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Industry Surveys 2005: A Review of the Best (Part III)

Now more than ever industry surveys have become a familiar and important tool for mobility managers. Designed to assist with benchmarking and policy improvements, and to provide a concise and objective snapshot on a range of issues and challenges, Yvonne McNulty reviews nine of the best industry surveys of 2005 in this final part of a 3-part series.



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Winning Strategies for a Global Workforce: Attracting, Retaining and Engaging Employees for Competitive Advantage

Towers Perrin

One of the largest studies published in 2005 emerged from Towers Perrin, a global professional services firm that helps organisations improve their performance through effective people, risk and financial management. The study is the largest of its kind using a sample exceeding 80,000 respondents, and is aimed at identifying employee attitudes at work.



Towers Perrin: Companies have a vast reserve of untapped potential.

According to the survey, employee engagement ranges dramatically worldwide. 'Engagement' is Towers Perrin's measure of employees' willingness to give discretionary effort at work and is linked to attracting and retaining talent.

"An engaged employee is one who is willing and able to contribute to company success," says Jim Crawley, Principal at Towers Perrin. "It is not a measure of happiness or satisfaction but the extent to which a person puts discretionary effort into their work, beyond the required minimum to get the job done, in the form of extra time, brainpower or energy. It's about going the extra mile."

The highest recorded levels of engagement are 40 percent and 31 percent in Mexico and Brazil. The lowest recorded levels - in the low single digits - are in Japan and India. Across Europe and North America, engagement levels fall somewhere in-between.

Respondents were specifically targeted because they focused on global talent management (GTM) rather than generic or functional HR tasks. ORC

Not surprisingly, the study has found broad evidence to suggest that companies with higher employee engagement outperform those with lower employee engagement. High levels of engagement bring measurable benefits to a company. Engaged employees are far less likely to leave for another job than their less-engaged peers. Worldwide, 59 percent of the highly engaged survey respondents planned to stay with their current employer, compared to just 24 percent of the disengaged group.

The study involved more than 85,000 people working for large and mid-sized companies in 16 countries on four continents. Respondents were contacted directly rather than via their companies, and used an online questionnaire. Sixty-five percent were male, 35 percent female, with the majority between 30 to 44 years of age. Thirty-two percent were in professional/technical/specialist roles, 15 percent were directors/managers, and 36 percent in non-management roles.

The findings showed that 62 percent are only moderately engaged demonstrating that companies have a vast reserve of untapped potential in their workforce.

"This has significant consequences for companies' growth agendas and their ability to achieve higher performance," says Crawley.

One of the most important factors that have an impact on whether someone is engaged is management. The survey indicates that employees don't have strong confidence in senior management's ability to inspire and lead. For example, just 41 percent think their senior management supports new ideas and new ways of doing things, and only 40 percent think their senior management acts in a way that is consistent with their values.

"For the first time ever, through this study, we've given a voice to the workforce worldwide," noted Crawley. "And what they are saying is that although they want to contribute, their management and supervisors put obstacles, often unintentional, in their paths."

Whilst the findings are worrisome, one of the strengths of the survey is that it provides a very clear road map to removing the obstacles and

tapping into the massive potential reserve of discretionary effort that people can give and that drives superior company performance.

One of the best features of the survey is the methodology and research aims. These are clear and concise from the first page. Research aims include pinpointing the factors that truly influence employees' motivation, commitment to their employers and desire to achieve at work. Another strong feature is the attempt to identify both tangible and intangible facets of work from compensation and benefits to intangibles like leadership, day to day management and organisational culture.

A number of common themes emerged from the study. First, when it comes to choosing a job, people everywhere have similar needs and requirements. These include ensuring adequate compensation and financial security, achieving work/life balance, and having relevant learning and career opportunities.

A second theme is that although people care about job security, they value mobility as well and will generally remain open to considering other job opportunities.

A third theme, and perhaps the most important, is that people are more likely to stay with a company that they perceive as 'talent friendly' and progressive in terms of having leading-edge people practices and work environments. Culture does play a role too. For example, in Asia employee retention depends to a great extent on how the company makes people and business decisions, the level of stress in the work environment, and the adequacy of benefits.

Conversely, in Europe and North America the availability of training and career advancement, and the ability to make one's own job-related decisions were more strongly linked to retention.

