



Spotlight: Mobile Workforce Management

The Power of Mobile – Accelerating Digital Transformation Through People and Process



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Digital transformation involves leveraging technology as a foundation to provide timely access to information. That connectivity and digitization of real-time data results in useful, actionable information that fuels more strategic decision making and organizational agility not previously attainable.

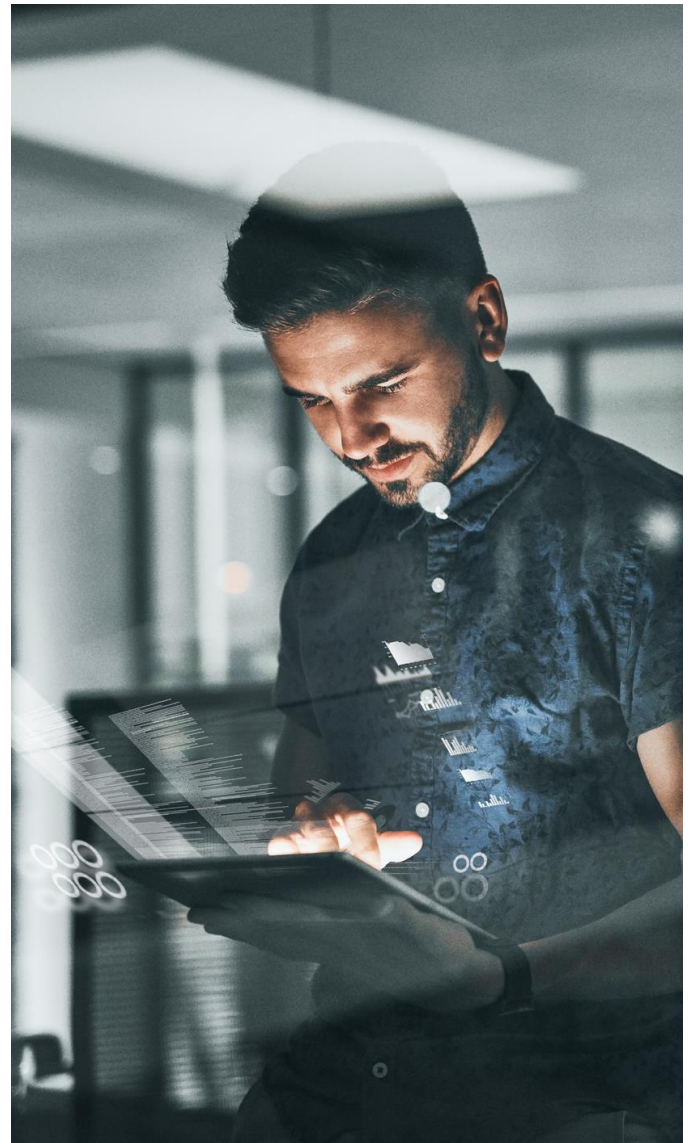
Reaching full transparency across departments, processes, and people has limitations, and this much sought-after transformation doesn't come without barriers. While the ability for organizations to strategically access and collect raw data across business systems has been prevalent, there has traditionally been a disparity in the technologies available to translate that data into useful information and then disperse it to the people who need it. That is a serious problem, as the full value of digital transformation can be realized only when both people and technology are considered.

The next big opportunity for businesses

Enter one of the most transformative opportunities by which businesses can communicate with, engage, and empower employees: smart mobile technology.

In 2011, only 35% of Americans owned a smartphone. By 2019, that number had jumped to 81%,¹ the devices nearly saturating the U.S. population. Smartphones now go well beyond supporting basic communication; they provide

access to a wide range of content that delivers — in real time — the information people need to make better decisions faster. From paying rent to ordering takeout, booking travel, or checking email, smartphones are a portal that allows people to access, automate, and act on what matters to them.



