CISCO

A Study:

Understanding
and Managing the
Mobile Workforce

July 2007

# Contents

# Executive Summary

Is mobile working the way we will all work in the future? Is it transforming the business world, driving innovation and creating opportunities – or confusing managers, draining organisational resources and wrecking family life?

This report examines the challenges faced by mobile workers and the organisations that employ them. It draws on a wide range of sources, including a specially commissioned series of in-depth interviews with mobile workers and their managers from organisations around the world. It reveals several surprising facts about what it takes to be a mobile worker – and how organisations can maximise the value they get from the people they empower with mobility.

Today's typical mobile worker is a full-time, male manager.[i] But within two years, one quarter of the world's working population will be mobile workers. This means that organisations will have to manage a rapid transition to a style of working that supports people of all kinds, makes the best of their talents and maintains their identification with the organisation and its goals.

Successful mobile workers tend to be resilient extroverts. They are open to new experiences and highly adaptable. And, contrary to the stereotype of the harassed and disoriented road warrior, they are supremely organised and independent-minded. With the right kind of tailored support, their productivity and adaptability make them superlative operators in an era of increasing demands and constant change. But they also need help in maintaining their work-life balance, and keeping their all-important self-confidence. Organisations clearly need to equip their mobile workers with more than just technology: they also need to supply attention, recognition, empathy and a constant sense of inclusion.

## Highlights from the report

- Mobile working can enhance productivity, motivation, flexibility and staff retention.

- Technological and cultural trends support the growing adoption of mobile working.

- The key competencies required for effective mobile working are adaptability, communication, planning, organisation and relationship-building.

- The emerging psychological profile of the successful mobile worker suggests that resilience, extroversion, openness to new experiences, self-confidence and self-motivation are critical markers to consider when selecting staff.

- Mobile workers are at risk of stress, isolation and alienation from their employers.

- Managing mobile workers effectively demands high levels of trust, respect for individual autonomy, and close attention to communication styles and content.

- Organisations with mobile workers must invest in the creation and maintenance of rich relationships.

- Readiness for, and approaches to, mobile working vary according to national cultures.

# Introduction

This report was commissioned by Cisco from business psychologists Pearn Kandola in March 2007. It explores the characteristics of the successful modern mobile worker, the effects of personality on mobile working, and the psychological challenges of mobile working. The report also examines what actions managers can take to get the best from their mobile workers.

## Approach

The research was conducted in two stages. Firstly, a literature review of sources including business journals such as the Harvard Business Review and the Academy of Management Journal, and academic sources such as the Journal of Applied Psychology was conducted. This review establishes the current leading thinking on the psychology of mobile working.

The second stage of research consisted of original interviews with a range of mobile workers and their managers. Thirty-five in-depth interviews were conducted with mobile workers and managers from the Middle East and Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Russia and CIS and Western Europe.

The interviews explored the characteristics that contribute to success and failure in mobile working, how opportunities for mobile working arise, the psychological challenges faced by mobile workers and the factors that most strongly motivate mobile workers.

The interviews also explored positive and negative management behaviours, the unique attributes associated with leading a mobile workforce, and the ideal levels of communication in a mobile workforce.



## Context

The research paid particular attention to evidence that may suggest cross-cultural differences in mobile working and the impact – positive or negative – that communications technology may have on the process of managing mobile workers.

## Structure

This report combines the literature review with the results of the interviews to provide a comprehensive document. The findings are structured around the themes that arose most consistently from the literature review and interviews.

## Subjectivity

All quotations are taken directly from interviewees. The report contains information based on perceptions which, while they may or may not be accurate, represent reality for the participants who hold them.

## Confidentiality

The interviews were conducted on the basis of strict confidentiality. Names of participants have therefore been removed from the material presented here. We have also removed details of gender and roles where such information might lead to identification of the individuals concerned.

# The Emerging Profile
of Mobile Workers

## The real mobile worker

### Defining mobile work

The research literature contains a number of definitions of mobile work and associated terms. These definitions vary according to the amount of time a mobile worker spends away from the office and, according to sites, where work is performed. For the purposes of this report, this definition of **mobile worker** is used:

Mobile workers are those who work at least 10 hours per week away from home and from their main place of work, e.g. on business trips, in the field, travelling or on customers' premises, and use online computer connections when doing so.

Electronic Commerce and Telework Trends, 2000.[ii]

This definition appears to be largely stable, with few changes evident over the past ten years. Within this definition, there are five specific types of mobile worker:

- **On-site movers** are individuals who work on one site, but move around within it, e.g. security agents and IT technicians.

- **Yo-Yos** occasionally work away from a fixed location, e.g. in jobs which require business trips.

- **Pendulums** alternate between working at two fixed locations, e.g. the employer's office and a client's office or a home office.

- **Nomads** work in a number of different places and are constantly moving amongst them, e.g. a sales agent visiting many customers a day, management consultants working at different client sites and engineers.

- **Carriers** work whilst on the move, transporting goods or people, e.g. train conductors or aeroplane stewards.

Figure 1. Variety of mobile working styles

This illustrates the differences between the types of mobile worker according to their movement patterns. It suggests that Nomads and Pendulums have the most variety in their work location and will most frequently be working away from the organisational office base. This research therefore focuses primarily on the Pendulums and Nomads, as they are most likely to be dependent on using technology for carrying out their daily work.



Locations beyond the home and office

Carriers
e.g. train conductors or aeroplane stewards

Nomads
e.g. sales agents, engineers or consultants

Yo-yos
e.g. occasional business trips

Pendulums
e.g. time at home or a client's office

On-site movers
e.g. IT technicians or security agents

Employer's premises
Office or factory

Home
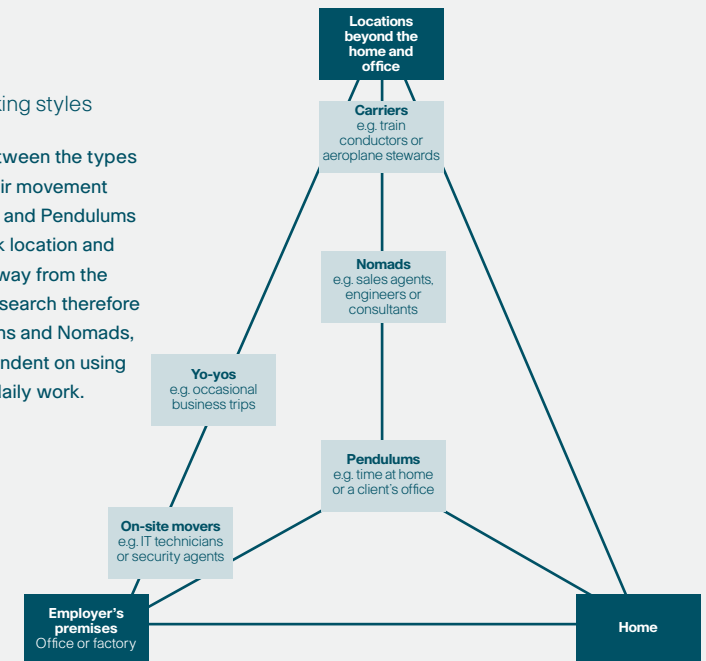
# Mobile workers: the facts

## One quarter of the global workforce will be mobile workers

Mobility within the global workforce is booming. According to predictions by analyst firm IDC,[iii] within two years there will be 878 million mobile workers worldwide and 99 million in Europe linked to their corporate headquarters by personal digital assistants, notebook PCs and mobile phones. This population represents more than a quarter of the global workforce and is a sharp increase from the 650 million global mobile worker population in 2004.

Some of the projected growth will be in traditional established markets. The US has seen a 20 per cent increase in mobile working between 2005 and 2006, and more than 70 per cent of the total US workforce is expected to be made up of mobile workers by 2009.

Non-traditional markets also demonstrate significant increases in the mobile working population. A survey of leading South African companies[iv] for example, demonstrated that nearly 20 per cent of their workers are now mobile.

According to IDC's global study of mobile working trends published this year, the largest number of mobile workers are in Asia/Pacific (excluding Japan), followed by the US and Western Europe.

### The mobility revolution can be explained by five main drivers[v]:

- Businesses (and individuals) like to communicate on the move
- Mobility increases corporate productivity and competitiveness
- Well developed broadband mobile devices, technologies and services
- Mobile technology supports personal communication
- Digital information and content are increasingly pervasive.

A Gartner 2006[vi] survey revealed that CIOs in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America estimate that corporate spending on mobile and wireless applications will grow between 10 per cent and 20 per cent per year through to 2009. The survey also showed that transportation, government, pharmaceutical, technology and professional service industries all ranked mobile workforce initiatives as a top-three spending priority.

## Mobile workers are increasing faster than home workers

IDC predict that the increase of mobile workers will be significantly greater than the increase in employees working from home, despite the widespread adoption of flexible working practices. This prediction reflects the wide range of voice, video and data services that are now available to users such as CDMA, GSM, 3G, WLAN, DSL and devices (PDAs, PCs, tablet PCs and tailored devices) which make working on the move possible.