One of the practical features of the survey is a 15-country breakdown of the top drivers of attraction, retention, and engagement beginning on page 16. Readers can very quickly find and interpret the data relevant to their region in an easy to read format.

Another important feature is that the study builds on three other studies conducted by Towers Perrin since 2003. The result is a body of research dedicated to identifying the drivers of attraction, retention, and engagement worldwide, which includes separate results for the US and Canada, and Europe. Tying it all together is a 2006 report entitled 'Ten steps to creating an engaged workforce, which summarises the key points of research conducted over the past four years.

For more information about this survey, and other Towers Perrin publications, contact Rob Dwyer at Rob.dwyer@towersperrin.com

Where to find the survey: www.towersperrin.com

Cost: Free.

Published by: Towers Perrin HR Services

Of interest to: All levels of management

Sample size: 86,000 respondents.

International Assignments Survey 2005/2006

Mercer HR

The cover of this report says "evaluate the competitiveness of your policies" and that's exactly what this Mercer HR survey delivers. It's a 235-page report loaded with valuable data to benchmark your international assignment policy and is a must-read for the HR manager. Authored by the European branch of Mercer and with input from more than 200 firms, the research was conducted over a 3-year period and provides an extensive perspective on current practices and policies.

One of the best features of the survey is that the data is broken down into various sections which are very easy to read and digest. This is despite some patchy areas of English grammar which can be a little distracting and annoying. Nonetheless, the report begins with a summary of 'survey highlights' in which key findings from each of the nine sections are briefly listed.

The next section presents a more detailed explanation of the key findings in nine separate chapters. These include chapters on spouse support, short term assignments, and localisation practices.

The final section presents the survey results in tabular and statistical formats. This section is extremely valuable for those requiring solid data.

Another strong feature of the survey is the inclusion of new and emerging topics including outsourcing trends and support provided to families before, during and after the assignment. But it is the inclusion of a new section on expatriate ROI that really deserves attention.

Respondents were specifically targeted because they focused on global talent management (GTM) rather than generic or functional HR tasks. ORC

"ROI in the HR field is becoming increasingly important," says Jackie Barber of Mercer Human Resource Consulting. "We wanted to see how multinational companies take ROI measurement into account in their international assignment management practices and policies," says Barber.

"What we found is that while there seems to be a lot of talk about it, few companies have actually put processes into place," she says.

Barber is right, despite expat ROI being a hot topic for some time. Unfortunately, Mercer's attempt to benchmark ROI practices in section nine is less rigorous than one would expect largely because it does not go deep enough into the issue in terms of non-financial costs and benefits. Ali Kursun at Mercer agrees, but says that it's still early days where this research is concerned and that the next release of the survey hopes to improve in this area.

Notwithstanding the above, the importance of the section cannot be overstated. The section asks some very important questions about financial ROI including the tracking of costs, and the benefits to be gained from international assignments. For example, fifty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they are able to obtain a fair estimation of costs, despite difficulties in centralising the collection of assignment costs.

Questions about measuring the benefits of international assignments in terms of the impact on revenue are also important, with 25 percent stating they have a rough estimation of the benefits. Not surprisingly, more than 75 percent indicated that they find it extremely difficult or do not measure benefits at all. This is despite more than 40 percent either currently having, or currently thinking about putting into place a process to track ROI.

For the reader, this topic is important and will continue to be important for future releases of the survey. Mercer deserves credit for making progress on a topic that is difficult to benchmark and which few consulting firms are attempting to address.

Another new section this year is family support before, during and after an assignment. With failed assignments on the rise, and reasons for failure largely attributed to lack of family and spouse adjustment, a section devoted to assignee and family support is both timely and necessary.

One of the more surprising findings is the 'stagnation' or slow increase of female expatriates in European companies. This is contradictory to the 2005 GMAC Global Relocation Trends Survey in which one of the key findings was the increase in female expatriates worldwide. But it's an important finding and one that demonstrates the value of obtaining benchmarking data from various sources, rather than relying on one source alone.

In terms of the most consistent finding overall, mobility appears to be increasing, and cost remains one of the main concerns for companies. Overall, these findings are consistent with other surveys, which is not surprising given the global focus of the research.

For more information about this survey, contact Jackie Barber at Jackie.Barber@mercer.com.

Where to find the survey: www.mercer.com

Cost: EUR 900.

Published by: Mercer HR Consulting.

Of interest to: International Assignment Managers.

Sample size: 200 multinational corporations.

Study of Global Talent Management Practices

ORC Worldwide

In part one we reviewed The Conference Board's Talent Management Report, one of two surveys included in this review which represents the

enormous interest this topic has generated in recent years. Rounding out our review is ORC's 2005 Study of Global Talent Management Practices. It is, not surprisingly, an exceptional study both in detail and depth, adding to ORC's existing reputation for a deep understanding of the field and its intention to produce respectable research.

The aim of the study is to provide practical data about what works and what doesn't work regarding global talent management. Whilst the results are aggregated, the findings recognise that specific companies and cultures need to choose strategies that make sense in their own context.

One of the greatest strengths of the study is the research process. The study was conducted by senior ORC consultants with extensive background in organisational development, talent management, and HR management. A PhD statistician performed the statistical analysis. The study process itself consisted of various steps, each building on the other, to produce a final questionnaire from which to gather the data and ultimately produce the study's findings.

To the reader this process is very important. When a study is conducted with caution and rigour, where questions are carefully sought out and tested, and care is given to obtaining theoretical background information from experts and respondents with an in-depth knowledge of the field, the result is a study that produces findings of more than trivial value.

For this study ORC commenced the research process by interviewing global talent managers in 10 companies. These respondents were specifically targeted because they focused on global talent management (GTM) rather than generic or functional HR tasks. Two expert panels were then conducted in New York and London with four more global talent managers. The panels gave ORC researchers insight into the issues of concern to those responsible for GTM.

"We do not always use a panel at the start," says Michael Fineman, Senior Consultant at ORC, "but in this case we wanted to make sure we had a really good understanding of the process being used in most companies and the issues that concerned talent management leaders so we could capture information that would be useful to them."

"We started with a number of one on one phone interviews and then conducted the panels. After we conducted the survey, we reconvened the panels for debriefing meetings to see if our findings rang true and were useful. The panels were very helpful for these purposes."

The final questionnaire secured 26 respondents, all global talent managers in mostly Fortune 500 companies.

One of the major and key findings of the survey was that the most important determinant of success with a GTM program is the degree to which the CEO, board of directors, and GTM leader are involved in GTM related activities. Essentially, the more time and effort these key people devote to GTM, the greater the likelihood for success for a GTM program.

One of the more surprising findings, in both the survey and the other discussions that made up the study, was the lack of connection in most companies between the talent management function and the international assignment process.

“The survey showed that one of the most effective and popular methods for developing leaders is giving high potential employees international assignments,” says Fineman, “but only about a third of companies consistently set goals for developmental assignments and monitor whether those developmental goals are met.”

In terms of developmental experiences that advance high-potential employees already identified as part of a GTM program, a number of activities are identified as essential. These include being included in critical meetings, having assignments across business units, and participating on global task forces. International assignments of 2 to 3 years duration are also important.

Of least use for this purpose are training programs conducted by outside providers (universities, training houses, etc), and responsibility for a different geographic region while remaining located in the home country.

For many companies, however, cost containment or localisation practices make the use of international assignments improbable or unlikely. In these instances the study found that alternative strategies for developmental experiences include enriching the current job or assigning the candidate to a cross-functional program.

In terms of retention of high potential employees, the study found that most organisations use more challenging assignments at frequent intervals and providing something extra in terms of pay and bonuses to motivate and retain these important individuals. Surprisingly, the least used tactic was assigning a mentor or coach from the executive team, despite this tactic being statistically correlated with success at retaining high potential employees.

Overall, the study provides an excellent snapshot of what global organisations are currently doing to attract and retain their global talent. But there’s also room for improvement. For example, organisations need to improve their talent-tracking systems to make it easier for managers in various locations to access information about currently available “talent”. They also need to ensure consistency of processes and criteria used to assess, develop, and track talent across all business units.

For more information about this study, contact Siobhan Cummins at ORC at Siobhan.Cummins@orcworldwide.co.uk.

Where to find the survey: www.orcinc.com

Cost: USD 800, executive summary free - download available on website

Published by: ORC Worldwide

Of interest to: Individuals charged with managing the identification, assessment, and development of key talent, especially of senior leaders

Sample size: 26 global talent managers

30 May 2006

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Subject: Surveys related to HR and mobility, industry surveys for mobility managers



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