

Transforming the workplace

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The impact of mobile technology on the working environment

For some, work is no longer just somewhere to go to, but something they do, wherever they are. In an increasingly time-pressured business and personal environment, for many the ability to work in what was previously "dead" time is more important both for productivity and work-life balance. To achieve this employees need access to their IT resources outside the office and at home. But even those who are constrained to work at a particular place – like a campus, hospital, factory or industrial complex – find that access to IT and communications at all times of the day and all locations within the workplace is increasingly important.

KEY FINDINGS

- **End users are not being brought into wireless and remote access projects sufficiently early**
Fewer than 10% of UK enterprises involve trades unions and other affiliations in decisions to proceed with wireless or remote access projects. This may work in early adopter markets in technology industries and generally non-unionised professional roles, but will hamper deployment of potentially productive mobile technology in many other industries. In addition, few involve end users directly or HR/personnel departments. Personal productivity is reliant on individual buy-in, so earlier involvement of end users would be worthwhile.
- **The broader implications of technology on workplaces are often ignored**
Almost one third of business managers believe an increasing number of employees would benefit from access to IT and business communications while working from home, traveling outside the office, or from a flexible location within their organizations premises. Despite this, IT management and purchasing dictate the approval processes, with one third ignoring the views of business management and around half ignoring the views of facilities or operations management.
- **Smaller businesses see more benefit in workplace change than larger ones**
Almost a half of smaller businesses see a benefit in working from home, enabling commuting time to become working time. This is a way to allow more flexible working as well as increasing the hours worked. Over a third of small businesses expect more employees to be working from home in the future, and about 40% expect more employees to be traveling outside the office with a need to access IT, this is almost double the number expected by large enterprises.
- **Security as always is a key priority**
Data security is the main inhibitor holding businesses back from giving more traveling employees access to IT, being rated as a serious concern by 50% and overshadowing other factors like cost. For home working, security and confidentiality is also a major concern, with almost half rating it as a significant constraint in limiting the number of employees allowed to work from home.
- **The communications infrastructure for traveling employees is no longer a major issue**
While the cost of remote or mobile communications is still a major concern, the lack of an available network or inconsistency is no longer an important issue. Finding the right connector for telephone sockets, modems and power leads has been replaced by finding the right roaming plans or a hotspot provider with a peering arrangement.
- **The changing shape of the workplace and working practices requires a new look at management**
Loss of management control, organisational culture and team cohesion are all seen as important inhibitors to working from home, however reduced staff turnover is thought by almost 80% to be a key benefit, just behind improved productivity. These positive impacts on morale need to be honed and exploited by appropriate management to meet both the objectives of employees and businesses.

RESEARCH NOTE:

The primary research data upon which this report is based was derived from an independent study conducted by Quocirca sponsored by T-Mobile. This involved 150 interviews of senior business and IT management from a broad cross section of industries in the UK. Respondents were divided evenly from among small (200-1,000 employees), medium (1,000-10,000) and large (10,000 and above) enterprises. Other sources of data are highlighted where they are used.

We would like to thank T-Mobile and the interviewees who contributed their valuable time.

Introduction

Workplace mobility has grown steadily in the last two decades, but workforces have always been mobile. Coming to and from work, selling at customer sites, meeting suppliers and prospects, carrying out maintenance on location, have always been factors in the working environment.

The concept of mobile working has become more prominent as businesses have become more dependent on IT and electronic communications. The geographic spread of teams, the need to remain in contact, and the need to be more responsive and competitive in a fast-moving market place all have an impact on the mobility requirements of the working environment.

As the pace and place of work evolves new terms such as virtual organisations, networked workplaces and the electronic office have emerged, as access to IT and communications is required away from the desk, outside the office and at home. For the purposes of this report, the generic term “wireless and remote access” will be used.

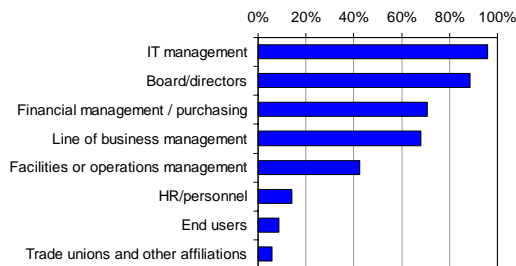
The aim of this report is to look at impacts of wireless or remote access on the workplace for small, medium and large enterprises and is intended to be read by those with responsibility for sourcing products and dealing with suppliers. As a background, 150 business and IT managers were interviewed from a mix of industries across the UK.