## Mobile workers can be more productive than home workers

Where home working has failed to bring greater productivity, there are high hopes for mobile working. The FAMILIES project,[vii] for example, found that Danish workers who alternated between locations were highly productive, whereas permanent and near-permanent remote workers were less productive than office workers. The main reasons for the remote workers' poor performance was the isolation that they experienced due to reduced social and informal interaction with colleagues and insufficient access to intra-company information flows.

Workers who have voice, video and data services that support informal communication as well as broadband and wireless technology are equipped to overcome these barriers and are likely to be more productive. Moreover, those who can work on the move can be more efficient with their time, with users of basic mobility solutions within Cisco valuing their related productivity gains at over 40 minutes a day.[viii]

## Implications

- Increases in mobile working are not limited to the traditional markets of Asia, the US and Western Europe. In Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Russia and CIS, where mobile penetration exceeds fixed-line penetration, ICT spending is also increasing,[ix] creating a fertile environment for mobile working practices.

- Mobile and remote communications using broadband technologies and voice, video and data services are set to increase in line with global increases in mobile working. Businesses must ensure that they adopt processes, structures, new resources and management practices which make mobile working effective if they are to benefit from increased productivity.

# The emerging profile of a mobile worker

## Mobile worker = male, full time, professional manager

**The current population of mobile workers have the following characteristics[x]:**

- Women are 67 per cent less likely to be mobile workers than men.

- People with a degree level education are over three times as likely to be mobile than those with a basic education.

- Managerial workers are twice as likely, and professional workers are over three times as likely, to be mobile as blue-collar and white-collar workers.

- Full-time workers are almost twice as likely to be mobile workers than part-time workers – 31 per cent and 18 per cent respectively.

- Self-employed workers are almost twice as likely to be mobile than paid workers – 42 per cent and 26 per cent respectively. Self-employed workers are more likely to be mobile because they usually have to be. They tend to have multiple functions, e.g. sales, procurement, marketing and delivery.

## Public transport and the home office are the most common secondary desks

In a survey of 1,500 executives worldwide,[xi] a third of mobile workers said that they spent 40 per cent or more of their work time away from their primary work space – which for most (88 per cent) was the office desk. Nearly half said that they spent 20 per cent to 40 per cent away from their primary workspace. The most popular alternative work locations were at home, away from the desk but somewhere else within the company's site, and travelling on business, e.g. in a plane, bus or train.

A survey of European mobile workers[xii] echoed this finding, showing that over a third of mobile workers spent 17 hours or more a week in remote locations, which were usually customer or client sites and temporary locations. Almost one half spent between three and 16 hours away from their primary work place.

Organisations such as Starbucks[xiii] are increasingly recognising the needs of this emerging market of mobile workers. They have equipped over 3,000 US outlets and 400 outlets in the UK with Wi-Fi in order to provide a consistent environment for mobile workers wherever they find themselves. Organisations employing mobile workers can themselves benefit from these developments, with hotdesking options proving increasingly cost effective.

## Implications

- Organisations may be inadvertently recruiting more male mobile workers by only offering mobile working options for full-time and managerial positions.

- Organisations need to consider what they can do to make mobile working opportunities more accessible for women with childcare responsibilities. Possibilities include expanding mobile work options to part-time roles, and providing allowances and technology for workers to keep in touch with their families whilst working away from home.

- Managers who are mobile and are managing either mobile or office-based teams will need to adapt their personal styles to cope with both being mobile and managing others at the same time.

- With the increase in workers choosing to work in temporary locations such as public transport, cafés and motorway service stations, mobile workers face novel issues around handling confidentiality and managing distractions.

- With the majority of mobile workers spending significant amounts of time away from the office, employing staff who are trustworthy and self-motivated is essential, as is the provision of appropriate technology and the recruitment of experienced managers who understand the nature of the mobile working.

# The personality of a mobile worker

Javier is a manager of mobile workers, working in Buenos Aires in a large consultancy. He says that mobile working is common amongst large consultancies but not elsewhere in Argentina. When employing mobile workers he knows that if someone does not have the skills to work without supervision and is not self-disciplined and able to meet their goals then they will not be successful. In his experience, he has found that mobile workers need to be open minded, particularly as work often involves working cross-culturally which requires the ability to adapt to change quickly and be flexible. He has also found that trust plays an important part – the mobile worker needs to be both trustworthy and trusting of colleagues.

**Javier is not the individual's real name**

The dominant personality characteristics for effective mobile workers are outlined in the diagram below.

Figure 2: Major personality traits of a successful mobile worker
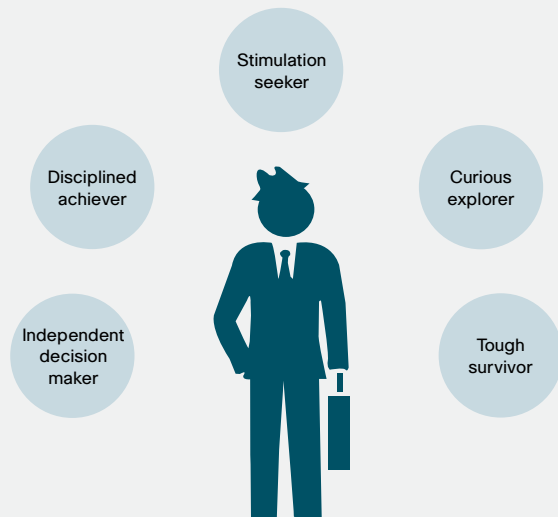


## Stimulation seeker

Mobile workers tend to be more extroverted than their office-bound colleagues. They get their energy and motivation from keeping in touch with people and going out and meeting with clients. While we might expect mobile working to appeal more to introverts because of its reduced contact with other people, the current research demonstrates that introverts are less likely to be effective in such roles as they are less likely to keep in touch with their team members. Extroverts tend to seek the company of other people and, since the support of social and work networks is important for mental health, extroverts will potentially thrive more as mobile workers than introverts.

## Tough survivor

Mobile workers need to be tough and resilient under pressure. They need to have low levels of neuroticism and high levels of emotional stability. Emotional stability refers to the ability to remain calm and relaxed (and therefore productive) even under stressful conditions. Mobile workers need a degree of resilience and to be fairly tough minded due to the potential lack of support. Their unpredictable environment also contributes to stress as they can be dealing with many unexpected events in the course of the working day.

However, interviews conducted by Pearn Kandola show that Latin American interviewees report that mobile working makes it easier to manage emotions such as anger and frustration because they are able to freely express themselves. European and African interviewees, on the other hand, viewed the challenge of dealing with feelings of loneliness and depression as a particular difficulty of the mobile role.

"The company of others is what I miss the most. I use chatting tools, telephone and email. I try to take a break for lunch and go outside and have a meal with other people, even if they are not direct contacts."
**Italian participant**

"It's important to make sure people can manage negative emotions before employing them."
**UK participant**

"It's easier to deal with negative emotions when you're mobile because you're not near the people who may make you upset."
**Brazilian participant**

## Curious Explorer

Interview data also indicates that for the majority of mobile workers, the ability to be creative and open to new ideas is key to their roles and more important than it is for office-based workers. Indeed, mobile workers tend to be attracted to such roles partly because of the unpredictable nature of the job and the variety of experience that this provides.

The mobile working environment is an unpredictable one. This means that mobile workers need to be open to new challenges and cope with the reduced security and certainty associated with their roles. They also need to be open to using new technology and to be creative in terms of problem solving.

The majority of interviewees believed that openness to new technology is essential. Norwegian interviewees, in particular, strongly believed that work could be done in the same way regardless of location, as long as they could access the internet to browse their company intranets, send and receive email and communicate by mobile phone.

## Independent decision maker

Whilst mobile workers are energised by people they also tend to maintain an independent mindset. They appreciate being trusted to work independently and usually enjoy the flexibility that comes with the territory.

They also value the co-operation of others. However, they can sometimes expect co-operation from their colleagues without necessarily giving it in return, as reciprocation can conflict with their drive to remain independent. This apparent conflict can be advantageous to mobile workers: they do not need to be part of a team to be happy, as long as they can tap into other forms of support. This independent mindset may also mean that people from more collectivist cultures such as Japan, Ecuador, Panama, Colombia and Venezuela may not be attracted to mobile working.

## Disciplined achiever

Conscientiousness and self-motivation are more important factors to the success of mobile workers than office workers. Linked to their independent desire to be in control and to own their activities, mobile workers also need to be self-motivated, self-sufficient and self-confident. In fact, mobile workers report that their second most significant challenge after work-life balance is self-motivation. This means that traditional parental or micro-management styles are unlikely to be successful with mobile workers. Mobile workers must take personal responsibility for meeting their targets.

In countries such as Italy, Mexico, India and Africa, where organisations are hierarchical and the power distance between managers and subordinates is greater, it will be more difficult for managers to allow mobile workers the autonomy they need to be successful in their roles.

