

Straight Talking – Work/life balance 2.0 – the merging of the consumer and the employee

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At one time computers and networks were only found in certain workplaces, often only selected and managed by specialists – the high priests of IT- and they were certainly far in advance of anything that even geeky hobbyists would have experienced at home. Now, not only have computers evolved from 'techie' IT into mainstream affordable consumer electronics, domestic communications networks have changed as predicted in the 1990s from Plain Old Telephone Systems (POTS) to Pretty Awesome New Stuff (PANS).

For consumers, PANS means mobile connectivity wherever they go, high speed broadband, and all at a relatively affordable price. I say relatively, because the typical home with two mobile phones, broadband and a fixed phone calling plan could easily be spending £100 per month on 'connectivity'. But where's the problem with individuals spending their own money on their own communications needs?

Depending on their job role, many 'consumers' will also find that as employees their employer will often provide them with some form of mobile or remote use device – phone and/or laptop – and some connectivity plan. The initially simple proposition of providing a mobile phone on a corporate tariff is now more complex as individuals have their own preferences, styles and tariff requirements for mobile phones. The business supplied mobile phone has also at times necessitated a more intricate sharing of beans counted between employee, employer and taxman as the line between personal and work use blurs.

Remote access to IT increases this complexity. Whilst remote working once might have involved a hotel network connection for a road warrior's laptop to dial in to read email, it is now far more likely to encompass other locations, in particular the home. This further blurs the divide between personal and business use, especially if an employee is regularly expected to work in these locations, whilst still remaining in an environment controlled and secured by the IT department. The remote employee might be

using other business critical applications in addition to email, or they may be using IP telephony bridged into the corporate PBX to appear like any other extension even when working from home.

This begs the question – who then pays for the home broadband, and who is responsible for ensuring it meets the company's needs?

According to recent Quocirca research, this is by no means clear, but as the use of consumer home broadband for business purposes increases, it will become a bigger issue. Over a third of medium to large enterprises across Europe already have employees using broadband to work from home, with another third starting to become active in this area. Around a quarter of companies are providing and paying for their employees' connections, and of the rest, 17% have employees claiming back all or some of the costs.

Home broadband is rarely going to be used solely for business purposes, so the employees are bound to be getting some benefit. Many consumer services from banking, access to utility accounts to shopping and entertainment are now being accessed or delivered over the internet. Consumers increasingly depend upon their broadband connection.

However a combination of wider household use and broadband delivered entertainment means the connection might be heavily loaded and by some less than friendly or even unsafe applications. Are these appropriate network conditions for those employees working from home who have to conduct confidential business needing solid security, or who use critical processes needing deterministic confirmation or completion?

Probably not, but then can an employer really take full control of the broadband connection, compelling the employee to get another for personal use? And what happens when two members of the household work from home with different employers?

Ultimately it's unlikely that employers will be able to impose either broadband service provider or IT department approved customer premises equipment, like a router at the entry to an employee's household network. So how then do they retain at least some control, to ensure that corporate security and protection needs are met, and that services used by the employee at home meet suitable service criteria?

The first step is to realise that once IT access is granted from outside the physical corporate perimeter and over public access networks, the infrastructure of the access network has to be seen as outside of the control of the business, and focus has to be turned to the endpoints. If the endpoint devices – PCs, laptops etc – are provided and controlled by the business, these can be built to meet its security and connectivity needs. If not, then the endpoint has to be treated as un-trusted and at the end of an un-trusted and potentially un-reliable connection – corporate services then have to be delivered through virtually private managed network connections.

Some of the risks in the network can be reduced if businesses take a more active interest in the specification, cost and availability of domestic broadband services on offer to their employees. While it may not be in their best interests to impose on employees, it might be possible to work in partnership with carrier suppliers to ensure more commonality across the corporate employee 'extranet'.

However, the caveat as always is the uncertainty of 'events' as employees move on, and all too often carrier partners become yesterday's suppliers when a cheaper deal comes along. Perhaps the virtual extension of the corporate network into employees' homes offers an incentive and opportunity to take a slightly longer term view – especially if the carrier can take on some of the complexity of dealing with the network load balancing of work and life.

For a more detailed look at the issues surrounding corporate telecoms, including employees working from home over broadband, download the "[Convergence or confusion](#)" report for free from the Quocirca website.

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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