



The fourth annual Global Workforce Summit: Focus on Europe, Middle East & Africa attracted 400 delegates from more than 30 countries, 50 speakers, and 21 sponsors. Corporate HR managers were asked to name the issues that they most wanted to benchmark, which included short-term assignments, spouse and family issues, assignments in Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe, new hire mobility, and cost of living. Some specific issues and trends discussed at the meeting included the following:

Female Participation in Management Roles

The EMEA Global Workforce Summit opening session speaker, Robert Brown, brought up some revealing statistics about the slow integration of women in executive positions around the world. For example, women make up less than 10 percent of corporate boards in Asia and the EU. He then showed us a per-country chart indicating the percentages of women serving at the board level in north and south countries in Europe. The two countries with the best track records, Sweden and Norway, stand around +/-25 percent, and only have reached that level because of government mandated quotas. (In fact, Robert used a wry quote in an observation about the government's intervention, "The prospect of hanging concentrates the mind!") We asked some of our experts here what it would take to balance the ratio of women to men in key business positions – will it require government intervention, or will the shortage of talent bring about a more dramatic shift? The respondents generally felt that government mandates might bring the numbers up, but the actions that would constitute true change included providing more opportunities for career pathing, and incorporating the responsibility throughout the company at all management levels to develop and promote the female pool of candidates for significant company roles.

Dual Careers

The impact of an expatriate assignment on the spouse's career continues to create issues for mobile families. Sometimes it simply is not possible for the accompanying spouse to work in the assignment location, and some companies try to alleviate the break in the spouse's career by supporting activities that will, hopefully, enable the spouse to resume work with minimal harm upon repatriation.

Repatriation and Retention

A connection to senior management is a critical component to retaining senior managers. In a study conducted of 35 key executives who had left one company, 34 of the 35 said they would have stayed with the company if someone from senior management had simply talked to them. Worse news still, not only did they leave holes in key management roles, but they each took, on average, 15 people with them to their new positions, which produced "craters" in some functions and departments for the company they left.

Delegates were cautioned that in Asia and other fast-growing regions, business expansion is occurring so quickly that the demand for talent is creating a not-so-subtle shift in expat career management practices. Companies note that there can be substantial attrition occurring before someone even is brought back to their original location for repatriation, because expats with a few years of experience are either seeking other job opportunities or being "farmed" by competitor companies looking for globally savvy talent. Advice to HR and workforce mobility professionals: keep an eye out for your expats, and after a couple of years of successful service, make sure career advancement opportunities are clearly articulated, and communication with the expat is frequent and meaningful.

"At the Table" participant Carol Ashton, Global Chief HR Officer for Ernst & Young, said she feels that holding onto key talent is like "trying to keep frogs in a wheelbarrow!" Ashton noted that retention policies, per se, are not where to focus. Instead, she pointed out that "retention is the outcome of effective people strategies." She noted that companies need more robust plans in place to select and assess expats, and to track and communicate with their global workforce.

Leapfrog Technology

Another “At the Table” panelist, Kevin England, Managing Director of African Legend Indigo Nigeria Limited, discussed how technology has impacted West Africa. With a population of 140 million, there were only 400,000 land lines in West Africa six years ago (meaning only about 3 percent of the population had access to a phone.). Today, there are 35 million cell phones in the country, and in one example, Kevin noted that it has changed the financial picture for subsistence farmers in the country. A group of farmers can share a phone and contribute to the cost of a generator for the phone. They can then form a central exchange, check the market prices for their products, and choose to bring the product to market when the pricing is best. In some cases, the farmers have doubled their incomes.

In another example, Dr. S. Chandrasekhar (a third “At the Table” presenter), Head of People Relationships Management for Capgemini in India, talked about ITC, a business conglomerate which provides kiosks in villages with internet connections for farmers so that they can determine the best times to sell their product and who to sell it to. As they no longer need a middleman to handle their business, the farmer makes more money, and the consumer can purchase at a lower price. Such technology leveraging is allowing whole communities to move up economically and productively, and more advances are to come.

Ethics and Values

Companies truly need to think globally and act locally in the context of their industry and environments; reexamine their values, and build relationships based on “doing the right thing.” One company suggested developing a “core code of ethics,” to which geographical locations could add points (but not change the core code) if needed, to incorporate local cultural actions or issues.