### Implications

- The stereotype of the lone worker or maverick does not fit the model of a successful mobile worker.

- Candidates who are not adaptable and flexible in their work style, resilient to managing negative emotions, open to new experiences, extroverted and able to maintain relationships with colleagues are unlikely to be effective mobile workers.

### Top tips

- When recruiting mobile workers or selecting candidates for a mobile working team, adaptability, resilience and openness to experience must be rigorously assessed through interviewing or assessment centre exercises.

- Mobile workers need to be given technology that allows them to work in diverse settings as well as team support to ensure that they can cope with unexpected circumstances.

- Mobile workers are flexible, adaptable and open to new experiences, which often means that they are highly creative. Assign mobile workers to projects which involve innovation, trialling new methods and thinking of novel solutions to problems as most will be energised by this kind of work.

# Geographical and cultural implications

## The distribution of mobile workers across Europe varies greatly

There is a strong divide between northern and southern Europe in the extent to which employees are mobile. Levels of mobile working are high in northern European countries such as the Netherlands (46 per cent), Sweden (40 per cent) and Finland (45 per cent), but are considerably lower in southern European countries such as Portugal (8 per cent), Greece (21 per cent), Italy (23 per cent) and Spain (17 per cent).[xiv]

This divide can be explained in terms of the country's networked readiness and also by cultural differences.

## Networked readiness creates the climate for mobile workings

Networked readiness measures the extent to which countries are prepared to use ICT effectively. The dimensions used in this measure are the general business, regulatory and infrastructure environment, the readiness of individuals, businesses and governments and actual usage of the latest information and communication technology.

Networked Readiness Index Ratings for 2006-2007[xv] show that Denmark leads the world in networked readiness, followed by Sweden and Singapore.

## Top ten countries on the Networked Readiness Index Ratings 2006-2007

| Countries | Denmark | Sweden | Singapore | Finland | Switzerland |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rank 2007-06 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Rank 2006-05 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 9 |

| Countries | Netherlands | United States | Iceland | United Kingdom | Norway |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rank 2007-06 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Rank 2006-05 | 12 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 13 |

In the past year, South American countries such as Mexico (49), Argentina (63) and Peru (78) gained several positions and smaller Central American countries such as Jamaica (45), Costa Rica (56) and Guatamala (79) showed even more significant increases.

However, sub-Saharan African countries have shown a negative trend with all countries apart from Nigeria (88) dropping places in the rankings. Countries that were previously moving upwards such as South Africa (47), Mauritius (51) and Botswana (67) moved significantly downwards.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, Israel (18) remains the leader in the Middle East and Tunisia (35), Morocco (76) and Algeria (80) have all increased their positions. The Gulf countries, except for Kuwait, have remained stable in comparison to the previous year's figures.

The low numbers of mobile workers in Southern Europe may be partly due to low network readiness. Research conducted by Pearn Kandola also suggests that a lack of technology and resources in some southern European countries means that organisations cannot afford to provide large numbers of employees with the equipment needed to work outside of the office.

Interview data also shows that in countries such as Russia, Mexico and Saudi Arabia, a lack of remote access to company networks and the internet and a lack of equipment create a significant barrier to mobile working.

## Cultural differences influence the take-up of mobile working

### Higher numbers of mobile workers in "Feminine" cultures

Higher numbers of mobile workers in countries such as Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Brazil can also be explained by their "feminine" cultures. Countries with feminine cultures have workforces that are more balanced between male and female workers. Childcare responsibilities are typically shared between men and women, and organisations value skills such as teamwork and collaboration. The combination of these two factors has, in part, led to a much longer history of flexible work arrangements that promote family-friendly working, including mobile work options.

Countries such as Japan, Italy, Austria and Mexico can be described as having "masculine" cultures. Typically masculine characteristics such as competitiveness and assertiveness are more valued within the culture. These countries have a much shorter history of providing equal opportunities for women in the workplace and flexible work arrangements that support family-friendly working.[xvi]

## Figure 3. Countries within the Masculine-Feminine Dimension

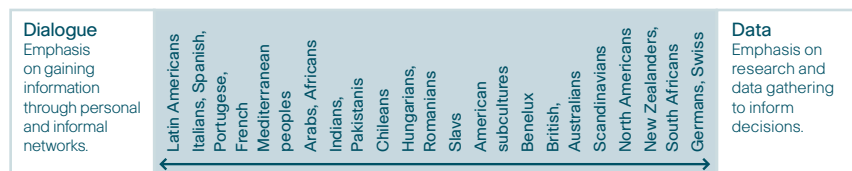| Masculinity — Emphasis on achievement, promotion, recognition and competition. | Japan · Austria · Italy · Mexico · Jamaica · UK · Germany · South Africa · United States · Australia · Hong Kong · Greece · Belgium · Arab Region · Malaysia · Brazil · Singapore · West Africa · Iran · Chile · Finland · Netherlands · Sweden | Femininity — Emphasis on interpersonal harmony and co-operation. |

## Mobile working is higher in data-oriented cultures

Southern European and Latin American countries are described as having dialogue-oriented cultures, whereas the Scandinavian, South African and North American countries are described as having **data-oriented** cultures.

Organisations in dialogue-oriented cultures tend to favour work styles that facilitate face-to-face communication. Relationships are more easily built and sustained in these kinds of organisations. Organisations in data-oriented cultures tend to emphasise productivity and efficiency and, as a result, are more likely to promote autonomous working, brief communications and the use of technology. These preferences have a close fit with the characteristics of mobile working.[xvii]

A recent survey of mobile working in the Middle East showed that 76 per cent of those questioned agreed that mobile working makes their business more competitive, and 71 per cent strongly agreed that laptop computers allow for the flexibility to balance home and work responsibilities more satisfactorily.[xviii] These views are significantly more positive than in Lebanon (52 per cent) and UAE (68 per cent). Organisations developing mobile work opportunities in this context must be sure to consider how relational networks and technology can be used to facilitate close communication.

## Figure 4. Countries within the Dialogue-Data Orientation dimension

| Dialogue — Emphasis on gaining information through personal and informal networks. | Latin Americans · Italians, Spanish, Portugese, French · Mediterranean peoples · Arabs, Africans · Indians, Pakistanis · Chileans · Hungarians, Romanians · Slavs · American subcultures · Benelux · British, Australians · Scandinavians · North Americans · New Zealanders, South Africans · Germans, Swiss | Data — Emphasis on research and data gathering to inform decisions. |

## Defining successful mobile workers cross-culturally

**Italy**
"Mobile working gives you flexibility and a better quality of life." A successful mobile worker is: good at prioritising, determined and clear in work-life boundaries.

**Hungary**
"Mobile working isn't common at all. It's easier to be mobile if you're a regional rather than national worker." A successful mobile worker is: self-disciplined, self confident and positive about change.

**Norway**
"It makes no difference to me where I am. Work is something I do." A successful mobile worker is: the same as any successful worker – independent, has excellent IT skills and is open to new work processes.

**Saudi Arabia**
"We're already in a mobile environment so it wasn't difficult to get a mobile role." A successful mobile worker is: connected, committed to the institution and communicative.

**Mexico**
"It's difficult to get web access in Mexico – it can be expensive and the company can be reluctant to pay."

A successful mobile worker is: connected and in touch.

**Brazil**
"It's mainly foreign companies that offer mobile working in Brazil, not yet traditional Brazilian companies."

A successful mobile worker is: self-disciplined and able to manage workload.

**Nigeria**
"Trying to have a good work-life balance is difficult when moving around Africa as the lack of recreational facilities and safety risks can confine you to your hotel room."

A successful mobile worker is: resilient and self-assured.

# Regional summaries

## Latin America

### Personality

- Latin American respondents believed that it is easier for mobile workers to manage negative emotions than it is for office workers. Interview data suggests that having the personal space to deal with negative incidents can be beneficial to the mobile worker. Distance from the person who may have upset you is seen as beneficial and you can be more demonstrative of your negative emotions if you are alone.

- Latin American respondents also believe that it is more important for mobile workers to be open to new experiences than it is for office workers. Mobile workers often encounter different situations and an innovative approach is seen as beneficial in these circumstances.

### Challenges

- Work-life balance is important. Mobile workers make attempts to separate their work and home lives where possible.

- Mobile workers can feel isolated and forgotten by their office-based colleagues.

- Ability to access the information they need to do their job effectively is also a concern for mobile workers.

- Some mobile workers find that spending a great deal of time with one particular client can divide their loyalties. They may begin to identify more with the client than with their own organisation.

### Management

- Communication and understanding are considered the most important aspects of managing mobile workers in Latin America. Managers need to devote more time to mobile workers than to office workers in terms of making sure their needs are understood and met. Managers need to be aware that mobile workers may not always have the same access to information as their office-based counterparts.

- Managers need to make sure that they stay in touch with their mobile workers and be aware of what they are working on. Managers must also be wary of miscommunication which is a danger when communication is not conducted in a face-to-face environment.