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How does this prevalence of mobile impact businesses and the workforce? First, the technology has established consumer-level expectations. People crave instant access to the information they need through user-friendly technology. That expectation now extends to their experience at work as well. A survey by The Workforce Institute at Kronos found “**Nearly half of employees (48%) wish their workplace technology performed just like their personal technology,**² and more than a third of employees surveyed (35%) feel their job is harder than it should be because of outdated processes and legacy technology.” From the perspective of employees, mobile technology is empowering. Providing them mobile access increases engagement and allows them to make better decisions faster, driving higher productivity and better business outcomes overall.

Second, organizations must consider smart mobile technology in the context of their workforce demographics, as managing multiple generations (from baby boomers to Generation Z) is the norm. Employees are increasingly expecting broader use of mobile technology, no matter where they fall demographically.

- Technology adoption has historically been slow for boomers, but don’t count them out. As of 2019, **68% of baby boomers reported owning a smartphone.**³
- Meanwhile, over 93% of digital-savvy millennials owned a smartphone as of 2019, and they will account **for 75% of the workforce by 2025.**⁴

- Gen Z, made up of digital natives, accounts for **24.3% of the U.S. population** and have already entered, or are poised to enter, the workforce soon.⁵ These younger generations are accustomed to using mobile in ways previous generations are not, and that digital savvy can benefit employers.

No matter where your employees lands, much of your workforce is mobile aware and likely has access to smartphone technology at this very moment. Concurrently, younger generations expect rapidly accelerated and evolving workplace technology.

Despite the opportunities smart mobile technology affords businesses through harnessing the power of their already mobile-ready workforce, some management teams are hesitant to leverage it. Their fears are typically unfounded. Concerns about loss of control (where the power shifts to the hourly workforce and limits manager governance), the lack of compliance surrounding where and when employees are working (and thus how they are paid), and potential privacy issues with mobile devices on-site can usually be mitigated *more* effectively, *not less*. These fears are stopping businesses from achieving holistic transformation, where advancements encompass both people and process.

Are these fears founded in fact, and do they offset the powerful value proposition offered by a mobile-ready workforce?

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Mobile workforce management – departing from historical approaches

Providing the hourly workforce with access to smart mobile technology and/or leveraging the technology they already have can represent a stark departure from traditional management structures. Typically, employees have limited access to information and are therefore restricted from making any meaningful decisions at work. While this may have held value in the past, such restrictions today are demoralizing and disengaging, especially with the evolving expectations of the younger workforce.

While it counters historical norms, developing a thoughtful approach to mobile workforce management (MWM) creates a stronger and more effective governance structure when managing a large hourly workforce. For example, the level of data granularity increases significantly, because mobile represents a continuous data loop as

employees perform their jobs. Connecting this information to analytics tools can also deliver valuable insights to businesses, both operationally and through workforce management. Providing employees with mobile technology aids in that effort and creates a more transparent, communication-rich environment built on trust where employees feel empowered and can thrive.

When governance, access to useful and relevant information, and empowerment to make decisions exist in balance, organizations have the opportunity for increased agility, engagement, and workforce performance.

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Top 5 value-driving areas of mobile workforce management

The top five value-driving areas of MWM where employers have the opportunity to empower rather than restrict employees are:

1. Agile business continuity and health and well-being initiatives

Disruptions are common in the workplace, and whether they are due to an accident, an error, or natural disaster, the ability to react to these challenges in a timely manner is critical. This means immediate communication, adjustments to workforce scheduling and labor planning, and a wide range of supply chain implications.

Mobile technology allows for the dissemination of these changes to all relevant workers in a rapid and effective way. This agility mitigates the risk to organizations from slow, dangerous, and costly responses to the unexpected while continuing to foster a healthy culture of trust within the workforce.

2. Improved communication and the employee/manager relationship

Whether employees are dispersed in a field service organization or embedded in a factory, effective communication is difficult. Ankura’s Labor Strategy and Human Capital survey reports that only 33% of employees feel that management communicates well with hourly workers.⁶ After all, how can they? Consistent communication is a challenge even for organizations that hold regular town hall meetings, as these are often one-way conversations where employees do not feel comfortable asking questions.

