

# Impact of mobile phone on work life



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## **Impact of mobile phone on work-life balance of field workers**

### **Abstract**

This research report is an exploratory study of impact of mobile phone on work performance, productivity and personal life of field workers. Are field workers able to take the advantage of mobile phone and related new technologies to improve their work life balance or they finding it difficult to manage their work and personal life due to use of mobile phone? This research is an attempt to understand the impact of mobile phone and related new technologies on their work life balance.

### **Introduction**

The success of western economies is much more depends upon the efficiency and output of the field workers (Drucker, 1999). According to him field workers are also called as knowledge workers. A knowledge worker mainly works away from the desk and works in technical services and spend more time with clients and dealers whereas field workers also works away from desk and deals with the customers service. Many organisations provide equipped handy mobile devices to field workers which allow them to access the various applications and chance to communicate with the office workers and clients during field work.

Work life balance is defined as creating a productive and fruitful work environment where tension between work and personal life is minimised (State service commission NZ, 2005). It means perfect combination of participation in paid work and unpaid work (personal life, social

responsibilities and family work). Work life balance is all about implementation of policies which will be helpful for workers and staff to maintain their healthy and satisfying lifestyle which will lead to improved performance and productivity of the worker.

The main purpose of this study is to understand the impact of mobile phone on work life balance of field workers. This study is designed to provide a detailed analysis of the use of mobile phone during work time and off time and its impact on work and personal life of workers. Applying work life balance in an organisation is very important to develop the productivity of workers. It is broadly considered that mobile phone and internet are distorting margins among workplace and personal life.

Some researchers believe that mobile phone is a threat to modern life, whereas others consider it as a new opportunity to maintain work life and family life (Wajcman et al., 2008). No other device has been spread as drastically among people as mobile phone, but its social and personal impact is not clearly known. This research report is based on assessing the impact of mobile phone on work life balance of field workers.

## **Mobile phones and field workers**

In the 1990s, for the first time GE and CompuCom organisations provided mobile phones and laptops to their field workers and sales representatives and made them a mobile workforce (Pepe, 1999). The main motive of these organisations of 'going mobile' was to make their field workers more productive and improve their ability to use dead time while traveling. As a result, field workers can check voice mails and can give call back in their

spare time like waiting at airport, train stations. In the past few years' mobile technology changed very dramatically. According to Jarvenpaa and Langs (2008) mobile technology is combination of communication, hardware and software handheld IT devices which includes PDA's, mobile phones and other integrated wireless devices enterprises like Blackberry. Mobile phone allows field workers for more bendable plans and gives independence to work from anywhere and anytime.

Demand of work life balance is very sizzling topic amongst the various organisations to improve the productivity of workers. In 1980's the importance and need of females and field workers is recognised by organisations like Deloitte & Touche and Merck. IBM started to change the policies like maternity leaves, EAP's (Employee Assistance Programme), home based work and child care policies to improve work life balance of female workers and field workers (Pepe, 1999).

The Economist Intelligence Unit conducted a survey in 2004 with more than 1500 field workers on mobile phone practices in field work (Belen, 2009). More than 75% field workers proposed that tools like email, text messages and voice calls help them to improve their productivity and availability on the job. They also described other benefits like faster decision making, real time information and flexibility. However flexibility on the field work means not an opportunity for the field workers to maintain their work life balance (Taylor 2003; Rood 2005).

The Economic Intelligence Unit also found some disadvantages of the mobile phone practice amongst the field workers like trouble in managing their work

home balance (Belen, 2009). According to Jarvenpaa and Langs (2008) mobile phone also brings some disadvantages to the life of field workers like “ less personal time” and incapability to isolate themselves from the work during there off time. In other research by Schlosser (2002) where he interviewed with field workers and he found common disadvantage of being mobile leads to increase in expectation of availability. Increase in expectations indirectly increases workload and responsibility on the workers. They also feel compulsory to respond to the calls from their subordinates and managers (Davis, 2002). Due to more expectation of availability and quick response to work allied problems in weekends may indirectly affect the work life balance and may increase frustration amongst the workers (Jarvenpaa, Lang, et al 2003).

