1 Employee Attitudes to Relocation

A lack of knowledge about employees’ willingness to move can disrupt the most carefully laid relocation plans. This chapter analyses the problems associated with the relocation of organisations and with individuals moving within Britain and overseas. How to predict employees’ mobility is examined together with how to improve attitudes towards company relocation and individual relocation at home and abroad.

COMPANY RELOCATION

One of the main problems in relocating an organisation to another part of the country lies in trying to predict how many employees will move with it. Relocation is bound to cause a certain amount of disruption in the running of the business. If most of the employees based in the old location refuse to move with their firm, the organisation must recruit and train replacement staff. New employees will need to start work as soon as the move has taken place and training plans must be initiated straight away if staff are to be effective quickly. However, the time lags involved in a relocation exercise – perhaps resulting from delays in obtaining and refurbishing new premises or from departments/sections moving at different times – can seriously affect recruitment and training plans.

Although manual and clerical staff may be replaced relatively easily, staff with special skills are hard to find. If they refuse to move with the firm, the company will have a difficult task on its hands in trying to find suitable replacements. The loss of key staff can be expensive in other ways too – their contracts may well provide for more costly redundancy provisions than for junior employees.

MOBILITY

In trying to assess reactions to company relocation in terms of which staff will move, the following factors need to be taken into account:
— Age;
— Sex;
— Marital status;
— Education level;
— Housing;
— Socio-economic group;
— Geographic region.

By analysing these factors and by determining a profile of the work-force, it is possible to gain a better idea of how many staff will move and who these staff are likely to be. This in turn will influence decisions on the contents of the relocation/redundancy packages.

Age

In general, mobility falls with age; the most mobile being the 16 to 24-year-old age group. However, the mobility of young workers may reflect that of their parents.

An independent survey on willingness of workers to move with their job was carried out in January 1983 by communications specialists, Milne and Stewart Consultancy. A representative sample of the adult British population was asked: 'If the company you work for had to move its premises, do you think you would or would not move with it and find a new home if it moved more than 50 miles away and gave you financial help to move?' (A similar survey was also conducted in 1977.)

The results of this survey (see Table 1.1) demonstrate clearly the fact that younger people are the most mobile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Would move</th>
<th>Would not move</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16–24</td>
<td>81 (%)</td>
<td>13 (%)</td>
<td>6 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>67 (%)</td>
<td>24 (%)</td>
<td>9 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>61 (%)</td>
<td>32 (%)</td>
<td>7 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–64</td>
<td>58 (%)</td>
<td>38 (%)</td>
<td>4 (%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Milne and Stewart Consultancy.