

Navigating COVID-19: Balancing transferees' needs and emotions



Summary of U.S. Bank Corporate Programs virtual client forum regarding COVID-19 impacts on mobility

The rapid rise and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic turned business as usual on its head overnight. In its wake, mobility specialists are facing unprecedented new challenges as they navigate both disruptions to usual processes and the emotions of employees. To support mobility clients in navigating these uncharted waters, U.S. Bank hosted a virtual forum to bring mobility specialists across an array of industries together to share challenges and solutions.

Several thought-provoking themes emerged during the forum. Forum moderator John Sculley, SCRP®, observed that “it’s not enough to be reactive” when companies and mobility professionals are operating in such uncertain times. “Being aware and anticipating shifting and emerging needs will help ensure relocation stability.”

The forum, held on April 1, 2020, featured three mobility specialists:

- Julie Coleman, CRP®, GM
Regional Contracts Manager, HR Services – Americas
Shell Oil
- Johnny Haines, SCRP®, SGMS-T
Sr. Manager, Relocation Services
Deloitte Services LP
- Jill Johnson
Sr. Manager Global Mobility - Americas, Total Rewards
Becton Dickinson

During the forum, participants also had an opportunity to weigh in via polling.

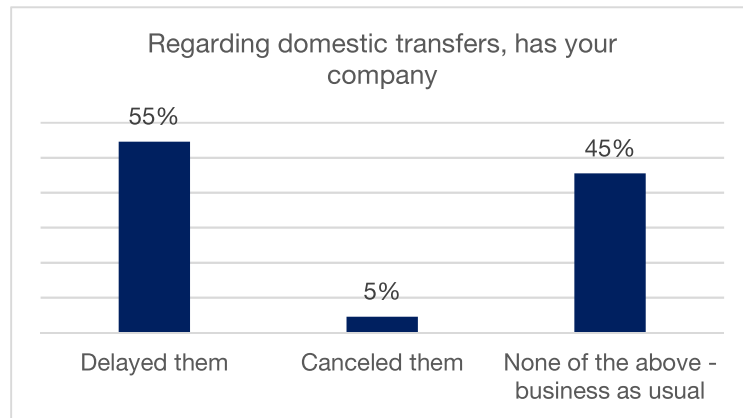
Managing relocations during the pandemic

Panelists shared that most relocations that have not already started are being put on hold. This was also reflected in attendee poll results, which showed 55% of poll respondents are delaying domestic transfers and 94% are delaying international transfers.

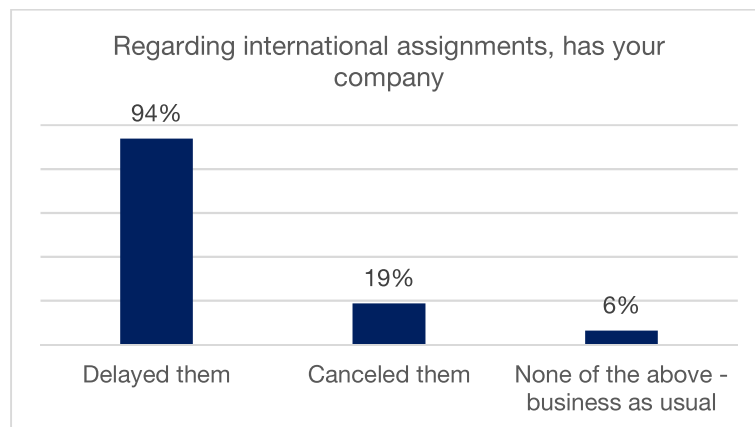
Because conditions continue to change, the panelists indicated that they are continuing to evaluate their programs and monitor the status of relocations already in progress. One key point discussed was how an organization’s industry type may influence the way relocations are handled. Companies in an industry deemed an “essential service” may find they need to continue with relocations but with modified programs. On the flip side, knowledge-based companies are finding that having employees work from home right now eliminates the need for moves.