## CEE

### Personality

- Central and Eastern European respondents believed that it is very important for mobile workers to be open to new experiences as the nature of mobile work means that things are constantly changing.

- The vast majority of respondents felt that self-discipline is a very important part of mobile working due to the lack of direct supervision.

- Central and Eastern European respondents believed that trust and co-operation are not more important for mobile workers. They feel that both these attributes are equally important for both mobile workers and office workers.

### Challenges

- Isolation is seen as a challenge of mobile working. Self-confidence is cited as an important way of overcoming this.

- Self-discipline is also seen as a challenge for mobile workers due to the lack of supervision.

- Work-life balance is an issue for Central and Eastern European respondents. Some find it difficult to maintain family and friendship networks whilst mobile working.

## Management

▪ Central and Eastern European respondents felt that regular contact with their managers is important. Face-to-face contact is also seen as vital.

▪ It is also important that links are maintained between the mobile worker and their team. This can be through informal and more formal communication such as knowledge sharing.

# Western Europe

## Personality

▪ Western European respondents felt that it is important to be creative and open to new ideas as a mobile worker. This is due to the unpredictable nature of the work, both in terms of the environment that they work in and also the variety of work that they have to do.

▪ Mobile workers from Western Europe felt that they need to be able to deal with negative emotions more effectively than office workers. This is due to the isolating nature of mobile working, which means that less social support is available to help them deal with negative emotions. Mobile workers have some strategies for helping themselves to deal with negative emotions, these include seeking out contact with others and building informal networks.

## Challenges

▪ Work-life balance is seen as the most significant challenge for mobile workers in Western Europe. Mobile workers can find that the boundaries between work and home life can become blurred. However, the upside to this is that they have increased flexibility to complete work as and when they want rather than being constrained by traditional nine to five working.

▪ Self-motivation is the second most significant challenge. Mobile workers do not receive the same levels of formal or informal supervision as office workers and therefore are more reliant on self-motivation to meet their goals.

## Management

▪ Western European mobile workers do not want to be micro-managed. They find that excessive scrutiny increases stress and that the ideal levels of communication are contact once a week plus a face-to-face meeting once a quarter.

▪ Feeling included is very important to Western European mobile workers and it increases their motivation levels. It is important for managers to be seen to be driving team building to reduce perceptions of remoteness.

# Russia and CIS

## Personality

▪ Russian and CIS respondents indicated that it is very important to be conscientious as a mobile worker. However, they see this as an important trait for all workers, not just those who are mobile.

▪ Trust and collaboration was also seen as important. However, this is not thought to be more important for office workers but important for all workers.

▪ Respondents believed that there is no difference between the needs of mobile workers and office workers when it comes to dealing with negative emotions.

## Challenges

▪ The main challenges for Russian and CIS mobile workers are feeling isolated and effective prioritising.

## Management

▪ Russian and CIS respondents saw no difference between the management style needed for managing mobile workers and the management style needed for office workers.

▪ Communication was seen to be important but it was also noted that excessive communication is not helpful. This could turn into micro-managing which is seen as unhelpful.

# Middle East and Africa

## Personality

- Respondents from the Middle East and Africa believed that it is very important for mobile workers to be resourceful. As the mobile working environment is very unpredictable, it is seen as important to be adaptable and flexible.

- It is considered very important to be able to deal with negative emotions and the effects of stress as a mobile worker.

## Challenges

- Smaller companies, especially in Africa do not always have the resources they need to work in a mobile environment, which can be frustrating, e.g. a large voice network.

- Work life balance is seen as a major challenge for this market. There are less recreational facilities available in some areas so there are fewer opportunities to relax. The boundaries between home and work life are also blurred as people can get in contact at inappropriate times, when office workers would not be expected to be working.

## Management

- Managers need to address the issues with work-life balance and encourage their mobile workers to work sensible hours and make time for relaxation.

- Managers need to make sure that they provide the necessary technological resources to enable their mobile workers to work effectively.

## Implications

- The challenges faced by mobile workers depend on both the culture and network availability in their country of work. Those employees working in countries with limited internet connections are likely to experience higher levels of stress related to technological difficulties.

- If organisations try to introduce mobile working into countries with dialogue-oriented cultures, they must carefully consider the technology used to maximise personal and informal communication.
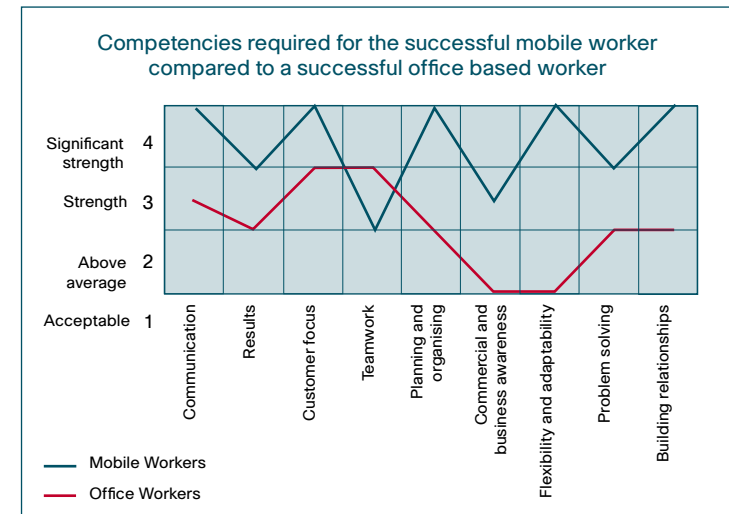
# Mobile worker competencies

**This research shows that the key competencies demonstrated by effective mobile workers are:**

- Communication
- Customer focus
- Planning and organising
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Building relationships.

In particular, to be effective, mobile workers need to demonstrate stronger planning and organising skills, flexibility and adaptability and relationship-building skills in comparison to their office-based colleagues. By contrast, they are less likely to need effective teamworking skills. This observation does not invalidate their need to work effectively with colleagues, but stems from their strong drive to work effectively on an independent basis.

Unlike personality traits which are relatively stable over time, an individual's competencies can develop and improve with experience. This means that as well as selecting employees with these key competencies, organisations can also work to give existing employees the opportunities they need to develop in the mobile working competencies.



Competencies required for the successful mobile worker compared to a successful office based worker

## The major competencies required of the mobile worker

| Competencies | Mobile workers | Office-based workers |
|---|---|---|
| Communication | Need to stay in touch with relational networks, work in multiple teams, bridge massive chasms of communication and communicate using a variety of mediums. | Are surrounded by people; communication is required but happens more naturally. |
| Achievements and results orientation | As there is less support and much less monitoring, there is a need for higher self-motivation. | Have support in the office and people to monitor and 'push' them on. |
| Customer focus | Spend a lot of time going between clients, seeking clients out and working at client premises | High, although they need to be good as they tend not to be facing customers all the time. |
| Teamwork | Take part in less collaborative work than office based workers, display less supporting and less helping out. However, teamwork skills are vital when working in multidisciplinary teams, and to avoid isolation. | Tend to work predominantly in teams and need to be highly co-operative, supportive and collaborative. |
| Planning and organising | Need to be able to plan for changing circumstances and need contingency plans in place and higher order of planning ability. | Need to plan but on a more basic level, not so far in advance. Less risk and fewer contingencies. |
| Commercial and business awareness | Need to be independent in making decisions and taking action when commercial opportunities arise. Often there is no one available to check things with. | Need to possess some commercial and business awareness, but the abundance of support means there is opportunity to get help and check decisions with others. |
| Flexibility and adaptability | Need to be able to cope with changes, work in different situations and locations. Need to be flexible in order to work with a variety of different people and communications media. | Much more likely to work in a more routine role where change does not occur daily and there are fewer problems to work around. |
| Problem solving | More likely to suffer from non-work related problems with technology and travel that they must solve independently. | There are more options for support when things go wrong, e.g. technicians to mend computers instead of having to do it themselves. |
| Building relationships | This is a key aspect of the mobile workers role and fundamental to their success. They need to build relationships with clients, colleagues and to fulfil their own personal needs. Building trust is important within this. | This is also important but likely to happen much more naturally due to proximity. |

## Adaptability and communication

The most important aspect of adaptability is communication style. Mobile workers need to be adaptable in the way they initiate and respond to communications. They need to make their messages more explicit than traditional messages. They also have to select the communication channel appropriate for each message and receiver, and be able to switch to alternative methods where the ideal route is not available. Communication issues are thoroughly explored in the previous report commissioned by Cisco entitled

The Psychology of Effective Business Communications in Geographically Dispersed Teams.[xix]

Working in public areas presents significant challenges to mobile workers, especially as they have little control over the resources, such as internet or telephone access, available to them. This requires mobile workers to be adaptable, for example by using multiple methods to communicate or by restructuring plans at short notice. One adaptation to the mobile working environment is the practice of making the communication context clear from the outset, for example by saying "I am on the train". The other person can then understand the constraints of the call, such as the need for a short call length and any restrictions on subject matter.

