Understanding the needs of the workforce, considering available mobile options, and working with a trusted partner on an enterprise mobility project can help organizations overcome many unforeseen challenges.

Overcoming the Challenges of Mobilizing Workforces

January 2021

Written by: Carrie MacGillivray, Group Vice President and General Manager, Worldwide Telecom, Mobility, and IoT Research

Introduction

As organizations continue to mobilize their workforces, many benefits are extolled about how mobilization changes the work dynamic, enables collaboration, and improves productivity. The effort to equip workforces was accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. However, this mobilization transformation requires organizations to overcome several hurdles. This IDC Analyst Brief discusses some of the challenges organizations face on this journey, including those that will continue to propagate because of extended work-from-home requirements and social distancing protocols that will remain in place throughout 2021. This paper also provides considerations on how organizations can more effectively leverage mobile technology to drive increased business productivity, efficiency, and collaboration for their mobile workers.

AT A GLANCE

KEY STATS
According to IDC’s 2020 U.S. Enterprise Mobility Decision Maker Survey, the top deployment challenges to enterprise mobility are:

» Security (52%)
» Integration with back-end systems and applications (34.1%)
» Low workforce adoption (33.2%)
» Compliance (32.4%)
» Privacy (31.8%)

IDC’s 2020 U.S. Enterprise Mobility Decision Maker Survey asked 340 IT decision makers about the challenges they are experiencing in deploying enterprise mobility. Topping the list is security, with 52% of respondents struggling with this issue as it relates to mobilizing their workforces. However, integration with back-end systems and applications (34.1%), low adoption by workforce (33.2%), compliance issues (32.4%), and privacy concerns (31.8%) rounded out the top 5 challenges.

Three main categories have emerged around organizations’ issues with mobilization efforts: people, process, and technology.
**People**

Using a mobile device has proven to drive productivity, increase collaboration, and provide more flexibility for workers; however, as mobility deployments expand and are managed more rigorously, employees have concerns about how mobility will affect their jobs and their privacy or limit their face-to-face interaction with colleagues and customers. People challenges that organizations must overcome include:

» **Reluctance to adopt.** While some employees may have been reluctant to adopt workforce mobility tools in the past, the massive shift to work from home due to COVID-19 created a significant imperative to embrace productivity-enhancing mobile connectivity and tools. This change includes employee roles that have traditionally been static and/or office based. As workers shift to wearing multiple hats (e.g., restaurant staff, retail workers, teachers, healthcare workers), organizations can position mobility not only as a necessity for business operations but also as a tangible workplace perk that extends greater flexibility for workers to manage these broader responsibilities. The result will be better employee buy-in as well as improved employment satisfaction. Demonstrating how mobile tools can make workers more productive and efficient while reducing workplace stress can increase employees’ willingness to adopt them. Additionally, introducing clear policies and expectations that protect a work-life balance will mitigate employees’ resistance to workforce mobility programs.

» **Reduced opportunity to collaborate (i.e., brainstorming, information sharing).** After a cataclysmic 2020, there are many lessons learned about remote collaboration and teamwork, regardless of where team members reside. Enabling an organization’s workforce with mobile tools and devices will drive only more collaboration as we enter the "new normal." Also, ensuring that any hurdles to getting access to high-speed, high-bandwidth connectivity are overcome by supporting connectivity programs — possibly subsidizing broadband connectivity — will directly contribute to more employee buy-in to mobilization efforts.

» **Privacy concerns.** The power of mobile devices and the ability to connect anytime and anywhere inevitably spur concerns among employees about their own privacy and the possibility of their organization monitoring their activities. To mitigate employees’ concerns requires developing transparent policies and expectations around what data (i.e., email, corporate applications, location data) is fair game for monitoring when an employee uses their device for business purposes, regardless of whether it is a corporate-owned or employee-owned device.

Ensuring that any hurdles to getting access to high-speed, high-bandwidth connectivity are overcome by supporting connectivity programs — possibly subsidizing broadband connectivity — will directly contribute to more employee buy-in to mobilization efforts.
Process

Implementing and managing any technology require the development of processes. As mobile tools become more embedded in the workforce and their utility becomes more integral to business processes, there are several considerations for ensuring a successful deployment. These include:

» Development of training. Simply putting an app on an employee’s smartphone may not achieve its intended goal if the app is not intuitive to use or its purpose is not understood. As an organization is evaluating mobile devices and applications, it needs to understand what training materials are available and whether the organization can handle the training requirements internally. An organization must be prepared to investigate not only the technical functionality and cost associated with the mobile apps and device deployments but also whether the user experience will drive usage and, in turn, improve mobile worker productivity.

» Compliance concerns. Mobile workers move across networks and locations, exposing an organization to a wide variety of ever-changing technology, data management, financial, operational, and HR regulatory issues. Close integration between IT, HR, and legal/compliance is needed to ensure that an organization and its employees comply with any relevant regulations. Many of the same protocols, applications, and tools designed to provide cybersecurity oversight can also be used to manage compliance to meet personal and corporate data protection and privacy requirements.

» Budget priorities. Historically, addressing increased worker mobility needs have not been prioritized as critical to business operations in many industries, subsequently resulting in funding challenges. However, public health protocols for COVID-19 have had a profound impact on workplace operations, so enabling the mobile worker is a top priority for organizations. Budget is being redirected to ensure that workers have the tools to remain productive regardless of their work location. Organizations facing budget constraints now have the perfect case study to demonstrate how critical workforce mobility is to business continuity and resiliency — and how return on this investment can be achieved.

