

MOBILITY



Magazine of Worldwide ERC®

February 2015

MASTERING *THE ALIGNMENT OF* MOBILITY SERVICES

THE CASE FOR

COLLABORATION

LEADERSHIP STYLES

IN GERMANY

PRE-APAC SUMMIT

WELCOME TO SHANGHAI



ALL FOR ONE

The Case for
Collaboration
in Global Mobility

By Michelle Sandlin, CRP, GMS-T



“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

It is amazing how this simple statement, long attributed to Aristotle, still rings true today and how it is being applied in many different business environments and organizations.

The ancient Greek philosopher’s words speak to the synergy that is created when two or more companies or individuals form strategic partnerships and forge business relationships to better serve the needs of their clients and customers. They do this by combining their talent, experience, knowledge, resources, tools, skills, workforce, and service offerings, which together are far greater than what each could offer individually.

For a growing number of global mobility professionals, collaboration and strategic partnerships provide a significant competitive edge and have led to increased business opportunities. By joining forces with other individuals and companies that can augment the services they provide, they are able to leverage these relationships in order to provide better and more wide-ranging services for their clients.



BRIDGING THE GAP

Clients want and expect their service providers to work together to help them achieve their business goals. Corporate clients within the global mobility space expect that their transferees and international assignees will enjoy that same seamless service.

While there are challenges to collaborating with individuals and companies that aren't technically part of your own organization, there are solutions for bridging that gap.

"Technology is the glue that binds it all together," says Shawn Sweeney, CRP, GMS, vice president of business development and client relations for Orion Mobility, headquartered in Danbury, Connecticut. His company specializes in global solutions for expense services, payment processing, tax services, and software for the relocation industry.

In order for all parties to be able to collaborate effectively, there has to be an integrated system that allows them to work together, efficiently share information, and exchange communication. When it comes to global mobility, companies demand centralized technology solutions and platforms that allow for real-time data access in a multi-user environment where all parties involved in the relocation process have instant access to information. Additionally, companies want Web-based platforms that make it possible for multiple users to log in from anywhere and on any device.

"Technology allows service providers to still work independently but produce a single platform of information and data that enables the corporate client to stay involved in the relocation process," Sweeney says. "Vendor portals allow service providers to update, upload, or have direct feeds to a single technology platform for transferees and clients."

It used to be that service providers focused only on their own book of business and provided services based on their own core strengths. Over the years, mobility professionals have gained experience in a variety of relocation business sectors and have brought that knowledge and experience back to their organizations.

Meanwhile, companies have expanded their service offerings through the acquisition of other firms. For example, relocation management companies have purchased temporary housing companies and moving companies. The result has been a lot of cross-selling opportunities, and the people who work

for these organizations now have quite a bit more knowledge and experience about a lot more pieces of the relocation puzzle. That now enables companies to better think outside the box, pool their resources, and offer new and innovative solutions to their clients.

When moving a transferee from point A to point B, every company does things a little bit differently, but many elements and processes are the same for all, and the information that is needed is really no different.

That is where technology comes in, because it allows collaboration to happen, with multiple service providers utilizing one system instead of many. This is a huge benefit for the corporate client, because it comes across as a single process. Also, having access to all the information in one place and allowing the parties involved to have a clearer picture of what is happening inherently makes for a more transparent relocation process.

Sweeney believes in being proactive, joining forces with like-minded companies, and being able to present collective services to clients. He sees technology as the bridge between providers in the industry and the end client. He says his company is trying to help the industry as a whole by bringing suppliers together and by packaging services with technology solutions.

"We went from looking at ways to sell our products to asking why these other providers couldn't offer other services," says Sweeney. "That led us to the idea that if we have four service providers offering four different services, the four of us should work together and provide a single platform for the client."

ACCESS TO SKILLS AND STRENGTHS

Jeff Walker, CRP, GMS, is CEO/president of Corporate Relocation, LLC, a full-service global relocation corporation in Carrollton, Texas. He refers to collaboration and strategic partnership development as "mission-critical" as the workforce continues to expand internationally.

"It is important to recognize that you need the expertise of strategic partners who specialize in certain regions of the country or globe," says Walker. "It is also important to align yourself with strategic partners who specialize in certain services that are critical to the success of domestic relocations and global assignments. The strategic partnerships that you develop are what set you apart from your competition. Global mobility providers do not always specialize in technology, tax, payroll, legal,

immigration, temporary housing, or real estate. As a result, partnering with providers who specialize in those areas reduces risk and allows access to those skills and strengths.”

He adds that these partnerships also make it possible to work more efficiently, while providing access to what others are doing, which can be conducive to creative problem-solving.

“Collaboration has become the service model because the world of the future will not be served by the organization of the past,” says Walker. “The workplace has become more global and more virtual, which is causing a more loosely joined workforce. This virtual workplace makes it even easier to collaborate with experts in ... other global mobility areas.”

He says in many cases, customers will feel as if they are being served by a single company located under one roof when, in actuality, they are getting the benefit of the global collaboration of the strategic partners who each specialize in their specific services.