Panelists were asked, “How are your companies handling your pending and new relocations, interns and assignments?” Their answers revealed that, first and foremost, decisions are made to ensure the safety of all their employees and comply with social distancing recommendations. Respondents stated that with

things so fluid and changing quickly, everything is being looked at on a case-by-case basis. Some are putting together panels to make sure internal partners meet regularly to discuss each transaction and situation. The panelists discussed how their companies are looking at every option, including delaying all moves or pausing them unless they're in process. Other areas of impact include canceling home-finding trips, implementing virtual surveys for household goods, extending temporary living, and allowing virtual work arrangements for new hires and interns.



For international relocations, the panelists also discussed that, due to travel restrictions and bans in place, those moves are being delayed unless they are “mission critical” relocations or repatriation.



Changing arrangements with provider partners

A common theme among panelists was the disruption being experienced with providers. The current circumstances are causing mobility specialists and providers to seek unique ways to approach relocations. Transferees often do not want movers in the house when they are home. Residential appraisals are traditionally completed as interior inspections requiring access to the home. The current

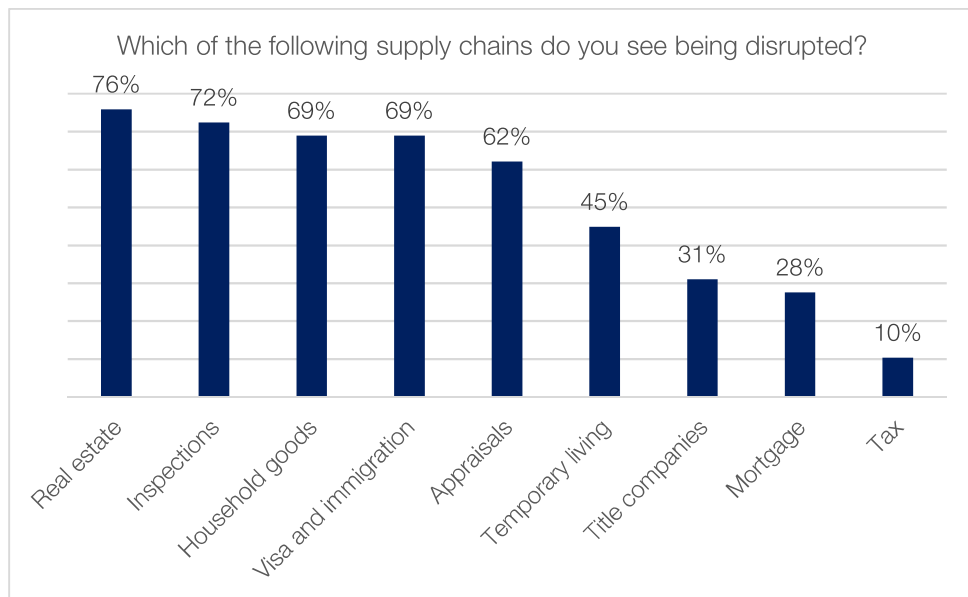
environment is causing the industry to consider alternative methods, such as external-only appraisals to keep providers out of the home.

Wendy Morrell, CRP®, director, U.S. Bank Relationship Retail, commented, “At U.S. Bank, our primary concern during this difficult time is the safety of our customers, employees and supply partners. We have quickly shifted to accommodate alternative appraisal types based on the guidance of the government sponsored entities to ease concerns of customers and appraisers.”

One way panelists are staying on top of the changing environment is by having frequent meetings and check-ins with their supply chain as well as their internal partners. This can help eliminate surprises. But it also allows mobility specialists to detect emerging trends and needs, enabling them to communicate any unexpected changes with their transferees and find new solutions quickly.

Regarding supplier disruption, Sculley noted, “Mobility specialists have a constant need for staying in contact with their providers to help them see what is around the corner. It’s important to stay agile and proactive, rather than reactive.”

During the webinar, attendee poll respondents indicated that most of the disruption with providers is taking place in the homebuying process. Not surprisingly, real estate and inspections are causing the most difficulty. And in agreement with the panelists, poll respondents show that moving household goods is also becoming a challenge.