Additionally, when on the job, employees are often too busy to make or receive calls. They may not have the time to go in search of their supervisor either, further limiting communication. This communication breakdown is pervasive, with 85% of non-desk employees continuing to feel the communication they do receive from their employer is not enough.⁷

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Mobile technology solves this issue by allowing two-way communication whenever and wherever convenient for the employee. Creating faster, more convenient communication not only saves time, it also helps build a stronger employee-manager relationship. This is critical, as managers account for 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across business units.⁸

3. Time-off requests and work-life balance

Employees are sensitive about time off, and they should be. Vacations and holidays are part of an employee's benefits, and the ability to take time off at desirable times matters. Historically, paper forms were filled out once a year and employees were told what was (and was not) approved. This legacy process is confusing, can be perceived as secretive, and escalates emotional responses in the workforce.

Mobile technology replaces this outdated process with a more agile and transparent approach. Artificial intelligence (AI) can auto-approve time off when the assessed business needs allow for it, and because the process can be automated, supervisors cannot easily make bias decisions on approvals. Perceptions of transparency and fairness increase, removing a significant amount of emotion.

Mobile solutions also allow for managers to easily assess how much vacation time employees are using. Taking adequate time off is not only important for supporting employee morale, but it is also essential to managing burnout. Yet in 2018, more than 768 million days of PTO went unused, a 9% increase from 2017.⁹ Encouraging employees to balance their time off counteracts workplace fatigue and supports a stronger work-life balance.

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4. Shift swap and schedule management

Workforce agility is critical to the future of work. This doesn't just mean the business's ability to realign labor to accomplish the changing goals of the organization; it also means employees' ability to manage their schedules to meet the needs and obligations of their personal lives. Empowering hourly employees to manage shift swaps conveniently supports a culture of trust within organizations and engages the workforce.

Mobile technology provides a level of governance to the schedule management process, as what was once manual can now be fully automated. Not only can a system determine whether additional costs will be incurred with the requested shift swap, but it also can determine whether the swapped employee has the required skills for the shift. There is no gaming the system. Historically, managing this kind of process manually was a significant distraction for frontline supervisors. Now that time can be used more strategically elsewhere.

5. Managing overtime from an employee/employer perspective

It is rare in today's economy that a business has a flat demand curve. Shifting consumer demand requires companies to flex up and down on a daily basis, triggering overtime requirements. Every employee has their own set of overtime preferences, whether it is the total amount they want, when they

want it, or the types of jobs they are willing to work in an overtime scenario. Management teams struggle to match employees to fluid business needs and often have the wrong people in the wrong job at the wrong time.

Mobile technology enables instant communication to qualified employees and provides a channel through which employees can respond and accept additional shifts. This allows management teams to fill holes in demand faster and provide better customer service to the market. Without mobile, this process remains manual, with slow response times and a potentially ineffective match of employee desires to business needs. This can adversely affect engagement as employees may face increased fatigue with forced overtime or not receive the desired or customary overtime hours.



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Conclusion

While the benefits of implementing a smart MWM strategy are manifold, there are some clear areas of caution as companies prepare to venture into this high-value space. For example:

- The right work and pay rules must be in place so that the organization is not just replicating bad practices
- The parameters for allowing time off need to be objective so that the tool can automate decision making where possible
- Companies should consult with their legal counsel to determine any legal implications and what type of agreements must be signed by employees to permit use of personal mobile devices

That said, these considerations should not stop organizations from cascading the value of a smart mobile strategy across their workforce, driving governance, communication, and engagement. With forethought, leaders can quickly capture benefits worthy of the effort.

Companies fearing a loss of control by empowering their workforce will find the opposite to be true when integrating an MWM strategy. Increased governance and more granular analyses of key performance indicators can support increased communication and employee-driven, effective decision-making. When managed properly, the shift in management strategy to mobile is powerful — driving performance and engagement to achieve true workforce agility.

Sources

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