## Planning and organisation

Planning is of great importance for effective mobile working. Key planning tasks include priority setting, multi-tasking and time management. Mobile workers consider these skills to be essential for their role.

The uncertainty of the mobile working environment makes the ability to plan vital. Mobile workers must understand the factors that are likely to cause disruption to their work and quickly develop strategies to deal with such occurrences. There are two particular forms of planning skill which are key. Firstly, there is the basic planning level. This may include strategies such as making back-ups of important digital files required for meetings.

Secondly, the strategy of **planful opportunism** involves ensuring that they have enough resources to deal with any unexpected and short notice changes. Although plans have to be made quite quickly in the event of an unexpected disruption, mobile workers tend to spend a great deal of time planning what they would do in these types of situations. They anticipate what might occur and make back-up plans accordingly.

Confidentiality also drives mobile workers to plan effectively. Research has found that mobile workers feel that having to work in public spaces can compromise confidentiality, as it is difficult to monitor who might be looking over your shoulder or listening to your conversation.[xx]

"You need to put together a cocktail of types and styles of communication. Written communication isn't enough."
**Italian participant**

"If you don't plan ahead, you don't succeed."
**Brazilian participant**

"Good organisation [is essential]. You need to ensure that you're prepared for different types of work at different venues."
**UK participant**

# Challenges of Mobile Workers



## The health and well-being of mobile workers

### Mobile workers may be at risk of poor mental health

Figure 5 shows the factors related to mental strain which can lead to fatigue and burnout. Mental workload leads to mental strain which can have positive and/or negative consequences. When the worker has personal control, the ability to do the job, resources and support, the negative consequences are reduced. Since mobile workers frequently work alone and do not always have the support and resources they need, they are at risk of fatigue and burnout.
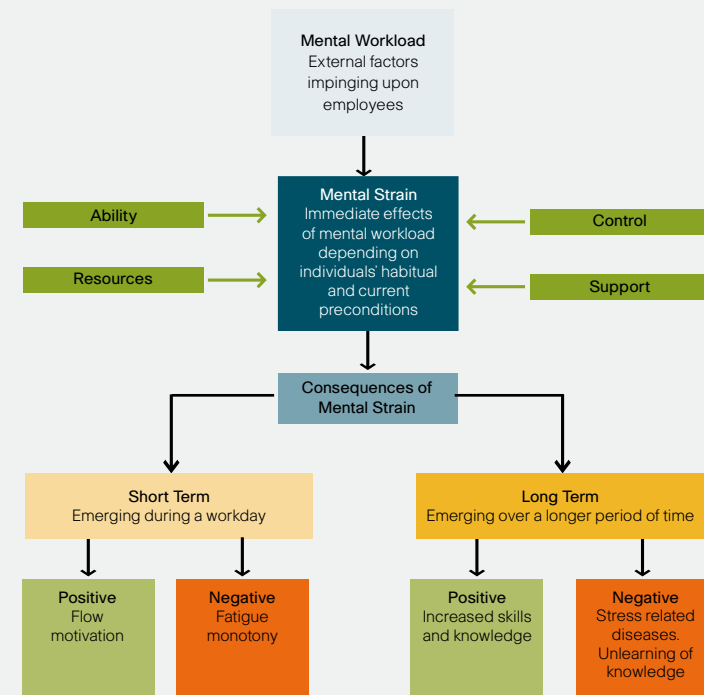
Interviews conducted by Pearn Kandola reveal that mobile workers miss having regular feedback and advice from colleagues. They find it more difficult to call on the support of colleagues when they feel mental strain, due to physical distance. In particular, when mobile workers are not able to communicate regularly with their managers, it is difficult to build trust and develop close supportive relationships.

Another source of stress for mobile workers comes from the travelling lifestyle, which makes it more difficult to eat healthily, exercise regularly and maintain regular sleep patterns whilst away from home. This can have a negative impact on people's attention and cognitive processing abilities.

"It's probably more difficult to express yourself to your manager as you don't know them well enough to do that. It's not as close a relationship [compared to office workers]"
**UK participant**

"Not having a base structure whilst you're away causes a subtle stress, it's an extra layer on top of the 'normal' stress that you'd feel if you were office-based."
**UK participant**

When office-based workers, particularly managers, do not recognise the pressures that mobile workers are under, and fail to validate their roles as being important within the organisation, this creates a further source of stress.

A final issue for mobile workers in relation to this model is control. Mobile workers reported feelings of independence, autonomy and self-determination over their working lives. However, they also reported frustrations from a lack of control over their changeable environments.

"The key to being a good mobile worker is being in an organisation where office working and mobile working has the same kudos."
**Italian participant**

Figure 5. The relationship between work and health



Adapted from Richter and Hacker (1998).

Implications

▪ Organisations need to be particularly mindful of the mental health of mobile workers, and look to provide support and resources to prevent unnecessary mental strain.

## Top tips

▪ Mobile employees should be given strategies to help them manage negative emotions in the absence of peer support, such as relaxation and positive self-talk techniques.

▪ Technology must be appropriate and reliable. IT support should also be available for times when there are technical problems or failures. Technology must also enable easy-to-use links to mobile workers' support networks in order to reduce their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

▪ Managers need to act as a bridge between office-based workers and mobile workers. Both groups need to be encouraged to communicate and helped to appreciate the unique difficulties each faces.

### Mobile workers experience isolation

"The connection-disconnection thing – feeling embedded or disconnected within the organisation, gives you a sense of being illegitimate."
**UK participant**

Research shows that being with others at work has a strong impact on positive emotions.[xxi] Positive emotions lead to increased goal-directed attention, creativity, openmindedness, work performance and motivation. It is important that mobile workers who are physically separated from their colleagues do not also perceive themselves as being emotionally distant.

The majority of interviewees reported experiencing isolation at times and commented on the negative effects, including loneliness, "missing the banter and camaraderie," losing out on knowledge sharing and feeling disconnected from the organisation.

Mobile workers do not have the natural support around them that office-based workers have and instead must make significant efforts in planning and managing their interactions with colleagues, clients and others. This means that unless mobile workers are explicit in communicating their needs for support, others are much less likely to identify and respond to those needs.

The most common methods of overcoming isolation include seeking out colleagues for conversation when feeling stressed, maintaining informal networks, communicating with a trusted colleague on a daily basis and using chat or instant messaging tools.

Implications

▪ Mobile workers can find it more difficult than office-based workers to create and maintain support networks within the organisation and, when they experience isolation, their performance may suffer in the form of reduced creativity and flexibility.

## Top Tips

▪ Mobile workers could be encouraged to share contextual information to help them to feel more connected. Examples include, visiting each other's home offices or sharing photos of places they visit regularly.

▪ Provide communication technology to enable mobile workers to stay in touch with colleagues, friends and family when they are away, which could help to reduce feelings of isolation.

Mapta is an Information Manager working in Moscow. She explained how travelling in Moscow takes a lot of time, so being able to use mobile technology whilst on the move makes her life more efficient. Although the under-penetration of wireless, broadband and voicemail causes the most problems for Mapta, she considers the struggle to maintain a work-life balance when it is possible to communicate 24-7, to be the most significant psychological issue. As a manager she knows that she should set an example to others, but finds this difficult to do because of a company expectation that she will be online all the time. She believes that it is important for organisations to take a company-wide approach that supports work-life balance and offer work plans that are productive in order to tackle this issue.
**Mapta is not the individual's real name**

### Blurred boundaries between work and home – a negative impact?

Work-life balance has become an issue that is acceptable to discuss at work. Research shows that managers are generally becoming more assertive when it comes to maintaining their work-life balance with 62 per cent believing they have a satisfactory work-life balance compared to 52 per cent four years ago.[xxii] Despite these general advances, mobile workers are not benefiting. In 2006 it was reported that mobile workers were as much as four times more likely to work whilst on annual leave than office-based workers.[xxiii] More specifically, three quarters of the Economist survey respondents[xxiv] cited blurring of personal and work time as a key negative aspect of mobile communications. The inability to balance work with social and family demands can lead to a variety of consequences including increased absenteeism, elevated stress levels and lower productivity.[xxv]

Maintaining work-life balance is the most significant psychological challenge reported by interviewees from Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, Russia and Latin America. Spending time away from home on a regular basis is a major source of work-life discord. Mobile workers often struggle to maintain relationships and friendships as regular contact is difficult to establish. It is also difficult for mobile workers to commit to hobbies or personal interests as they cannot attend classes or groups which require regular weekly attendance.

Working from a home office when not travelling removes the physical boundaries between places of work and family life. This means that the mobile worker is constantly faced with the challenge of maintaining disciplined boundaries.

### Blurred boundaries – a positive impact?

Investigations by Pearn Kandola show that many mobile workers, particularly those from the "feminine" cultures of Norway and Brazil, reported positive feelings about having the opportunity to work flexibly around the needs of their family. Flexible work patterns give them freedom – providing they carefully manage their work. They also stated that it doesn't matter to them where they do their work as long as they get the job done.