1 Across the organisation

Wireless and remote access must be considered outside the constraints of the underlying technologies – it is transforming the way of working, not simply a way of utilising available technology. It covers the requirements of those working from home, on the road, in hotels in airports and so on, as well as those moving around inside the company boundaries.

If field service engineers do not have to return to the depot to update their worksheet details, or sales people do not need to return to the office to check emails they make more efficient use of their working and personal time. If consultants can work at any desk, in any office, this makes them more effective and decreases the pressure on office space. Despite this, the roles of those with broader workplace interests – facilities, HR and trades unions - are rarely involved in the major changes brought about by wireless and remote access (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Who would typically be involved in approving the decision to proceed with a wireless or remote access project?



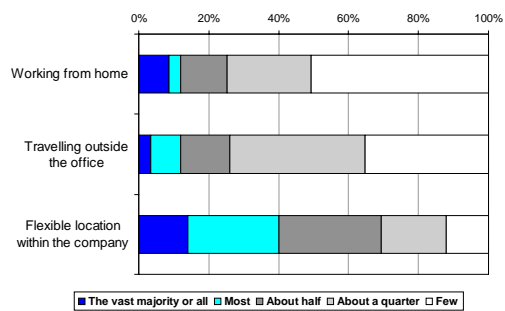
Whilst the other participants in the decision making process are important, wireless and remote access opens up opportunities to address the cost of occupancy of office and

site facilities, the cost of unnecessary travel by changing working practices, and the work/life balance of the employees. Implemented and managed well, these can all have a positive effect on overall business productivity, flexibility and responsiveness to customer and market pressures, and ultimately a business’s bottom line.

2 New places to manage

Not everyone wants to take work home with them or to work outside the office, but around half of UK enterprises think that 25% or more of their employees would benefit from access to IT at home and almost two thirds think a similar percentage would benefit from access to IT outside the office while travelling (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Working other than at a fixed desk – what proportion of employees would benefit from access to IT?

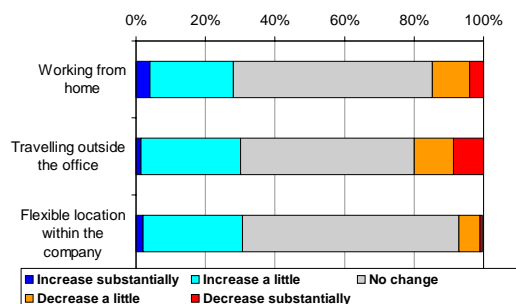


While these modes of working are not for everyone, and only around one in eight companies think most of their employees would benefit from wireless or remote access, the potential of remote working, recognised by many, indicates that a change in thinking will be required for managing the individuals concerned and their output.

Flexibility within the working environment is even more compelling, with over two thirds believing that the majority of their workforce would benefit from access to IT while away from a fixed work-station. For some businesses this leads to a fully flexible environment, with desk sharing or hot-desking, to reduce the pressure on office resources.

For the most part, these modes of working are all on the increase, but one in five see some reduction in the number travelling outside home or office (Figure 3). The increasing cost of business travel, heightened security fears and increased use of technology may all over time affect the number of employees who currently travel.

Figure 3
How will the numbers change in the near future?

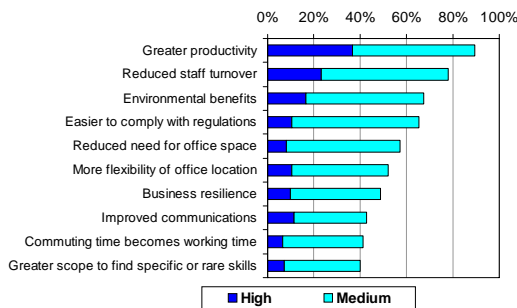


However, overall, around a third see increases in all three areas of remote or flexible access, and this is supported by other research into mobility and by historical trends seen in government figures from the UK Office of National Statistics for home working.

3 Decentralisation – the home branch

At one time working from home was seen as a binary switch – either fulltime at a place of work or at home – but the distinction is now far more blurred. An element of home access to IT systems reduces the need for professionals to travel to the office during the day, say before or after an external meeting. The odd day here and there working from home can be good for many to concentrate on a specific project, and productivity is seen as the biggest benefit (Figure 4).

