

## From Fragmentation to Control: Why Operating Models Matter in Global Mobility

Global mobility programs rarely emerge from a single, deliberate design process. More often, they evolve over time, shaped by historical practices, regional requirements, incremental adjustments, and often as a result of historical mergers or acquisitions. While this organic development can provide flexibility, it frequently results in operating models that are fragmented, complex, and difficult to manage.

At the core of this complexity lies the traditional home-host country framework. Each assignment involves a unique combination of origin and destination, with distinct regulatory, fiscal, and employment considerations. As organizations expand their global footprint, the number of these combinations increases exponentially. This creates a landscape characterized by multiple employment relationships, diverse payroll arrangements, and varying policy interpretations.

The implications of this complexity are significant. From an operational perspective, it requires coordination across numerous stakeholders, including home and host country HR teams, global mobility specialists, finance departments, and external vendors. Each of these parties plays a role in the assignment lifecycle, from initiation to repatriation. However, the absence of a single point of accountability often leads to inefficiencies, delays, and inconsistencies.

For the assignee, this fragmentation can result in a disjointed



experience. Interactions with multiple stakeholders, each with their own processes and timelines, can create confusion and reduce confidence in the mobility program. From the organization's perspective, the lack of integration can hinder visibility and control, making it difficult to monitor costs, manage risks, and ensure compliance.

In response to these challenges, many organizations have introduced shared service centers and invested in technology platforms. These initiatives are designed to centralize transactional activities, standardize processes, and improve data availability. While they can deliver tangible benefits, they do not fundamentally address the underlying structural complexity.

Shared service centers, for example, can streamline administrative tasks and reduce duplication of effort. However, they do not eliminate the need for coordination between multiple employing entities. Similarly, technology can enhance efficiency and provide valuable insights, but it cannot remove the inherent complexity associated with managing numerous home-host relationships.

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This distinction is critical. Efforts to improve efficiency within an existing structure are not the same as redesigning the structure itself. Without addressing the root causes of fragmentation, organizations may find that complexity persists, albeit in a different form.

The GEC model represents a more fundamental shift in operating model design. By establishing a single employing entity for international assignees, it reduces the number of employment relationships and simplifies the flow of costs and responsibilities. This structural change has far-reaching implications for how mobility is managed.

One of the most immediate benefits is enhanced visibility. With assignments consolidated within a single entity, organizations gain a clearer view of their global assignee population. This facilitates more effective monitoring of costs, risks, and performance. It also enables better alignment with broader talent management strategies, as the pipeline of internationally mobile employees becomes more transparent.

Accountability is another area where the GEC model can deliver improvements. In a fragmented model, responsibilities are often dispersed across multiple functions and geographies. This can lead to ambiguity and gaps in ownership. By contrast, a centralized structure provides a clear point of accountability, enabling more effective governance and decision-making.

Consistency is also strengthened. Policies and processes can be applied more uniformly across the assignee population, reducing the risk of discrepancies and ensuring a more equitable experience. This is particularly important in organizations with diverse international operations, where variations in local practices can create challenges in maintaining alignment.

However, it is important to approach the GEC model with a realistic perspective. Its success depends on careful design and effective implementation. Factors such as governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and integration with existing systems all play a critical role. Moreover, organizations may choose to adopt a hybrid approach, using a GEC alongside traditional models to address different types of assignments.

The key takeaway is that operating model design is a strategic consideration, not merely an administrative one. The structure through which mobility is managed influences every aspect of the program, from efficiency and cost to risk management and employee experience. Organizations that recognize this are better positioned to navigate complexity and achieve their objectives.

As global mobility continues to evolve, the need for more integrated and controlled operating models will only increase. Whether through a GEC or alternative approaches, the ability to move beyond fragmentation and establish a coherent structure will be a defining factor in the success of mobility programs.