge, Global Mobility Lead Europe, at Unilever

Insightful data analytics must be driven by company goals – do we need a more competitive programme? Do we really have access to good internal candidates? Are we experiencing post-repatriation attrition? Why is it taking too long to move people? Do we need to ramp-up in new locations quicker? With robust analytics, GM professionals are taking the lead in shaping the criteria for measuring success and getting in front of these questions – a bold move beyond simply illustrating headcount and movement.

However, such a transformation does not happen overnight. Leveraging data analytics is a journey - and changing business priorities, geo-political events, as well as planned cyclical activities, can distract from the path. But if done properly, the entire global mobility ecosystem is empowered with the knowledge they need, when they need it most, to make accurate and informed decisions with true agility.

At various locations along their unique journeys, our clients shared their thoughts on their successes and what they aspire to achieve in the future:

Begin With The Basics

Most companies begin their data journey from a place of real concern about data integrity. Data often sits across multiple systems and spreadsheets, version control is impossible, and GM teams are often penalised by the business for bad data that often comes from the business, undermining their reputation as business partners.

The 2017 RES Forum Annual Report chapter on data analytics of lists, Excel spreadsheets, Access databases, SharePoint, invoicing tools, vendor status reports, payroll, and manual checklists – on top of the organisation-wide HR system, as data sources survey respondents consolidate to provide reporting to the business. According to a 2016 study from BGRS, 44% of respondents stated a top challenge in producing accurate reports is that data resides in multiple, disconnected sources. And to further compound this problem, another 19% reported that data is not being captured at all.

The first, and sometimes most challenging step in achieving accurate and valuable data insight is connecting all the disparate systems and data with the business and the wider mobility ecosystem:

"Moving to a single source of truth was a huge leap for us. Only once the data was consolidated and brought up to date could we develop dashboards that could be pushed out to the business detailing volumes, trends and estimated costs. This allowed point-in-time active visibility of spend and a certain amount of predictability on where the programme is heading – whilst the application of traditional expat policy types remains relevant for the right assignee/assignment profiles, the perceptible shift to Permanent Transfers and STAs is particularly key to future business planning."

- Vicki Christofides, Director of Global Mobility at Thomson Reuters

Once the data is consolidated and the mobility ecosystem integrated, GM teams – and all key stakeholders – have real-time access and control. Harnessing current, historical and pending data, teams can produce on-demand reports as well as visualisation tools to track trends and avoid any unexpected surprises. Then, through the power of data insights, Mobility teams can move from a reactive approach – creating headcount lists every month, to a proactive approach – predicting future volumes and costs, enhancing the GM team's ability to advise the business and add value to the process.

Build On That Foundation

Typically, detailed cost visualisation is the next step after data integrity. This is simple to achieve with software that can batch-update and consolidate cost estimates across the entire business, then filter down per business unit, location, cost type, cost centre, approving manager, etc. Some companies, such as Rolls-Royce, take this one step further by providing Finance and Business Leaders direct access to real-time cost data trending over time to be used for accruals:

"Cost detail is traditionally challenging to highlight to the business in rows and number formats. Empowering the business to self-serve their own cost data through interactive analytical dashboards has opened their eyes to the detail behind what they approve in terms of spend."

- Gareth Davies, Head of Global Mobility at Rolls-Royce

Mobility is still very influenced by cost pressure and all indications are that this will continue. The RES Forum survey indicates that 64% of organisations currently use their data to manage costs, and a further 30% would like to do so in the near future.

And while the old back-of-the-envelope cost estimate still serves its purpose as a quick insight into the cost of a move, recent trends indicate that many businesses are experiencing a growing need for a greater level of accuracy. Mobility programmes are (finally) collating actual cost data to build on their estimates analytics and highlight key areas for savings – such as by reducing spend on tax services - by using their own tools to consolidate information to feed into the compensation collection process; or by reducing spend on compensation reconciliations at year-end. Closer alignment with Finance also seems to be a driver for some companies through tracking actual spend across the programme month-on-month:

"We are currently working on meeting the demands of our business in relation to more real-time management of the accounting cycle. We are working on loading actual data into our mobility technology to compare to the estimates – facilitating real-time access to accurate costs for Finance, whilst enabling cost estimate data review, in parallel, by using actual allowance and relocation cost data."

- Vicki Christofides, Director of Global Mobility at Thomson Reuters

Successfully implementing data analytics to support cost containment requires payroll

and compensation counterparts, and often third party service providers, to work closely together to feed timely payroll, expense and invoice reporting into their mobility software, enabling the business to see costs almost as they are happening. With complete visibility into estimated and actual assignment cost data, GM teams are armed with the insights they need to:

- Consult with business about future spend based on past actual costs
- Better estimate the impact of future policy changes
- Provide more accurate accruals throughout the lifecycle
- Plan for and predict possible future spend 'spikes' past repatriation.

Take It To The Next Level

Harnessing and visualising data real-time is useful – but it is really the tip of the iceberg. A truly information-driven, visionary programme goes beyond data visualisation and leverages predictive analytics to model future trends and risks, prepare for sudden change, as well as better plan for hiring, managing, retaining and rewarding employees.

According to the 2017 Annual RES Survey, half of GM professionals aim to predict future assignment compensation, reward trends and costs in the near future. Additionally, two in five strive to predict assignment types and movements and want to identify future GM candidates. Hot areas of concern include career progression before, during and after assignment, willingness to go on assignment, diversity, retention and of course everyone's favourite - return on investment. While only 2% of organisations use analytics to understand this now, 44% plan to in the near future.