Figure 4
How important are the benefits of home working to the business?



The advantages in this type of ‘ad hoc’ home working is that it does not require dedicated home office space, and flexible commuting and working hours can have positive benefits on employee morale, as around two thirds see the potential of home working to reduce staff turnover – another too often hidden cost saving for the business.

Many organisations are taking things a stage further with positive encouragement and support for periodically working from home. Along with productivity and other soft benefits such as employee work/life balance, this can lessen the squeeze on office space, but it must be well managed.

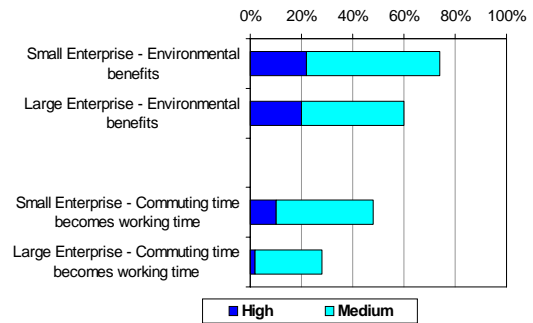
Without the proper communications solutions in place those working at home can be difficult to contact, increasing the burden on those remaining in the office and reducing, not improving responsiveness. Remote employees need different management methods as well as a significant element of self-discipline by the employee. Overworking can be as much an issue as under-working.

4 The impact on smaller enterprises

The combination of increased self-discipline with business flexibility makes it easier to understand why changes are happening faster in smaller businesses. While many lack the in-house expertise to provide their own solutions, this also means they have little baggage and fewer legacy systems. Some are starting from further behind than larger enterprises, but the closer proximity of all employees in smaller enterprises to their customers and the need to derive business benefits quickly drives their approach to IT investment.

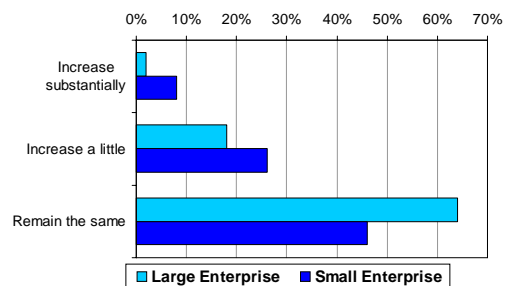
Smaller enterprises using the flexibility of what is becoming low cost high performance home broadband internet access to deliver data and even low cost voice services, can quickly gain benefit by reducing the need and impact of travel, increasing the hours available for working (Figure 5).

Figure 5
How important are these benefits from home working?



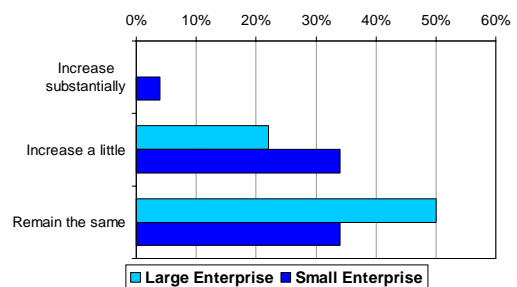
In addition to noting increased benefits from home working, smaller enterprises are increasing the number of home workers more rapidly than larger enterprises (Figure 6). This is partly because smaller size allows them to be more flexible in their adoption plans, but their organisational structures are flatter, and results are more readily noticeable.

Figure 6
How will the numbers working from home change in the near future?



Mobile data solutions, for email or remote access to business applications, allow employees to remain productive and responsive in gaps between meetings, while travelling, or on remote sites, and again, smaller enterprises are increasing the number of employees with remote access to IT.

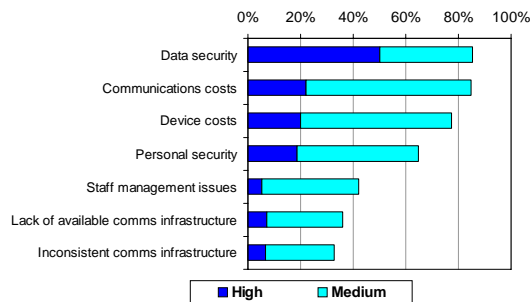
Figure 7
How will the number of those travelling and needing to access IT while outside the office change?



