

Secondment: Not Second Best

SECONDMENT IS GAINING TRACTION WITHIN THE PERSONNEL, HUMAN RESOURCES – AND MORE RECENTLY, THE CORPORATE REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY.

Legal and accounting professions, just to name two, rely on secondment strategies to strengthen client relationships and build employee skills. Similarly, clients rely on the flexible nature of a secondment to meet talent needs.

Secondment :

[si-kond-muh nt]
noun

Secondment is when a service provider “host” company lends or sends an employee to another organization, called the client firm.

Cushman & Wakefield is using this invaluable personnel tool which has produced great results. For example, a secondment helped fulfill an integrator role for United Technologies Corp. (UTC) in Singapore. Similar secondment strategies supported a global bank’s CRE team and provided short-term project support for Ericsson in China. Given the benefits, it’s anticipated that secondment usage will grow within the CRE sector, not just in Asia Pacific, but through other Cushman & Wakefield global offices as well.

What, exactly, is a Secondment?

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (a leading global authority), secondment is a “temporary movement or loan of an employee to another part of an organization, or to a separate organization.”

The host company employee has a workspace within the seconding client’s location until the assignment ends. Secondment arrangements can range from a few days to a year or longer. Regardless, the main facets of a secondment are “temporary” and “separate organization.”

Through a secondment assignment, an employee becomes immersed in the client firm’s organizational culture, and is in a unique position to share that knowledge and skill set with his or her CRE host company. Secondment also provides the client firm with access to unique skill sets from the CRE host company, which can be more cost-effective than hiring in-house.

The Three Party Agreement

There is more to a successful secondment than sending talent to a client firm and assuming everything will work out. A successful secondment requires cohesiveness and preparation between three parties. The CRE host company must be willing to loan an employee, for a specific set time, to a client firm. The client firm, in turn, must provide the employee with an adequate workspace, as well as access to corporate culture and knowledge.

Finally, the employee must be willing to work with the client firm, and remain open to different tasks and organizational structures. Without cooperation, alignment and understanding of expectations between these three secondment “pillars,” the arrangement won’t be effective.

The Benefits

A successful secondment can provide huge benefits for all participants. For the client firm, secondment brings qualified talent which, in turn, helps meet resourcing needs in a time- and cost-effective way. For example, in the case of Ericsson in China, Cushman & Wakefield resource was brought in to help establish governance and processes for the leasing administration and document management for transactions, clearing a backlog of outstanding items in a cost effective way. When the project is completed, as with any secondment, the employee can return to his or her CRE host company, in this case Cushman & Wakefield Beijing.

Meanwhile, the CRE host company, obtains unique knowledge about the operations and culture of that firm. As an example, let’s say the client firm’s executive group makes the final decisions concerning the acquisition or disposition of an industrial property. Armed with this inside information on decision makers as individuals, the CRE host company can develop proposals directed to the executive group, thereby saving time and ensuring information gets to the right people.

Finally, secondments allow employees to gain new skills and industry experience. An employee on loan to a client firm will implicitly understand the firm’s unique nuances, the language and terminology used, demands of specific individual stakeholders, and be able to effectively share that information with the CRE host company.



Success through Experience

Secondments can fail more often than they succeed. Why? Lack of preparation or focus on proposed outcomes. As such, a best practices guide, and preparation, are important for successful secondment experiences.

Everything must be transparent and approved by all three parties.

There are many things to consider when it comes to such an arrangement, not the least of which is how long the secondment will last, and how it will come to an end. Additional factors for consideration include, but are not limited to:

- > Determining how performance management reviews will take place.
- > Solidifying to whom the employee reports.
- > Paying overtime, bonuses, expenses and training.
- > Covering long-term, or persistent short-term, absences.
- > Deciding what will happen should organizational changes take place at the CRE host company or the client firm.

Perform due diligence on secondment employees.

A secondment assignment means entering another company's culture and way of doing things.

Not all employees are flexible enough, or even willing to be, embedded in a client firm. To ensure positive secondment experiences, the CRE host company should consider employees who are curious, outgoing, who want to advance and are open enough to accept different organizational cultures.

Make sure the employee maintains frequent contact with the CRE host firm.

This is important, not only for the employee to share information with the CRE host firm, but also to let the employee know that he or she is still an important part of the CRE host firm. For example, a global bank secondee continued attending Cushman & Wakefield weekly transaction management team meetings to ensure continued connection with the host company.

Develop a plan for re-integrating the employee to the CRE host company on the secondment's conclusion.

Much like an expatriate worker needs to be eased back into his or her host company upon return from a foreign country, the secondment employee will also need to be integrated into his/her role at the CRE host company. Re-acclimation and debriefing are important here.

Connect with the client firm at the secondment's conclusion to determine what went right and what could use improvement.

Certainly, the CRE host company will be in regular touch with the client firm throughout the secondment. But, a post-mortem following the secondment can be enormously helpful for all three parties involved to help ensure the success of other secondment experiences.



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Can Secondments Work?

A secondment arrangement is not for every firm. It requires flexibility and a willingness to receive new knowledge, not to mention time and preparation. Still, a company that has completed a successful secondment is in a unique position to provide better services to clients, while demonstrating full commitment. Finally, secondments provide fabulous learning opportunities for employees.