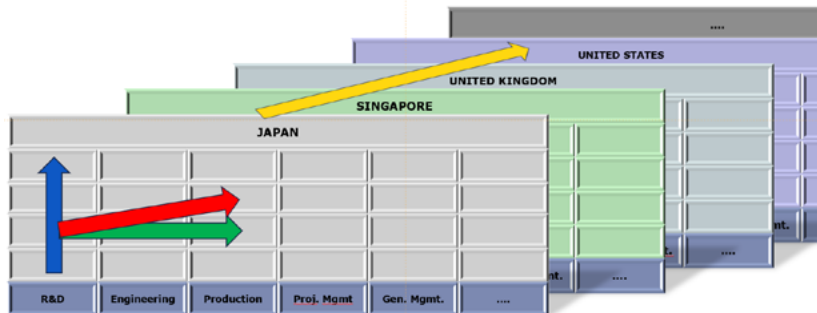


From Vertical to Global: The Many Shapes of Career Mobility

It is easy to think of career mobility as a single thing, typically a promotion, or occasionally a transfer abroad. In practice, mobility takes several distinct forms, each serving a different purpose, and each worth recognising deliberately rather than leaving to chance.

A “vertical move” is the most familiar, an employee taking on greater seniority and responsibility within the same function. A “lateral move” keeps someone at a broadly similar level but shifts them into a different function or discipline, exposing them to new skills and new ways of thinking without the pressure of an immediate step up. A “diagonal” move combines the two, adding both breadth and a degree of upward progression at once, often the fastest way to build a genuinely rounded leader.

An international move adds an entirely different dimension again, taking any of the above and placing it in a different country, with a different market, culture, and set of operating conditions to master.



What ties these forms of mobility together is a simple but powerful idea: every open position, wherever it sits in the organisation, represents two things simultaneously. It is a business need waiting to be filled, and it is a career opportunity waiting for the right person

From Vertical to Global: The Many Shapes of Career Mobility



to claim it. Viewed this way, a role in engineering in Japan, a general management position in the United States, and an R&D role in the United Kingdom are not separate, disconnected vacancies. They are nodes in the same talent map, each one a potential stop on someone’s development path, provided the organisation can actually see the map and move people across it.

This reframing changes the question that talent and mobility teams should be asking. The traditional question is narrow and often defensive: “Can we move this person?”. It focuses on logistics, approvals, and the immediate cost of a relocation, and it tends to treat mobility as an exception requiring justification.

The more useful question is broader and more strategic: “Where can this person create the greatest value?”. “Which career move would have the greatest career development and retention value for the employee?”.

These questions do not start from the constraints of where someone happens to be employed today. They start from where their skills, potential, and interests would do the most good for the organisation as a whole, and only then asks what needs to happen to get them there.

From Vertical to Global: The Many Shapes of Career Mobility



Answering these more strategic questions brings Global Mobility closer to Talent Strategy, rather than being simply a process to deploy a handful of expatriates. Used deliberately, global mobility becomes one of the most powerful tools available for developing future leaders, giving them exposure to different roles, challenges, markets and cultures. These experiences are hard to replicate without an international move.

An integrated approach reshapes the definition of Career Management itself, allowing careers to cross borders, businesses, and functions instead of ending at the edge of a country or a division. Such a proposition can easily enhance the “employer’s brand” and become part of the pitch to attract talent, since international opportunities are increasingly something that candidates actively seek, rather than passively accept if offered.

And in terms of Strategic Workforce Planning, this type of integrated mobility framework is the mechanism that allows scarce skills and critical talent to be deployed wherever they can create the greatest value, in the context of filling critical roles, Succession Planning, or the building a deeper and broader leadership pipeline than any single country could sustain alone.

Of course, none of this happens automatically. Mobility of this kind depends on genuine visibility across the organisation, a willingness to look beyond geographical and organisational boundaries when identifying candidates for a role, and a shared understanding that releasing talent to another part of the business is not a loss to be resisted but rather an investment that will pay dividends for the organisation over time.

In the next article, we will explore the last and crucial point: how an organisation actually governs a model where talent moves freely across entities that each have their own priorities and incentives.