### Why the difference?

Mobile workers are likely to have a positive experience of dealing with work-life balance when:

- They feel that they can be flexible and in control of when they work
- They have a good relationship with their boss
- They have access to the appropriate technology for communications
- They are based in a feminine culture with a history of family friendly work arrangements.

### Implications

- Employers must understand the impact that travel and unpredictable mobile work can have on an individual's home life, and recognise the extra stress this can subsequently cause.
- Employees with childcare responsibilities will benefit from a management approach that encourages work-life balance and promotes flexible working approaches.
- Overworking can become a problem, especially if it leads to burnout. The results of burnout for the organisation include increased turnover of staff and decreased productivity.

### Top tips

- Organisations need to consider how technology such as videoconferencing can be made available to employees who spend time away from home so that they can communicate more fully with their families.
- Where significant time is being spent away from home, managers should seek to determine whether any intervention is possible e.g., introducing a team rota system for time spent away.
- Managers should pay attention to the whereabouts of workers and bear in mind that shifting time zones and spending prolonged periods away from home may be pressure points for some workers.
- Managers need to play their part in setting the cultural work ethic within the organisation. Challenging excessive working hours, modelling a good work-life balance and reviewing the work-life balance of team members are all important tactics.

# The Management of Mobile Workers



## Employing mobile workers

### Identify and hire the right people

In order to select new employees who will perform well in mobile roles, recruiters should assess candidates according to the profile described in the section on 'The personality of a mobile worker'.

The traits described in each profile can be assessed through competency-based interviewing. Selectors may also assess candidates on their abilities to perform simulated tasks that are typical of mobile working, such as conducting conversations on the telephone, chairing a teleconference and working in a virtual team.

When individuals are employed in particularly challenging circumstances, such as a foreign country, it is particularly important to assess candidates for the qualities of resilience and adaptability.

### Motivation

In order to hire the right people, employers must understand what motivates mobile workers within the organisation. Motivations may include the desire

to be an ambassador for the company, to build relationships with partners, or to influence and negotiate with clients. Those who show distinct motivations towards mobile working are more likely to succeed in such roles.

### Multicultural understanding

As mobile workers frequently work in cross-cultural teams, it is advisable to select individuals with prior exposure to, or a good understanding of, working in multicultural contexts. These people will possess the qualities of cultural flexibility and openness to experience. They are likely to be more appreciative of and open to cultural differences and committed to gelling with a diverse range of colleagues.

### Implications

- If selection processes fail to reflect the unique nature of mobile work, the organisation may select people who are not well-suited to the mobile role.

- If new mobile employees have not been given a realistic preview of the mobile role, then they may not be geared up to cope with it, which may lead to subsequent staff retention difficulties.

> "One of the things that you need to have is the right mentality – that's an understanding of the difficulties you'll be faced with when working in Africa and the ability to adapt."
> **Nigerian participant**

### Top tips

- The assessment process should reflect the mobile role and could include assessments which demonstrate applicant ability to communicate via different technological mediums. This will also provide candidates with important insights into mobile working, allowing them to deselect themselves if it is not to their liking.

- The assessment process for mobile workers should include an assessment of self-motivation.

- When forming cross-cultural teams, it is important to develop team members' knowledge of other cultures before they begin working with colleagues from different cultures, e.g. cultural awareness training, cultural exchange, secondments, etc.

## Managers need to equip mobile workers to be "Road Warriors"

A "Road Warrior" is a worker who has been supplied with the resources and support that they need. Mobile workers report the following basic and essential tools:



### Basic tools

- Mobile phone.

- Laptop with wireless adaptor.

- Secure remote access to company internal network.

- Easy-to-access messaging system. (for SMS, voicemail, email, instant messaging).

"Managers need to equip mobile workers before they go out, Some people call them "Road Warriors." They need a good PC with wireless connection, decent hotels, enough money to get around and be able to deliver on their job."
**Nigerian participant**

### Additional tools

- Easy-to-access audio, web and videoconferencing.

- PDA or smartphone.

- Video telephone.

- Access to presence information of colleagues.

- Single contact number for all communications devices.

Mobile workers also need to possess good IT skills or be able to access good IT support services at the time and place of need. One of the most common reasons for mobile workers being ineffective is a lack of technology skills and support.

### Implications

- When mobile workers are given the technology and equipment they need to do their job, they feel valued. When technology is supplied that helps to make life simpler, people feel that they will be more effective.

### Top tips

- Ensure all mobile workers are provided with technology that equips them for their job and helps to make their mobile world simpler.

- Provide IT training for all new mobile workers who require it, as well as ensuring appropriate IT support systems are in place with an IT team that understands mobile workers' issues should be treated as priorities.

- Provide an online forum or Intranet site where mobile workers can share IT tips, best practice and practical information such as best restaurants, best cafes with wireless hotspots, or best hotels with broadband connections.

# Managing mobile workers

## Management style

Adar is a Human Resources manager and has been working for a global organisation based in Dubai as a mobile worker for the past two years. As a manager of mobile workers he questions whether all his workers are ready for the concept of mobile working. He believes that before employees are ready to adopt the concept they need to have established a strong loyalty and bond with the organisation, which takes time.

In terms of managing workers, Adar recognises the danger of living in a 24-7 communications world and believes that managers have a responsibility to identify those working abnormal hours and find ways to make sure they have a proper balance to ensure that they do not burnout. He has come to think that good management starts with an acceptance of the concept of mobile working, from either a productivity, morale or effectiveness point of view, and has found that the only way to see its effectiveness is by being results driven.

From Adar's experience, some of the things that he has found include the importance of being intuitive enough to know when to be physically present and when not to be, to provide coaching across the team, to nurture loyalty and encourage motivation. He has also found that highlighting high achievers and demonstrating that their success did not stem from coming into the office every day is encouraging for others.

Adar is not the individual's real name

## DON'T be a micro-manager

Managers of mobile workers cannot simply rely on the skill set used to manage office-based teams because many of those traditional tools are redundant. For example, managers cannot informally monitor progress or easily track their subordinates' whereabouts and activities.

Managers frequently respond to this situation by trying to track mobile workers with diary sheets and weekly updates, which can undermine feelings of trust. Furthermore, our research found that mobile workers frequently feigned compliance by filling in diary

"Skills are different, it's the kind of thing that managers need to know up-front rather than learn by trial and error and understand from a psychological point of view."
**Italian participant**

sheets inaccurately. They also found refuge from their managers' continual scrutiny by setting their devices to divert mode, and claiming battery failure or network coverage problems.

## DO back off for better results

In the interviews conducted by Pearn Kandola, mobile workers frequently reported that excessive scrutiny resulted in increased stress, breakdown of genuine relationships and demotivation. Methods of monitoring that suit both the manager and the mobile worker are required. These methods must support the mobile worker and not cramp their freedom and creativity. Managers must avoid making mobile workers feel guilty about the flexibility within their roles by developing clear contracts and having open discussions and reviews of which methods are working and which are causing problems.

The need for a manager to be trusting is considered to be essential by the majority of mobile workers and managers from all nationalities. The majority of interviewees believed that trust and avoiding over-managing are more important for managers of mobile workers than managers of office-based workers. Mobile workers acknowledge that the need to be more trusting is difficult for managers and takes time to develop. However, trust is an essential motivator for mobile workers.

"I prioritise my own tasks. I am a very independent worker BUT my boss backs me up all the way and I have a lot of freedom in my work. For example, I have two kids so I don't want to spend all the time in the office so I sometimes leave early and work for two hours when the kids are in bed. I make my own list and make notes in the electronic work management system and put my hours in myself. There is complete trust from my manager which gives me a lot of freedom."
**Norwegian participant**

### DO focus on managing individuals as individuals

Mobile workers are a self-motivated, autonomous, dedicated and often pioneering group. This means that managers must manage their mobile workers as individuals; understand their unique motivations and how to respond to them. Mobile workers' needs can include recognition, autonomy and team sharing. Managers must also understand the level of contact that each mobile worker requires for monitoring and social contact purposes.

Management needs will differ between workers, depending upon seniority, experience and personality.

### DO take time to understand mobile workers' worlds

The work style of the "Nomad" – shared by the management consultants, engineers, IT managers and sales executives who figure in this research – is marked by a variety of work environments, projects, clients and different teams. Workers who believe their managers do not understand their unique working world feel both unsupported and sceptical about their managers' ability to give any valid performance feedback.

### Understanding

Mobile workers have mixed views about whether a good manager needs to have experienced the mobile work style in order to understand the pressures of the role. But all agreed that, regardless of the source of understanding, a manager must appreciate the stresses of the mobile role in order to provide worthwhile support.

### Recognition

Mobile workers become demotivated when they feel their managers do not recognise the amount of work that they do, or do not understand how long particular tasks take to complete. Many mobile workers also experience frustration when they are overloaded with work as a result of managers misunderstanding the extent of their availability – something which would be easier for their manager to be aware of if they were present in the office.