5 Issues to address

Wireless and remote access provides flexibility, but with this there is an increased need to put in place well thought out policies with adequate support. Businesses no longer worry much about whether there will be a communications infrastructure available. Even in hotels where in the past guests had to struggle with incompatible phone sockets, now have wired or wireless broadband access, cellular data network coverage, or are at least in walking distance of a Wi-Fi hotspot (Figure 8).

Figure 8
What are the main inhibitors to giving more employees who travel widely nationally or internationally, mobile or remote access to IT?



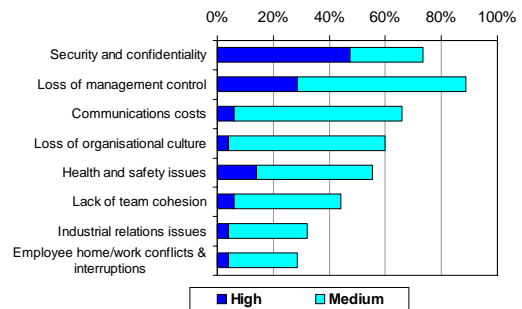
Security is still the number one issue, and while technology can help, it is better dealt with by educating users about their responsibilities and enforcing security best practice. The etiquette of business communications is evolving fast, but it is best to be explicit about what is, and is not, allowed or expected. For example, do not download and install third party software, keep laptops, PDAs and mobile with you at all times when using public transport, always use a PIN code and do not write your password on the back.

User education can also help manage communications costs, although for most businesses the problem is more one of making communications costs transparent and consistent. One bill for mobile calls, another for Wi-Fi and yet another for landline calls does not make it easy to manage or plan.

While security and communications costs are also an issue affecting who is allowed to work from home, the loss of management control is seen as a greater problem (Figure 9). This, along with loss of organisational culture, is a real issue if no adjustments are made, so the changes in working patterns necessitate a change in management style.

Again this comes down to employees understanding in advance their part of the management contract, and managers setting goals and measuring achievements rather than monitoring progress by direct observation of hours worked in the office or presentee-ism.

Figure 9
What are the main inhibitors which limit the number of employees who are allowed to work from home?



6 Conclusions

There are many benefits to an organisation in using wireless and remote access technology to put IT into the hands and homes of employees. This is not making employees 'mobile', but extending the current resources to better fit employee working patterns, and then offer ways to enhance and transform business processes.

Although many focus on increased productivity of the employee, the wider impacts on how the business is structured and resourced are often ignored. The savings in office and travel costs, both of which have grown in recent years, will have an increasingly significant impact on the business.

These issues of office space, location and facilities can be addressed, but the transformation does not have to resemble the 'bricks to clicks' mantra from the days of the Internet boom.

Too much reliance is often placed on technology and the flexibility of employees to cope with working while out of the office, but defining and communicating policies and working practices for new modes of working – home working, remote wireless access and flexible offices – would be far more effective.

Traditional working environments, offices, factories and campuses will not be replaced by virtual teams of road warriors and home workers, but they can be augmented by them. Companies must look for how to extend and evolve their working practices with wireless and remote access, but this will only be accomplished with buy-in from their employees and suitable changes in management methods.

6.1 Acknowledgements

This kind of research is crucial to all of us in the business and IT community - suppliers and customer organisations alike. We would therefore like to thank all of those participants who contributed so generously, with patience and good humour, towards a better understanding of issues in this important area and to the sponsor of the research behind it.

About T-Mobile

T-Mobile International is one of the world's leading companies in mobile communications. By Q3 of 2004, more than 109 million people were using the mobile communications services provided by companies in which T-Mobile or Deutsche Telekom have a majority or minority stake. And all that over a common technology platform based on GSM, the world's most successful digital wireless standard. This also makes T-Mobile the only mobile communications provider with a seamless transatlantic service.

T-Mobile UK, the fastest growing UK network, currently has 16.1 million customers. Its UK network covers over 99% of the UK population and currently offers roaming on 370 networks in 163 countries, including the USA. T-Mobile UK has 1,900 Wi-Fi locations, giving customers the largest UK Wi-Fi network as well as the largest network in Europe and the USA.

For more information about T-Mobile UK, please visit www.t-mobile.co.uk or contact the press office on +44 (0) 70171 50150.

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About Quocirca

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- Enterprise Applications and Integration
- Communications, Collaboration and Mobility
- Infrastructure and IT Systems Management
- Utility Computing and Delivery of IT as a Service
- IT Delivery Channels and Practices
- IT Investment Activity, Behaviour and Planning

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