

How CHROs can leverage mobility to evolve workforce strategy



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With added cost pressures and complexity, CHROs should consider the evolution of workforce mobility as a necessary path to better outcomes.

Two questions to ask:

► How can better alignment of the mobility function across workforce strategy lead to improved outcomes?

► Why should CHROs reconsider the metrics around mobility's return on investment?

The complexity of the **"next normal"** of work has prompted the HR function to transform in a way that prioritizes agility and resilience, while not sacrificing employee experience.

It's clear that, despite market uncertainty, cost-cutting can't be an objective in and of itself, without considering the macro view of an **organization's future shape** and capabilities.

At the same time, recent experience has shown leaders the limits of some legacy HR processes and models that are neither suited to the workforce challenges of today nor agile for the future. As Chief Human Resources Officers (CHROs) look to drive workforce transformation suited for this climate, the Mobility function can evolve to be high-impact, efficient, and cost-effective while promoting growth for the business and for people.

The CHRO Imperative Series provides critical answers and actions to help Talent leaders reframe the future of their organizations. The **EY 2024 Mobility Reimagined Survey** reports that Mobility functions can have influence across key focus areas for CHROs (talent development, cost efficiency, and creating an exceptional employee experience), if there is thoughtfulness around mobility investment and its strategic influence within organizations.

The survey revealed five key drivers of more "evolved" mobility functions that are tied to better return on investment for internal talent goals and business health. The drivers – strategic alignment, talent linkage, digital focus, flexibility, and the use of external expertise – all can be influenced, if not owned, by the CHRO.

Mobility functions that focused on the five drivers reported being 2.3 times more likely to say mobility helps organizational resilience, 1.5 times more likely to say mobility helps address talent shortages, and 1.3 times more likely to cite positive mobility return on investment (ROI).

Resilience

2.3 X

more likely to say mobility helps organizational resilience.

Race for talent

1.5 X

more likely to say mobility helps respond effectively to talent shortages.

Despite improved outcomes reported by the more "evolved" Mobility functions, some leaders still consider the Mobility function on a transactional island, which belies its strategic value. Mobility's scope now includes providing operational and strategic insights on potential tax, legal, or regulatory risks of cross-jurisdictional work, in addition to influencing overall employee experience.

Nearly all mobile employees (92%) say an international experience can be life-changing, with 64% saying they are more likely to stay with their employer after a long-term mobile assignment.

Further analysis shows that the quality of the experience matters most in the staying power of the mobile assignment, and on its impact on talent outcomes. Employees cite career growth as the leading reason to seek further mobility experiences.

Meanwhile, attracting and retaining talent are first and second on the list of employer-identified workforce risks, according to the **EY 2023 Work Reimagined Survey**, showing that the still-heated race for talent remains a focus across the C-Suite.

Harmonizing mobility with greater workforce goals

As CHROs consider a new constellation of workforce needs and requirements, the data shows a people-first approach as being effective and essential. The EY 2023 Work Reimagined Survey shows that organizations which prioritize people in their workforce decisions report markedly better outcomes: they are 2.5 times more likely to have employees who feel connected to their teams, and their employees are five times more likely to agree their organization can adapt and build future skills.

Applying a mobility lens to this people-first approach can help realize more benefits, even if the many moving parts of workforce strategy won't allow for a one-size-fits-all solution. The moment calls for agility and resilience to build work models that enable remote, hybrid and physical mobility experiences, while serving the needs and values of individuals and the organization.

The **EY 2024 Mobility Reimagined Survey** shows significant splits in mobility preference (program type and support) and purpose (career progression or skills building) depending on age, gender, and seniority. For example, 50% of women would consider developmental assignments in the future compared with 33% of men. Similarly, 45% of Gen X employees would consider long-term unaccompanied assignments (without their families or significant others) against 30% of millennials. Perhaps to be expected, 36% of younger Gen Z employees consider technology tools for reporting and compliance as important, compared with 24% of Gen Xers.

