

## Straight Talking – Productivity and individual commitment

By Rob Bamforth, Principal analyst, Quocirca Ltd

The way many people work has changed dramatically over the last decade. There are more lines of communication both inside and outside the organisation involving everything from dispersed cross-functional teams and matrix management to integrated supply chains and service outsourcing.

Working locations are blurring as more work partly from home or while travelling and have to deal with the whole work/life balancing act.

IT and communications have become an integral part of working life with the blossoming use of email, intranets and the Internet as well as mainstream business applications. Immediate access to IT is no longer a luxury or something restricted to a privileged few, but a requirement for many employees all through their working day.

Despite enduring many failed projects, most businesses still believe productivity improvement is a key reason for making IT investments. With increasing numbers of employees needing access to the IT applications and services while out of the office, tools to support mobile working are big business, and mobile solutions are often sold as a 'silver bullet' for increasing productivity.

But it's not quite that simple – despite the technology, much of the real gains in productivity come from user commitment.

Obtaining this is not simple, especially when the business can be affected by other aspects of mobile solutions. For example, there is the ever present challenge of mobile security. If breached this can cause operational disruption and even have an impact on brand-name or shareholder value in the longer term.

There are technology solutions which can be deployed to address many of the security issues, but ultimately the individual employee is the weakest link and their understanding and support of the security processes is vital.

Other issues more peripheral to mobile application deployment are also often missed, including the effect on other employees.

For example the flow of many meetings in larger companies can become quite disrupted by the number of people constantly checking incoming emails on their mobile phone or BlackBerry. Or the use of a laptop ostensibly to take notes, but actually being used, often noisily, by an employee to be virtually somewhere else other than the physical meeting.

As well as providing tools to make employees more productive, technology provides plenty of opportunities for distraction and procrastination if the employee is so inclined.

The problem is often one of time management, which has been exacerbated by the speed of the technology, making even trivial email, instant messages or new alerts appear urgent as they beep onto the screen. Again understanding, buy-in and adoption of a corporate usage and etiquette is the route, rather than a reliance on yet more technology. Mobile employees need to understand the impact their working patterns have on others.

However technology can also pose obstacles to their individual productivity that should be addressed during the selection and deployment process, otherwise employee attempts to efficiently manage their time will be undermined.

Firstly when addressing the important issue of mobile security it's important to remember why mobile working is being encouraged – flexibility and productivity – and this can be lost if solutions are not well suited to the needs of individual mobile workers.

Do they have to go through a complex re-authentication process when roaming from one network to another, do they have to struggle with finding external security tokens when really they just want to press on? Keep it robust enough to manage the risk, and simple enough

to ensure the user isn't trying to find work-arounds.

These issues tend not to be as much of a burden to those who move from one fixed but remote encampment to another – coffee shop to airport lounge – but can be very disruptive to those who need more frequent access on the move. Mobile security solutions have to be applied not only to match the risks to the business, but also the working patterns of the individuals.

Also important are the technology choices – handsets, laptops and networks. Patchy coverage, hardware or software that is prone to frequent failure, or solutions simply not specifically designed for mobile use will frustrate employees, sapping the efforts of even those who want to be productive.

For those who have not been adequately consulted or won over into mobile working, these minor distractions will become the major excuses for the failure of productivity benefits to materialise.

Mobile users have to put up with intermittent and slower networks, distraction and noise in their working environment and isolation from the peer support of their colleagues.

If the tools, systems and processes they are offered do not recognise the challenges they face, they will undermine the individual's commitment and ability to increase their productivity. Without that, the organisation will not get the returns it was expecting.

For a more detailed overview of how to address the issues that impact mobile worker productivity, see the Quocirca report "[Distraction and Diversion](#)".

## About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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