David Gonzalez, CRP, GMS, is senior vice president, global business development, for Hilldrup Cos., a moving and storage company headquartered in Stafford, Virginia. He says what has led the mobility function down the path of collaboration is the maturing of the industry, challenging economic conditions, overcapacity, and investor recognition that asset-based business models with strong leadership and balance sheets will be sustainable. “Advancements in technology and open architecture are opening our eyes to data and metrics that allow each of us in the supply chain to examine metrics that drive performance and allow us to leverage our resources to compete and attract new opportunities in the form of more volume,” Gonzalez says.

The benefits of strategic partnerships and the fine art of collaboration are far-reaching for both the service partners and for the clients and customers they serve.

“The benefits to the service providers working in collaboration with one another are reduced risk, more experience, the ability to work efficiently with quicker problem resolution, innovation, and having access to boots on the ground around the globe,” says Walker. “All of this leads to higher customer satisfaction, which is the same goal for all service providers.”

Gonzalez says another result of service providers working together in serving mutual clients and

Utilizing one system instead of many is a huge benefit for the corporate client, because it comes across as a single process.

customers is the elimination of duplicate infrastructure and the potential for errors in data reporting.

At the same time, clients, customers, and transferees experience more streamlined, efficient processes, with a team of service providers working in conjunction with one another and sharing common information as it pertains to the relocation process. By pooling their collective resources, service partners are not offering a part of the service but can offer an entire package of services.

Strategic partnerships also offer service providers an opportunity to develop long-term business relationships. By leveraging the core strengths of each party, those involved are able to position themselves and their companies for optimized success and growth.

A MATTER OF TRUST

As with all good relationships, strategic partnerships must be founded on trust. According to Sweeney, trust is the most difficult challenge to collaboration among service providers.

“Working together for the good of the client requires service providers to trust each other and be OK with the fact that they will not be in complete control,” says Sweeney. “When service providers take a step back and understand the end goals of the client, partnering and working together can provide a seamless relocation experience.”

Gonzalez adds that a good collaborative team should consist of mature and innovative business



By pooling their collective resources, partners can offer an entire package of services.

leaders, financial resources, physical assets, and strong technology support.

Walker says excellent communication is also an essential element: "A breakdown in communication in the virtual workplace can be devastating and can result in service failures." Like Sweeney, Walker also points to the importance of trust. "There must also be a high level of trust between each provider, and their knowledge and skills must be much greater than that which could be created internally."

Again, this speaks to the importance of having a single system that allows multiple parties to directly input information and have shared access to data. It is a vital ingredient for successful collaboration and will continue to play an important role.

Walker explains, "Information-sharing by multiple parties involved in a relocation is absolutely necessary in our virtual workplace. Service providers in the relocation industry cannot compete without this ability. People are going to continue to have high expectations about accessing information from their mobile devices. Technology will continue to drive these expectations higher in the future."

Gonzalez adds that mobility professionals are challenged in their ability to gain visibility across continents and manage risk in the form of loss in the mobility supply chain and with compliance due to evolving regulation.

"New technology and innovation have increased the demands for nimble data to observe and manage workflow in an environment that is as near to 'live' as possible," he says. "Open architecture will facilitate the pushing and pulling of data if we can all focus on mapping the data elements that we each need to meet our business goals."

Just as technology solutions will play an important role in the future of the global mobility industry, so too will the collaborative efforts of those who serve the industry.

Gonzalez says that from his standpoint "we have reached the juncture in the mobility industry where we need to put the customers' interests ahead of our own and leverage our collective competencies and assets to design and sustain 'best-in-class' mobility platforms."

Sweeney adds that today's technology allows service providers to collaborate and form partnerships instead of working against each other, which brings a positive experience to the relocation process.

To address concerns about the security breaches that seem to be rampant these days, precautionary measures are built into various platforms. Additional customization allows companies to have several levels of security and password protection and to limit or deny access based on customer specifications.

It is important also to mention an apparent shift within the global mobility industry to no longer separate domestic and international services. This makes collaboration and the ability to leverage relationships even more important, since service providers need to be able to deliver their services anywhere in the world they might be needed.

GOOD PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER

Sweeney sums it up, "At the end of the day, it really just comes down to trust and good people working together. I think that is where this whole partnership idea came from, because it really doesn't matter what business you are in or what company you represent, as long as you are willing to set all of that aside and work together in providing services and solutions that ultimately are best for the end client. That is when we know we've truly become an industry that is really working together as a whole."

We cannot accomplish this by working in the quiet isolation of our own companies. We have to be able to trust and rely on our partners in the industry. There is always more value in what we can do collectively than in what any of us can do alone. *M*

Michelle Sandlin, CRP, GMS-T, is a freelance writer and columnist for the Houston Chronicle. She is a frequent contributor to the Business Journals, Mobility, and several other publications and corporate blogs. She can be reached at +1 281 831 3112 or by email at michelle.sandlin@me.com.