Handling repatriation

Emotions are playing a big part in what is now the new normal of mobility. Speakers shared stories ranging from heroic to heartwarming. They spoke of families being

unable to reunite due to border closures, challenges getting personal possessions moved safely, and even instances of transferees making personal sacrifices to ensure that the job gets done. To ease some of the employee stress in such a fluid situation, it is more important than ever to communicate frequently with employees, making sure they know the company is working through every changing scenario.

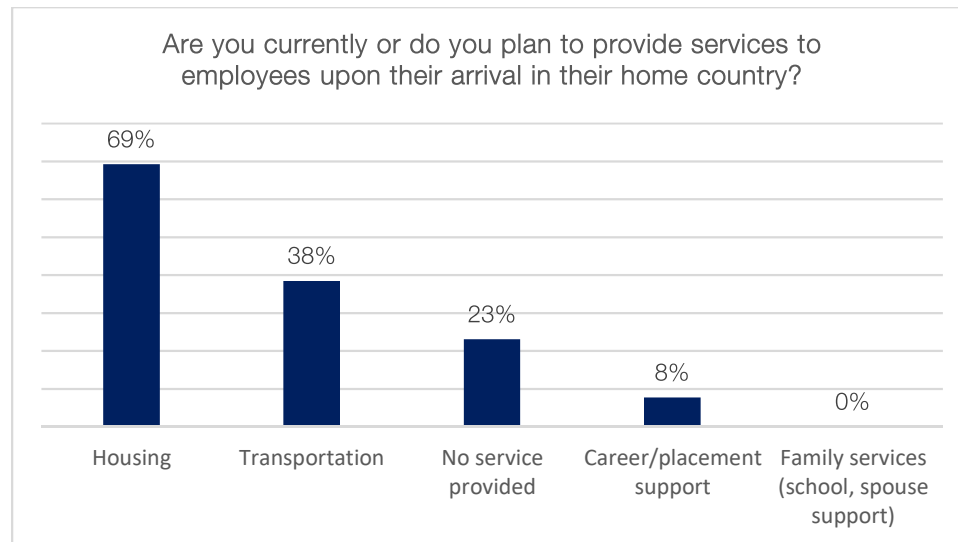
While the COVID-19 situation is certainly a global one, the way this is unfolding shows that it is very much highly localized. Each mobility case is affected differently by business conditions, geopolitical situations and employees' personal circumstances. Companies are looking at factors such as jurisdictional issues and employee locations, drilling down to the specifics of each. One size does not always fit all.



Our speakers talked about situational solutions versus universal solutions. The polling showed that the majority of respondents are making decisions case by case based on the employee's choice. They first evaluate the individual situation and then make specific recommendations to the employee in order to reach a mutual solution. Sculley stated, "It is critical that employees are provided clearly defined choices. Having their company bring guidance and knowledge to employees for them to understand all the options will help them to feel that both the company and employee are in this together. Sweeping and simplistic policies won't work. One-off improvisations are needed in many situations."

Regarding repatriation, Sculley notes, "Duty of care calls for more than 'employee choice' on big decisions like emergency repatriation. An assignee may not have the information, resources or perspective to make the best choices. Employers should, in each case, provide a considered recommendation and support the employee's evaluation and election. Otherwise, employees may stumble into unnecessarily risky, premature or costly courses of action."

Due to the sudden nature of having to accommodate a large number of changes, it appears that mobility teams are still in the process of determining how best to support returning employees. This is a trend that is likely to change as mobility specialists have more time to adapt and prepare support. By anticipating needs before they arise, mobility specialists can help offset some of the emotion and stress associated with relocation during this time.



While there is a large amount of uncertainty surrounding mobility right now, our panelists and attendees helped shed light on their current methods for managing relocations. Agility is critical, as is being understanding of your employees' emotional needs. You may [view the entire forum online](#) to hear more details from our panelists and moderator.