Dashboards visualise key parameters required to answer these questions. Layering with added cost predictions, trends over time, as well as benchmarking against company-wide statistics, can really help organisations identify if their talent programme is successful, or where there may be serious concerns



around succession planning, for example.

Further data modelling can help organisations answer questions such as what if there is a tsunami in South America and we need to evacuate our assignees on short notice? How many assignees will be impacted by the latest travel ban? What could Brexit cost us?

However, predictive analytics can only enable decision making if the organisation has accurate data to work with – and data visualisation can certainly help with accuracy too. We find we are building data integrity and audit dashboards as part of system implementation, to ensure organisations are aware of data gaps and can rectify them. Really knowing your data – and sometimes its shortfalls – can facilitate better communication with the business, as well as clear qualification around parameters used to predict programme trends. It can also open the eyes of the business to where their data or actions (or lack of) may be impacting the overall value of the service GM provides.

Push The Boundaries

So cost and transparency are still common themes for companies like Rolls-Royce, Thomson Reuters and Unilever, and they have worked hard to get their data cleaned and available to their stakeholders. But what do they aspire to achieve in the future? Vicki at Thomson Reuters highlighted what many programme leads are considering:

“We would like to be more involved in assisting with candidate selection – looking at candidate profiles, country combinations

and best value for the company in terms of performance, suitability for certain roles and potential return on investment.”

Business push-back is often a barrier to data sharing. A strong feeling remains that performance ratings and skills profiles, although highly relevant to successful assignment management, should not be shared outside of the Talent and Performance Management space. However, attitudes are slowly changing:

“Performance enablement is high on the agenda of the HRDs and formal rating systems in many organisations are being torn up with an emphasis on continual performance dialogue and focus on development and potential. So, it's a challenge as to how well we can collate meaningful data to inform the talent/mobility agenda. What data will be relevant and how will it be universally consistent? International opportunities play an important role in the development agenda – Global Mobility needs to partner closely with the Talent & Leadership Development teams to design programmes and meaningful solutions in order to be successful.”

- Gareth Davies, Head of Global Mobility at Rolls-Royce

Companies like Rolls-Royce and Thomson Reuters are recognising the importance of looking outside of the box when it comes to data. Slowly conversations are turning to non-standard sources such as public social media profiles from LinkedIn – a way to source skills and experience without having to ask employees to complete more forms and maintain more profiles in even more applications.

Mike Piker at Naspers is looking to further break boundaries by tapping into vendors and more anecdotal information to help identify suitable candidates for overseas roles:

“I envisage gathering a set of predictive analytics that will help us identify employees who can withstand and deliver on their role in tough locations. I want to gather information that will answer: How well do they tolerate ambiguity? How well do they deal with security challenges? Are they easily disconcerted? How well did they adjust in previous moves?”

- Mike Piker, Vice President - Global Total Rewards/People Technology, Naspers



Perhaps the near future will see Global Mobility 'rating' their assignees in the manner of organisations like Uber – rating on cultural awareness, adaptability or even ease to work with? Perhaps social analytics – data mining from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Tumblr, will supplement skills profiles with interests, or even call out certain key behaviours? Assignee Rating – the Future?

Global Mobility technology has come a long way. Where technology demands used to be about automation of complex calculations, and workflow to simplify policy complexities, now these functionalities are expected by default. Changing attitudes to system integration and data sharing mean that GM attention is turning to more creative value-add – comparing cost with performance, baselining against the wider organisation, and leveraging external data sources - to truly align with the Talent agenda. Now, through improved data insights, the GM function is seen as a key contributor to the development of talent, helping to enable top-line growth and key business strategies.

Assignee Rating	
Age	Rating
Adaptability	★★★★☆
Easy to work with	★★★★☆
Cooperative	★★★★☆
Culturally Aware	★★★★☆

“Integrating with your entire ecosystem of partners, business stakeholders, vendors and assignees is core to achieving a data driven programme”, says Mark Thomas, CEO of Equus. “When armed with trusted data, global mobility teams have the opportunity to turn the tides and collaborate with the business to provide valuable tools for talent management, cost containment, compliance and more.”

As GM technology advances, so will the impact of the mobility ecosystem. For several years now, mobility systems have been integrating with HR databases to exchange employee demographics, job and company data and compensation details, facilitating data consistency, and providing insights into sophisticated mobility demographics and costs. The mobility ecosystem 2.0 is standard integration across Mobility, HR, Talent, Reward and vendor systems, consolidating and sharing appropriate data, and facilitating smooth communication and management of assignment logistics. The ecosystem will provide real-time visibility of move status, compliance, costs and programme demographics, consolidated with performance, KPIs and assignee skills and experiences. The possibilities are limitless, and this new environment will both accelerate and benefit from advanced analytical insights to the mobility future.



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Head of Operations, UK, Equus Software. Equus Software is the global leader in cloud-based international relocation and mobility solutions. More than 300 organisations around the world rely on Equus tools and technology to automate mundane, transactional work so that global mobility teams, talent management professionals and other key stakeholders can focus on adding value to the business. Founded in 1999, Equus has a proven track record for delivering cutting-edge talent mobility solutions, continuous innovation and exceptional customer service. Visit www.equusoft.com.



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