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“Be Curious”

How SAP Manages International Careers



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Employees want to face new challenges, learn how business is done in their host country, and experience the spirit and culture of a different SAP entity – this is why they agree to international assignments. SAP offers a wide variety of preparatory courses for expats including cultural training and spousal support training. Susanne Guenther, Global Mobility Manager EMEA Region, explains how this works.

Ms. Guenther, when globalization became one of the most powerful trends in industry and commerce, the challenge for HRM was to build up executives' intercultural competence. Expatriates were supposed to serve as an example to local staff. Critics said that companies were practicing a new form of colonialism. Nowadays, HRM aims to create a partnership between expats and local staff. How did you experience this development?

SUSANNE GUENTHER In the past, we used to relocate a lot of people in leadership roles to host countries and host SAP entities. Nowadays, we relocate employees across all levels of the organization. Most of these moves are career-driven. Employees want to face new challenges, learn how business is done in their host country, and experience the spirit and culture of a different SAP entity.

What different scenarios give rise to international assignments in your company?

GUENTHER SAP offers assignments lasting up to two or three years. There are three scenarios: professional development; filling a business-critical position; employee-driven moves, usually in dual career situations in which both partners in a relationship pursue a career. SAP provides a package of services to employees who are on a temporary professional development assignment. This package might comprise, for instance, flights, air-freight, home leave, housing, destination services, and health insurance. Employees filling business-critical positions in a host country are offered assignment business packages. They include all the benefits of the career package plus a cost-of-living allowance, excess baggage, hardship allowance, and optional benefits like a home search trip, cultural training, and language training.

PACKAGES FOR EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN MOVES

For dual career and employee-driven moves, we offer packages that cover legal matters such as tax and immigration. We



Load curves in the course of the day; SAP's research project MeRegio (above). SAP employees, Shanghai, China (below).

also have our own policy for revenue-generating consultants on customer projects. Besides temporary assignments, our employees are also free to relocate long-term to any vacancy worldwide. This is in fact the most common scenario the Global Mobility team supports. SAP has a global corporate job portal and many of our employees choose to transfer permanently to a new role in a different country.

How does SAP Academy help develop leaders globally?

GUENTHER Several years ago, we revamped our approach to leadership by designing road

maps for every leadership level. The road maps set out professional development offerings for every step of the way. Besides leadership training programs, we offer coaching, mentoring, job shadowing, and job rotation. That way, everyone can find the development opportunity that best meets their needs. In particular, short-term job rotation programs of three to six months and fellowships, which are short-term assignments in a different role, help our people adapt to the flexible and agile practices the future of work demands.

Today, it is hard to imagine a career path that does not have at least two



SAP employees, India (above). Comparison of the power consumption of current devices and outdated devices; an employee is requesting an E-Car (below).

long-term assignments in another country. How do they fit into SAP's strategic personnel development?

GUENTHER We believe that experiential learning is key to professional development. International assignments are part of this, as are working in other Board areas or divisions, and on different products at SAP. Managers and employees have regular SAP Talk conversations about their career and professional development goals and opportunities. If a manager and employee decide that an international assignment is an important next step, we can point them to the right internal contacts, information,

and tools to prepare for it. In their Corporate Portal profile, employees can indicate whether they are willing to work in another location and which languages they speak. This enables the leadership team to approach them about relocating to another country if an opportunity arises.

DISCUSSING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the regular one-on-one conversations between employee and manager, the leadership team meets once a year to discuss professional development for spe-

cific groups of employees. This helps it not only to plan ahead but also to be aware of talents who have specific strategic development needs.

Companies provide a wide range of preparatory courses aimed at expats. What does SAP offer?

GUENTHER SAP too offers a wide variety of preparatory courses for expats including cultural training and spousal support training. Employees can also get in touch with former and current expats on our social media platform. This is a very powerful tool, as they can benefit from real experiences abroad. We also offer access to various IT tools, such as GlobeSmart, that provide information about the host countries (cultural background, laws, and housing, for example) to help families prepare for their move. All expats can easily connect with country experts for individual support.

SAP works with relocation providers. What are the benefits of an outsourced solution in this field?

GUENTHER Outsourcing these services means that SAP can focus more on the strategic aspects of the program, and on making sure we and our employees comply with legal requirements and that policy is followed. One further crucial aspect for SAP is to ensure the best and most cost-effective solution for moves abroad by consulting our managers, employees, and project managers. Our relocation providers, on the other hand, are the contacts for the group. They help employees relocate by providing country-specific services such as finding a school and a house, and providing local advice on any concerns. For a model like this to work, we have to standardize our processes. That is why we implemented global standards to ensure employees receive the same services in the same quality wherever they are. Because we have partners in almost every country, we know we can rely on them whenever we expand into new markets.

A software provider like SAP has of course a great affinity with technology and the opportunities it brings. For instance, you developed the Move Your Talent software to support the administrative side of having a globally mobile workforce. Tell us more about this tool.

GUENTHER We co-developed this technology with SIRVA, our mobility provider, to streamline our processes. The tool is very intuitive. It is a manager self-service tool that provides cost estimations, policy packages, relocation agreements, and the internal approval processes. We have enhanced the technology over the years to meet our changing business needs. And it is flexible enough to evolve to meet our future needs as well.

Are you going to build more tools like Move Your Talent?

GUENTHER Employees who travel internationally on business are subject to tax, social security, and immigration regulations. Due to increased scrutiny by tax offices, SAP has decided to increase the compliance level for internationally mobile employees by capturing and validating detailed travel data. To meet these demands, we built our Global Compliance Calendar. If employees travel to certain countries, an automated e-mail prompts them to validate their trip data in the Global Compliance Calendar.

As the global mobility manager for EMEA, you lead a team of consultants located in Walldorf and Prague. Your team deals with a number of countries that are regarded as politically and economically unstable. What extra help does SAP give the employees it sends there?

GUENTHER We support employees with hardship and cost-of-living allowances that we regularly review. SAP can pay allowances to employees in almost any currency. That way, it protects employees from inflation risks abroad. We are in very close contact with our Corporate Continuity Office and pass on security warnings and travel advice to our employees while they are

traveling. SAP provides 24/7 support including a hotline that all travelers can use in the event of emergencies, potential terror attacks, or political instability.

Why would companies send valuable staff into risky situations? There are lots of digital tools bringing virtual teams together.



SAP Innovation Center Potsdam 2018.

GUENTHER SAP always tries to avoid exposing employees to risk. However, the unexpected can and does happen, even in low-risk countries. For such situations we offer the 24/7 helpline for emergency support and we can ensure local support for the group.

Expats who return to their native country often complain about being forgotten with regard to career opportunities and attractive projects. Do you know this problem, and how do you solve it?

GUENTHER It is a well-known challenge. Global Mobility therefore recommends that, while they are abroad, employees agree their career and learning goals with their

manager in their home country. We encourage our employees to use SAP Talk to discuss their achievements and the next steps after their return. We also suggest that employees build a network at home and find a mentor, coach, or sponsor there with whom they stay in contact. We help them stay in touch by granting regular flights home. Employees can always choose

to start a new career in a different department and role by applying for one of the jobs on our Global Job Portal.

What would you recommend to a young HR manager who wants to start an international career?

GUENTHER Be curious. Broaden and enhance your leadership portfolio by making an international assignment part of your career plan. Prepare yourself thoroughly for your stay abroad and embrace every opportunity to learn and every new experience when you are there. ●

Interview: Christoph Stehr, Hilden