Multinational or Global?

At a roundtable of strategic level executives, we discussed the attributes of the global vs. the multinational company (as it relates to HR, operations, sourcing, etc.). What was the consensus? Some of the points mentioned noted the following: Global companies don’t have to be “mature” organizations – in fact, a newer company (like Google, for example) might be more agile and better able to make a big leap into globalization that a more established company, encumbered by tradition, might not make as easily. Global companies have brands that are recognized around the world, provide consistent standards of delivery for customers, require global experience in their leadership (rather than just valuing it), demand diversity of thought and culture, frequently are not as driven by headquarters policies and practices, and offer more autonomy to local operations around the globe.

Geographic Themes

Eastern Europe continues to emerge as both a source of talent outside of the region and a destination for companies. And the “MEA” part of the “EMEA” region attracted keen delegate interest. India, a net exporter of talent, is also a strong job market, so those with the right skill set can do well in-country. The Middle East is also a talent magnet with dynamic economic development, led by Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Africa work issues also were presented, and though it is impossible to generalize about this continent with 1 billion people and 2,000 ethno-linguistic groups, the opportunities for economic growth due to the wealth of natural resources are worth working through the issues that do plague some areas, such as health (HIV-aids and malaria) and security.

General Session Survey

During the 2007 Worldwide ERC[®] Global Workforce Summit: Focus on Europe, Middle East & Africa, delegates were surveyed about key topics in workforce mobility. The results are summarized below.

Assessment and Selection	
How would you rate the job that companies are doing in assessing and selecting suitable employees for international assignments in Europe?	% of respondents
Excellent Job	1%
Good Job	47%
Fair Job	47%
Poor Job	5%
Total	100%

Personal Career Change	
Do you anticipate looking for a new job in the next 12 months?	% of respondents
Yes	17%
No	83%
Total	100%

European Economic Outlook	
How do you generally feel about the outlook for the European economy over the next 12 months?	% of respondents
Very Optimistic	26%
Somewhat Optimistic	68%
Somewhat Pessimistic	6%
Total	100%

Long-term Assignments Into Europe	
Do you anticipate that over the next year, the number of traditional long-term international assignments (defined as about 2-3 years) into Europe will:	% of respondents
Significantly Increase	11%
Somewhat Increase	41%
Stay About the Same	28%
Somewhat Decrease	21%
Significantly Decrease	--
Total	100%*

Short-term Assignments Into Europe	
Do you anticipate that over the next year, the number of short-term international assignments into Europe will:	% of respondents
Significantly Increase	41%
Somewhat Increase	45%
Stay About the Same	13%
Somewhat Decrease	1%
Significantly Decrease	--
Total	100%

Procurement Department Involvement	
How involved are corporate procurement departments in purchasing global mobility services in Europe?	% of respondents
Significant Involvement	41%
Some Involvement	44%
Minimal Involvement	11%
No Involvement	4%
Total	100%

Biggest Driver of Workforce Change	
What do you think will be the biggest driver of change in the workforce over the next five years?	% of respondents
The Geographic Shift of Economic Power to Asia	31%
Controlling Costs	16%
Talent Shortage	36%
Technology	4%
Need for Innovation	1%
Environmental Challenges	2%
Multi-generational Workforce	2%
More Culturally-diverse Workforce	9%
Total	100%*

Work/Life Balance	
Are you satisfied with your current work/life balance?	% of respondents
Very Satisfied	23%
Somewhat Satisfied	57%
Somewhat Dissatisfied	19%
Very Dissatisfied	1%
Total	100%

Work Hours per Week	
How many hours a week do you work?	% of respondents
30 hours or less	2%
31-40 hours	12%
41-50 hours	41%
51-60 hours	32%
More than 60 hours	13%
Total	100%

Delegate Country Locations	
In what country are you located?	% of respondents
UK	45%
USA	22%
The Netherlands	6%
Belgium	3%
Switzerland	4%
South Africa	3%
Spain	2%
Canada	2%
France	2%
Sweden	1%
India	1%
Italy	1%
Germany	1%
Russia	1%
Czech Republic	1%
United Arab Emirates	1%
Turkey	1%
Hungary	1%
Norway	1%
China	1%
Saudi Arabia	1%
Brazil	1%
Total	100%*

Total number of respondents – 176

*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding