From Denial to Acceptance: The 5 Stages of Grief in Expat Payroll Management for Global Mobility Teams

So, you're an expat moving halfway around the world for your employer. You're navigating many challenges getting your family settled in a new country. Surely the least you can expect is that your expat pay will be right? Right? Getting expats paid correctly is a complex business. Sometimes internal silos, both organisational and psychological, make it hard to drive the optimal expat payroll solutions. The cost of getting it wrong manifests in different ways. The assignee experience is impacted by incorrect pay, or even hard-to-understand pay. Triaging failure, making retroactive corrections, or potentially dealing with compliance breaches can have significant financial implications for organisations.

The question is this - what is Global Mobility's responsibility in the expat payroll space? A default position for Global Mobility teams can be that expat payroll is "payroll," so it is Payroll's problem. We believe the answer is more nuanced and use the 5 stages of grief to demonstrate why Global Mobility teams cannot simply throw expat payroll "over the fence" to payroll teams, emphasising the need for collaboration.

1 Denial

Initially, there might be a tendency to deny Global Mobility's responsibility in relation to the complexity of expat payroll processing. Global Mobility can take a position that expat payroll can be handled independently by Payroll. Afterall Payroll are responsible for payroll. This stage represents a lack of acknowledgment of the challenges payroll teams face and the complexity of global mobility data that needs to be interpreted and processed.

2 Anger

Frustration and resentment may arise when assignees are not paid correctly, or the correct payroll reporting is not carried out. This stage reflects the dissatisfaction that can result from attempting to isolate this responsibility, and to cast blame on payroll teams for expat payroll errors.

3 Bargaining

Attempting to negotiate a solution might lead to discussions with Payroll about how they might position themselves better to manage expat payroll, perhaps by increasing resources or using 3rd parties to help. However, this stage highlights that simply delegating the task or suggesting the payroll team does more, does not address the root issues.

4 Desolation

Recognizing the limitations of a one-sided approach, there may be a sense of sadness or hopelessness in trying to rely on Payroll to manage expat payroll independently. Realising that payroll is often an execution function and that Global Mobility teams need to help them by providing expat data in a way that make it possible for payroll to execute and deliver payroll. This stage signifies the need for a more comprehensive and collaborative strategy.

5 Acceptance

Ultimately, accepting the need for collaboration between Global Mobility and payroll teams is crucial. Acknowledging that both teams bring unique expertise and perspectives to the process allows for a more effective and accurate handling of expat payroll, and critically improving the assignee's pay experience.
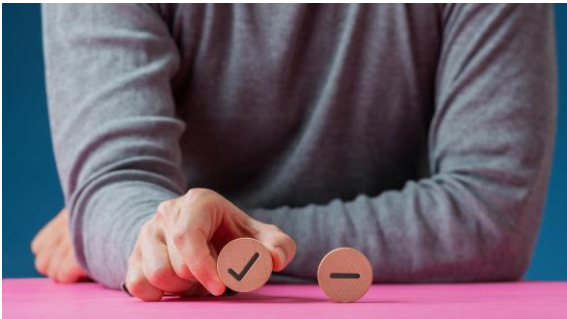
Global Mobility teams integrate with multiple functions who all must adapt their normal domestic processes for expats. Payroll teams have a thankless task of making sure all employees are all paid correctly, and often spend a significantly disproportionate amount of time figuring out pay for expats. Simply expecting payroll to independently own expat payroll in unrealistic and impractical.
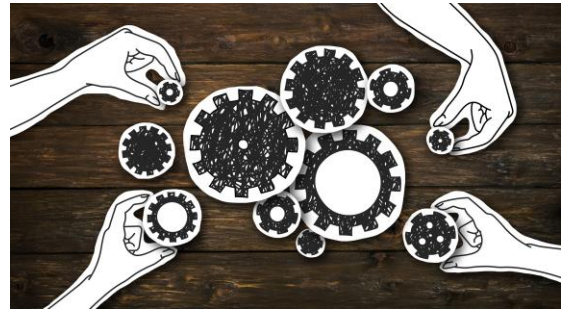
While collaboration is key, our view is that Global Mobility should own the process of getting payroll the data they need - mapped, coded, and formatted correctly. Following that logic Global Mobility should own the budget for this activity too. Payroll should focus on executing simple and clear payroll instructions, and not be caught up interpreting complex files or multiple disparate expat data sources. Our experience is that getting this challenge addressed saves money and time as addressing the root cause is always more cost efficient than dealing with the symptoms.

Why not short-circuit your expat payroll challenge and jump straight to the Acceptance stage? Only then will you ensure accurate, efficient, and compliant payroll processing for your internationally mobile employees.

Global Expat Pay can take ownership of this complex data challenge and we make it work so expats' pay is correct from day 1 of the assignment.

Contact our team to begin your expat payroll simplification journey.

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