"Matching the leadership style to the person is important. I wouldn't micro-manage a senior person or he would think he's going backwards, which would be extremely stressful. However, a person who needs support but doesn't get it would have to fire-fight which he'd find extremely stressful."
**Saudi Arabian manager**

"I don't get valid feedback from my manager as she doesn't see what I am doing. It would be good if my manager came out to see what I was doing and showed an interest so that I feel valued, understood and supported."
**UK participant**

"We need two-way communication. I listen. We have individual performance meetings and we arrange regular times and ways to talk, listen and give feedback. It's important to not only manage the work itself but also manage feelings."
**Saudi Arabian participant**



Some mobile workers, particularly those from feminine cultures, extend this expectation of understanding to their family environment. These mobile workers expect their managers will be understanding about childcare responsibilities and facilitate working arrangements that support their family life.

### Implications

- Trust is vitally important – and must run in both directions between manager and team member. Managers must relinquish some control of mobile workers and allow their autonomy to increase, while trusting that their mobile workers will not take advantage of this position.

- Different management styles are required depending on the personalities and levels of experience that staff have, as the same style could bring stress to one person because of perceived over-management and to another through perceived under-management. Managers must discuss, agree and review appropriate communication levels on an individual basis.

- Unless managers have experience of mobile working themselves or sufficient communication with their staff, they are likely to underestimate the situational factors that contribute to the difficulties their staff tend to face and be unable to provide the support required.

"When you're a manager you need to be very trusting of your staff. You have to have upwards communication and be co-operative and use technology to keep in touch. There's more need for co-operation and trust as a mobile worker – trust gives people confidence."
**UK participant**

## Top tips

- During the hiring process, candidates should be assessed for integrity and motivation in order to reduce the likelihood of recruiting those who may misuse increased autonomy.

- In order to develop line managers' trust of team members, they should be closely involved in recruitment processes as well as long face-to-face induction sessions. This practice allows managers to get to know individuals and to gauge their skills and abilities. Once a manager is confident that an employee can carry out work effectively, there is less of a need to track that employee or micro-manage.

- Managers should enable team members to manage their own workload and emphasise deliverables rather than activities. Managers should meet regularly with mobile staff to update themselves on progress and these meetings should have an output focus.

- Mobile workers vary in the degree to which they experience challenges such as communicating via technology, managing their own emotions, maintaining self-motivation, maintaining work-life balance and managing stress. Managers need to discover where each individual's challenges lie and provide coaching and support where appropriate.

- For managers to be able to give valid feedback on performance, they must gather input from those who work with the mobile worker and clients. A 360 degree feedback approach, with space for open-ended comments, can help to ensure that feedback is accurate and relevant.

- Work to understand mobile workers' working environments by visiting their work space or, if this is not possible, by sharing photographs or communicating via videoconferencing technology.

- Managers need to think about how the family lives of their mobile employees can be supported through flexible working arrangements and the provision of appropriate technology.

# Communication

### DO remember that the impact of manager and mobile worker interactions is amplified

To be effective, managers must be aware of the impact their behaviour has on their employees or team. Although this is the case for all managers, it is particularly critical for the managers of mobile workers because interactions are likely to be less frequent.

"My first boss had regular phone conferences with all team members so he was able to share knowledge across the team. My current boss didn't change his management style from managing office-based workers. He sends information through but sends 20-30 emails a day so it's difficult to filter out what's important and what's not."
**Hungarian participant**

"My manager told me that our department was being restructured at the end of a Friday afternoon when I was about to drive home for two hours. She should have taken a trip to visit me and spend half a day thinking about how the change would affect me. Time is one of our biggest problems. They don't spend enough time managing associates properly."
**UK participant**

Even in office-based scenarios, managers find it difficult to monitor the impact they have on their teams, particularly as upward feedback from employees is uncommon. However, managers can observe reactions by paying attention to body language, or by informally monitoring employee behaviour in the office. Managers of mobile workers can only assess their impact by listening to what employees actually say. Furthermore, there is a risk that mobile workers may inaccurately interpret comments made by managers as the body language, which provides so much information on the meaning of the communication is absent. This makes it very difficult for managers to gain a clear understanding of the impact they have on their mobile team.

### DO make every communication count

The majority of mobile workers believe that open and regular communication from their manager is crucial. As mobile workers have high expectations of these interactions, and because they are less frequent than those between office-based workers and do not tend to be face-to-face, it is particularly important that each and every interaction is clear and concise, and a positive experience for the mobile worker.

#### Factors that make an interaction positive:

- Relaying factual information clearly and concisely

- Giving clear instructions

- Spending an appropriate amount of time discussing challenges and difficult issues when they arise

- Asking about personal well-being as well as tasks and projects.

### Bad news has a bigger impact

Mobile workers reported stress caused by managers who communicate bad news to them over the telephone during a short conversation, or who give negative feedback at a time when it is not possible to discuss it in depth. Those mobile workers who had experienced visits from their managers in order to deliver bad news or who had carried out appraisals using videoconferencing had been wholly positive about their experiences.

## DO remember that personal communication is the key to reducing isolation

The majority of mobile workers recognise that communication is the most significant way that managers can reduce mobile workers' perceptions of remoteness and isolation.

## Mobile workers feel that managers should communicate at least weekly by telephone

Half of mobile workers say they expect their manager to be in contact with them at least weekly. The majority expect face-to-face contact at least once a quarter.

Mobile workers also appreciate frequent email updates and chat and text messages. Some value communication with "buddies" who have been identified by the organisation or found informally by themselves. It is important for managers to explore the forms of communication which most suit each member of their teams.

More senior mobile workers, however, indicated they appreciate the freedom given to them by their managers. They described relationships where they do not rely on their managers for support, indicating they would find more frequent communication unnecessary and therefore stressful.

Although frequent communication is desirable, the data shows that it is not only frequency but quality that is important. When emails are acknowledged and conversations are acted upon, the mobile worker feels supported.

## Small talk is big talk

Mobile workers believe it is more important for managers to pay attention to finding out and remembering personal details that are important to them, such as children's names and ages, birthdays, house moves and sports interests. When work relationships are being carried out over the phone, it is important to begin with conversation that builds personal relationships.

## Inclusion leads to motivation

Many mobile workers say they appreciate being given updates on internal news, being informed about events that are going on at head office, and being kept in the loop about decisions that are being made. In addition, being asked for input on current company issues and being given a stake in decisions help mobile workers feel embedded in the organisation.

### Implications

- Owing to less frequent and less informal contact, there is a tendency for each concrete interaction to have a greater impact than it might have in a traditional setting. Managers need to be much more aware of the way they communicate, monitor their communication habits and check on how their messages are being received and interpreted.

- Communications can be misunderstood or over-interpreted when it is not possible to spend sufficient time discussing an issue. When this is the case, a lack of follow-up communication can lead to festering negative feelings.

### Top tips

- Managers need to consider the most appropriate medium for delivering each message. Allow more time for delivering messages with negative or emotional content. Arrange face-to-face communication if this can be done in a timely fashion.

- Managers should set up ground rules for resolving differences before they develop into conflicts. In mobile teams that do not have frequent face-to-face contact, introduce a "checkout" process at the end of conference calls. This is a routine at the end of meetings where members take it in turns to raise any issues that are troubling them.

- Managers must be aware that their communications with mobile staff need to be frequent, open and responsive. Communications should ideally align with a contact schedule that suits both manager and mobile worker and is open to being reviewed periodically.

- Don't restrict communication to formal issues. Informal chats and updates on what's happening generally in the office are key to mobile workers' sense of inclusion.

# Motivation

### DON'T think self-motivation is enough

Self-motivation is said to be more important for mobile workers than office-based workers by the vast majority of mobile worker interviewees across all nationalities. Many of these workers report that maintaining their self-motivation is the greatest challenge they face.

The challenge for managers is to intervene in a way that is motivating, but not interfering, and to do so in a way that suits the individual. The majority of mobile workers say that it is the job itself that motivates them. It is the manager's role to make sure they are getting the support they need to do their job as well as they hope to.

Other workers are motivated by recognition of success, increased responsibility and good team relationships. It is important to find out what each team member's motivators are.

### Implications

- Managers can play a significant role in the motivation of mobile workers by understanding their drivers and needs, and overtly recognising good work. This recognition needs to be shared actively around the team, as colleagues will not absorb casual recognition in the way they would in an office environment.

"From a management perspective we should try and help mobile workers to be motivated."
**Nigerian manager**

### Top tips

- Managers need to find out what it is that motivates different workers and aim to provide ways for these needs to be met.
- In regular two-way reviews, it is important to discuss the impact of workload, travel and other difficulties on the mobile worker's motivation.
- Publicly recognise good work.

# Team building

### DO encourage mobile team building

Isolation is the main reason that mobile workers gave for wanting to work in an office. Managers should play an active role in tackling isolation head on. They must ensure that mobile workers maintain, nurture and enhance their relationships with one another, colleagues and clients.