New opportunities and risks connected to cross-border and hybrid working require new thinking about the purpose and potential of workforce mobility programs. The survey revealed that the most evolved mobility functions aren't passive observers of organizational strategy, but proactive learners and advisers to HR. Forward-thinking CHROs should use this to create deeper strategic alignment of talent and business goals.

Rethinking ROI and strategic value

Part of weaving mobility into broader business and HR imperatives is the ability to measure progress against its desired outcomes. If your workforce strategy emphasizes skills development, are you collecting metrics to show mobility's return on investment for skills? The same goes for metrics tied to talent retention, employee satisfaction, productivity, and the cost basis of the function.

With the right metrics, it's possible to make the case for mobility's added value to the organization, shifting perception of the function from "expensive" to "mission critical." The key is to consider mobility's strategic participation. How can it play a role in achieving business goals? How can efficiency be built in, potentially using a managed service?

When they are connected to the business, evolved mobility functions are more aware of the rising risks associated with cross-border travel and can mitigate them, they recognize that their scope is increasing, and they are more likely to build initiatives to control costs and improve efficiency.

(CONTINUED IN NEXT EDITION) ■

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Continued from previous edition

Evolved functions will be using metrics to best measure ROI, as market and labor trends demand more agility and thoughtfulness around mobility investment and general business health. They can also evaluate what role mobility can play in meeting broader sustainability and DEI goals. The survey shows 44% of employers believe that their global mobility program can ensure equal opportunities for all.

The importance of strategic alignment was clearly recognized by mobility professionals in the survey, with 95% agreeing that the alignment of their function to business and talent strategy has multiple benefits, and a further 89% agreeing that mobility helps secure organizational resilience.

There is a disconnect, however, between a recognition of the critical role mobility functions can play by being strategically aligned with the wider enterprise, and the reality of how they are currently operating. The survey reveals that 60% of respondents still believe mobility is isolated or siloed from other functions, with nearly as many (58%) believing the function is hampered by lack of internal data exchange.

Here, too, is an opportunity for CHROs to create better alignment of critical functions to work toward a more efficient and effective workforce strategy.

The way forward

The EY 2024 Mobility Reimagined Survey clearly demonstrates how workforce mobility is critical for business resilience. And CHROs need to recognize how evolving the mobility function is necessary to realize their organization's business and talent goals. Those who do this will certainly be on the path to helping the business gain that all-important competitive advantage.

Here are three areas of focus:

- ▶ Adapt and leverage the Mobility function's role and capability to improve efficiency and employee experience. By integrating a mobility perspective into broader workforce planning, organizations can find ways to streamline processes and reduce the time and resources required for mobile work. Mobility programs can help strike the right balance of implementation of technology suited to diverse work models and employee preferences, while evolving based on data-driven decisions. Reducing friction between employees and HR or mobility processes can support the personal and professional growth of employees and enhance their well-being.
- ▶ Refine mobility offerings to contribute to organizational resilience by building skills and inclusive career pathways. As employees are looking at mobility experiences as ways to grow their careers and achieve personal goals, organizations should consider how to enable and measure how the Mobility function is meeting these expectations and creating value. One consideration is how to build a bespoke program attuned to employee seniority and capability. Mobility programs may have a component tied to career milestones for leadership, while also catering to early-career employees needing a different kind of experience. This would also help an organization achieve its upskilling and reskilling goals, building resilience through mobility. Programs should also be built in a way that aligns to an organization's sustainability values, highlighting opportunities which require physical mobility experiences and those opportunities for which virtual or hybrid work collaboration would suffice.
- ▶ Keep people (and trust) at the center of mobility experiences. By being transparent about the opportunities, desired outcomes, and the overall vision that drives mobility's part in the broader workforce strategy, CHROs

can cultivate a "we" not "me" mindset that emphasizes collaboration and connection across work models. In laying out a vision of the future, and being clear about the organization's "why," leaders can create an environment that inspires a well-informed workforce about business goals, and how those align to the individual's purpose.

Summary

New opportunities and risks connected to cross-border and hybrid working require new thinking about the purpose and potential of workforce mobility programs. CHROs have data showing better outcomes if they evolve their mobility function to be more resilient, agile, and part of a sustainable work force strategy.

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