» Defining return on investment (ROI). The goal of any mobility initiative is to deliver meaningful benefit and value to the organization. It becomes increasingly important to understand how employees are going to use mobile devices and the associated ubiquitous connectivity. Setting up metrics to determine where efficiencies, productivity, employee morale, or other benefits will be realized is important to define the value of the investment. Another safeguard is ensuring that contracts with mobile operators and other vendors provide exit clauses, risk-sharing provisions, and claw-back options should the investment not deliver on its intended goals.
Technology

Another area where organizations struggle in their mobilization efforts is around the technology itself and the ways it impacts other technology investments, integration challenges, and security concerns. Technology challenges include:

» **Security concerns.** Security is ranked as the top challenge organizations struggle with when mobilizing their workforce. As more organizations provide employees with the option to work remotely using mobile devices (i.e., smartphones, tablets, laptops, mobile hotspots), connecting to noncorporate networks is commonplace. This trend provides new, potentially unsecure entry points for hackers to access the corporate network. Mobile devices pose significant security risks to the enterprise. Endpoint security risk can be mitigated by using threat detection and mobile device management (MDM) solutions to secure and manage corporate data on a mobile device. MDM tools can be deployed for both company-owned and employee-owned devices. All these solutions provide critical visibility and reporting into user activity by instituting passcode requirements, encryption, and access controls. Moreover, in the event of threat detection, MDM solutions can remotely locate, lock, and wipe devices even if the device is lost or stolen. Additionally, devices using work-from-home connectivity (in most instances through a household’s broadband connections) can be further secured through manual and automated policies that use virtual private networks (VPNs) and multifactor authentication (MFA).

» **Integration issues.** The second biggest mobilization challenge for organizations is giving workers access to corporate applications that are compatible on a mobile device. It becomes even more important to ensure that the organization is deploying mobile applications that integrate with corporate applications and systems. Working with a mobile operator or a managed mobility services vendor can ensure interoperability with existing systems; the provider can also design a deployment plan that provides built-in future proofing for mobility enhancements later.

» **Management of a remote workforce.** Increasing the mobility of a workforce introduces new challenges in managing the mobile IT assets (i.e., laptops, smartphones, tablets) deployed because they are carried outside the “four walls of the enterprise.” MDM solutions can help an organization better manage and protect mobile devices, apps, and data. Such solutions help IT staff proactively monitor and administer employee mobile devices without compromising privacy. These solutions can be deployed on corporate-owned or employee-owned devices.

» **Complexity of management and support.** Deploying mobile connectivity for employees is relatively straightforward because it means putting a mobile device in an employee’s hands, securing the device, and providing voice and data services to the device. However, organizations are looking to simplify the management of fast, secure mobile connectivity across their entire work-from-home and remote employee base. Having to manage multiple mobile operator relationships, hardware, and plans, as well as support the required configurations, poses an extreme burden to corporate IT and support operations. Consolidating these services through a single provider alleviates the stress for an organization’s IT and support staff. Discussing concerns about deployment complexity and ongoing support with a mobile carrier can help because the carrier can offer solutions that incorporate device management, corporate-use policies, and other services and tools to limit any adoption/transition pain points that exist on top of deploying the actual devices and connectivity.
Coverage concerns. With only a few exceptions, cellular coverage in the United States is ubiquitous and is a reliable, high-quality broadband connection. The deployment of 5G will only improve the wireless experience with faster speeds, lower latency, and enhanced security. Reviewing a mobile operator's 5G coverage map can help alleviate coverage concerns early in the purchasing cycle. Additionally, having a clear understanding of the geographies where mobile access is needed, along with a solid grasp of the performance needs of specific wireless use cases, will help an organization choose a mobile operator whose coverage and access options best align with its needs. For fixed locations requiring mobile service (i.e., corporate campuses, factories), an organization should discuss the additional hardware solutions needed to shore up coverage and signal strength with a mobile network provider.

Conclusion

When mobilizing a workforce, organizations need to be cognizant of the challenges they will encounter regarding people, processes, and technologies. It is not that these challenges can’t be overcome; rather, they need to be considered so that resistance, unexpected costs, or delays can be mitigated. Additionally, many benefits are achieved when workers become more "mobile." According to IDC’s 2020 U.S. Enterprise Mobility Decision Maker Survey, top benefits include improved worker productivity, better customer service, employee-perceived flexibility, speeding up the sales process, and enhanced portability within the work environment. These benefits are achieved as a result of understanding the needs of the workforce, working with a mobile provider that is invested in the deployment’s success, and planning for unexpected challenges along the way.

About the Analyst

Carrie MacGillivray, Group Vice President and General Manager, Worldwide Telecom, Mobility, and IoT Research

Carrie MacGillivray is Group Vice President and General Manager responsible for IDC’s Worldwide Telecom, Mobility, and IoT research. Carrie is responsible for leading a team of analysts who cover all elements of the telecom services and mobility markets to develop insightful research and market forecasts. Along with her team, she is responsible for assessing the supply and demand elements at play as organizations look for pervasive connectivity in their workforce, connected things, and processes.
MESSAGE FROM THE SPONSOR

T-Mobile for Business brings the Un-carrier experience to customers unwilling to settle. Leading the 5G charge with a network built from the ground up for the next wave of innovation, we have businesses of all sizes ready for the future of wireless and provide faster, more reliable connectivity for the mobile workforce. T-Mobile for Business is committed to helping you move your business forward with products and services that close the digital divide and enhance your workforce – all with the dedicated, award-winning service you deserve.

Optimize your workforce with the Workforce Mobility Index Assessment.