The data showed that when working in teams mobile workers appreciate having face-to-face initial meetings where roles and tasks are discussed. Those who worked in teams believed that regular meetings were required.

### Mobile workers say that team meetings should involve opportunities to socialise and build relationships

Many interviewees felt it was important for managers to drive team building. Common ways of doing this include encouraging communication and information sharing in team meetings, and making the most of opportunities to spend time together by organising team meals and regular social activities. Many felt that it was important to make the most of meetings and time together so that when they needed to work with colleagues and communicate over the telephone or by email, they could work more effectively.

Our investigations also show that successful managers spend time encouraging workers to develop relationships with the wider organisation. Ways of doing this include taking opportunities to work with other teams, encouraging contact with new employees and sharing informal communication across the organisation.

### Out of sight, not out of mind

Research shows that mobile workers appreciate efforts made by their managers to raise their profile within the organisation. Managers achieve this by sharing good work with senior figures and encouraging mobile workers to interact with people in senior positions. Managers also increase the visibility of their mobile staff by developing a company culture where mobile workers are viewed to be of the same status as office-based workers, so that a "them and us" mentality does not emerge.

"It can be difficult when not seeing people's faces – this is why you need to meet all your contacts face-to-face before you start mobile working."
**Hungarian participant**

"Distance can be a problem as sometimes teams are not as collaborative as you would like. As you don't see them physically, you need to stress much harder the concepts of building team spirit. In an office these things are taken for granted, it's part of everyday life, so affiliation, loyalty and intimacy are built naturally."
**Dubai manager**

"Managers of mobile workers also need to proactively find opportunities to engage with different levels in the organisation, by arranging meetings and conference calls or doing things outside working hours that a cross-section of the organisation is invited to."
**Dubai participant**

## Mobile workers' loyalties may not lie with their own company

Mobile workers who spend a significant amount of time working at a particular site, which does not belong to their organisation, e.g. a client site, may feel a weakened sense of identification with their own organisation. They may begin to identify with the client organisation more than their own, and as a result their company loyalty may be compromised.

This effect is exacerbated in organisations where the roles or work of mobile workers are not viewed as positively as office-based workers. Organisations are challenged to create a culture where mobile workers feel embedded and valued as equal to office-based workers.

### Implications

- Team meetings should not be solely task-based, but also focus on the development of relationships through the sharing of personal challenges, successes and information.

- Managers must recognise their key role in facilitating both the growth of team relationships and the development of a company culture that supports mobile working.

- There is a risk that such mobile workers will not act in the best interests of their own organisation, assign lower priority and less effort to internal work, or spend less time sharing information with their organisation.

### Top tips

- Managers must take action at the beginning of projects to support the team in developing a clear understanding of roles and tasks, organising tasks to encourage interdependency. Managers can facilitate goal and objective setting, agree methods of working and put communication strategies in place.

- Facilitation of team relationships may include actions such as arranging regular conference calls with the team and coaching on methods of communicating effectively through virtual media.

- Managers must make time for the team to socialise, whether this is face-to-face or virtually. A good balance is 80 per cent task time and 20 per cent relationship time.

- Managers need to work to raise the profile of mobile working throughout the organisation by publicising achievements and feedback about new methods of working.

- Managers should be clear about what defines good performance, specifying how good performance will be rewarded.

- Avoid making office headquarters the focus of information and power. Create communications channels where everyone has equal access to information and can share ideas, e.g. team intranets, chat forums and videoconference links to key meetings.

# Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that not only is the uptake of mobile working rapidly increasing, but it is also bringing productivity benefits to organisations as well as flexibility and motivational benefits to individuals.

The blueprint of the successful modern mobile worker has been described as an individual who is self-motivated, conscientious, resilient, extroverted, independent and has excellent communication, relationship building, planning and adaptability skills. An excellent mobile worker is also a worker with a skilled manager who is aware of the power of trust and communication, adapting their style to meet employee needs and building strong team relationships.

Mobile working does, however, come with a warning. Many workers find that work-life boundaries become blurred with the possibility of 24-7 communication. Others experience isolation when they do not receive the managerial, colleague and technological support that they need. This can lead to mental health problems.

Employers, therefore, need to provide suitable technological solutions with the capability to allow mobile workers to both remain in contact with colleagues, family and friends when they are 'on the road' as well as giving them the resources to access the information they need regardless of their location. Employers also need to educate their managers on how best to manage mobile workers.

As well as the differences in the uptake of mobile working globally due to networked readiness there are also cultural influences. Countries with more feminine and data-orientated cultures have higher numbers of mobile workers and workers in these cultures express more flexibility and less work-life balance issues.

If mobile working is to be successfully adopted within an organisation, this research highlights some key success criteria that focus mainly on four areas.

### 1  Understanding the profile of a successful mobile worker

Both managers and mobile workers need to understand the psychological make-up and skill-set of a successful mobile worker. Managers need to know how to adapt their management styles and how to react and cope with stress and work-life imbalance. It is also useful for mobile workers and potential mobile workers to be aware of where their strengths and weaknesses lie so that they can drive their own personal development along the right lines. Individuals who are working as mobile workers or considering mobile roles may benefit from looking at the fit of their personal style with a mobile work style using the Mobile Working Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

### 2  Understanding the different cultural approaches to mobile working

This is especially important for multinational companies that frequently have cross-cultural mobile teams. An awareness of different communication needs and expectations is necessary in order to manage employees successfully.

### 3  Understanding the challenges of mobile working

Challenges including maintaining self-motivation, managing work-life balance and handling negative emotion are all important, and it is crucial that managers are equipped with the skills to help employees overcome them.

### 4  Providing communication tools

Providing the right communication tools is necessary for the inclusion and trust of mobile workers. It is too simple to think that a mobile worker can just get by with a mobile phone and access to email on the move. It is important to ensure that mobile workers have equal access to other company

resources such as an intranet and videoconferencing technology. Mobile devices with the facilities of desk phones can also simplify the mobile working experience.

## Summary of best practice

### 1 Understanding the profile of a successful mobile worker

- When recruiting mobile workers or selecting candidates for a mobile working team, adaptability, resilience and openness to experience must be rigorously assessed through interviewing or assessment centre exercises.

- Organisations should invest in developing the competencies of adaptability, planning, communication and building relationships within the workforce in order to prepare existing employees for mobile working.

- When recruiting mobile workers the process should be two-way, allowing the employee to understand what the role will involve so that they can make an informed decision.

- Provide IT training for all mobile workers who require it, as well as ensuring that appropriate IT support systems are in place.

### 2 Understanding the different cultural approaches to mobile working

- Communication and understanding are considered to be an important aspect of managing mobile workers in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. Managers need to devote more time to mobile workers than to office workers in terms of making sure their needs are understood and met.

- Mobile workers in Western Europe, Russia and CIS do not want to be micro-managed. Managers need to be aware that excessive scrutiny can increase stress and over-communication is seen as not helpful.

- Work-life balance is a challenge in the Middle East and Africa. Managers should encourage mobile workers to work sensible hours and make time for relaxation.

### 3 Understanding the challenges that mobile workers face and provide the appropriate support

- Managers need to play their part in setting the cultural work ethic within the organisation. Challenging excessive working hours, modelling a good

work-life balance and reviewing the work-life balance of team members are all important tactics.

- Managers need to discover where each individual's challenges lie and provide coaching and support where appropriate.

- For managers to be able to give valid feedback on performance, they must gather input from those who work with mobile workers and clients. A 360 degree feedback approach, with space for open-ended comments, will ensure that feedback is accurate and relevant.

- Managers must be aware that their communications with mobile staff need to be frequent, open and responsive. Communications should ideally align with a contact schedule that suits both manager and mobile worker and is open to being reviewed periodically.

- Managers need to work to raise the profile of mobile working throughout the organisation by publicising achievements and feedback about new methods of working.

- Staff development needs to be highlighted. This study looks at the key competencies required, so managers should be able to design training to help develop these skills. Also, managers need to take an approach that tailors support to individual needs, focuses on coaching and is proactive in encouraging communication.

- Managers need to be aware of differences in communication needs amongst members of cross-cultural teams and structure communication schedules and resources accordingly.

### 4 Providing communication tools

- Bring mobile workers closer to the organisation by providing the same access to corporate communications resources as office-based workers. This could be as simple as giving mobile workers access to the corporate contact directory on their mobile phones or enabling them to participate in instant messaging sessions with their office-based colleagues.

- Provide communication technology to enable mobile workers to stay in touch with colleagues, friends and family when they are away. Giving mobile workers access to video communications to use with family members could help reduce any feelings of separation.

- Give mobile workers the ability to share contextual information to help them to feel more connected. Examples include sharing photos of

their homes, family members and places they visit regularly, setting up webcams in the home office and workplace.

- Provide an online forum or intranet site where mobile workers can share IT tips, best practice and practical information such as best restaurants, best cafés with wireless hotspots, or best hotels with broadband connections.

- Do not restrict communication to formal issues. Informal chats and updates on what is happening generally in the office are key to mobile workers' sense of inclusion.

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