## **Impact of mobile phone on work**

Lyytinen and Yoo (2002) published the research on work environment for organisations and individuals in which they proposed the impact of mobile phone and other wireless technology must have to be calculated by considering performance of team and output of the workers. There are many theories are available to measure the adoption of new technology and its impact on individuals. On the basis of TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) theory Breu, Hemingway and Ashurst (2005) conducted a research and they proposed some important aspect of impact of mobile phones on field workers.

1. Improved job performance: Most of the interviewee’s explained that use of mobile phone helped them for quick communication process and

better decision making while working on field which helped them to boost their job performance.

2. Improved productivity: According to the 45% field workers mobile phone with the multiple function and internet access improved their productivity. Instead of waiting for client or customer they can use their dead time for other task like checking and sending emails, new updates and cold calling. They also described the benefit of real time information due to use of mobile phone as they can attained meeting with the latest and updated data and information.
3. Faster task accomplishment: Use of mobile phone and new technological devices enables field workers to complete their task faster and in effective way. Rather than going back to the office or desk to complete task field workers get independence of physical location to complete the work (Breu, Hemingway and Ashurst, 2005).
4. Greater work control: As per the field workers who spend more time with customers and clients agreed that mobile phone with internet gave them greater work control.
5. Improved consulting process: As per the Breu, Hemingway and Ashurst, (2005) interviewees gave the reason that why they can meet more customers face to face on work fields, because these devices like mobile phone with internet facility enable them more responsive to the customer's queries and communications.
6. Improved collaboration: field workers agreed that mobile phone reduced their communication gap with other team mates and improved their collaboration on consulting team. Other field workers

propose that collaboration improved due to easy way of transferring private electronic files and personal work related documents.

7. Make job easier: Not every fieldworker agreed on this statement that use of mobile phone make their job easier. Some found it easier to complete work but difficult to maintain their personal and family life and some found it as easy to maintain personal life but tough in field work.

Recently, AMTA (Australian Mobile Telecommunication Association) published a survey in 2008 which was conducted within 2189 individuals in Australia on impact of mobile phone work life balance of Australian workers (Wajcman et al., 2007). They found some interesting things about impact of mobile phone on Australian workers. The key points are as follows,

- 20% field worker said that it's impossible for them to work without mobile phone.
- 75% field workers feels secure on field job with mobile phone.
- Two third of the male field worker switch off their mobile phone on weekdays to avoid being disturbed by office work.
- More than half interviewee's agreed that use of mobile phone increased their productivity.

## **Impact of mobile phone on field workers**

1. Personal and family life: According to Breu, Hemingway and Ashurst (2005) half of the field workers agreed that use of mobile phones helps them to maintain their personal and family life. Mobile phone allowed them to become in touch with family during field work and they can easily communicate with the family members in emergency and

normal cases. In contrast some field workers described that use of mobile phone impact negatively on their work life balance. Some workers found very difficult to balance their family and personal life with work life due to availability of mobile phone.

2. Mental stress: Due to increase in expectation of availability and instant response to the work related issues during personal time increases the mental stress on field workers which finally result in work life imbalance. 34% field workers said that it is very difficult to isolate them with work on off days due to the mobile phone which sometime increases their mental stress (Breu, Hemingway and Ashurst, 2005).
3. Frustration: According to the Economic Intelligence Unit survey, receiving calls on weekend and off time make workers frustrate mainly in case of women field workers (Belen, 2009). The author also proposed that women field workers are very specific about their work time and family time.
4. Commitment and loyalty: State service commission NZ (2005) published a report on work life balance where it states that organisation provides various facilities to their workers like mobile phone, internet facility, increment, holiday pays. This kind of rewards and facilities increases the feeling of commitment in workers and it forced workers to respond quickly and even on off time. According to report workers also feel more pressurised due to their commitment and loyalty to the organisation.



AMTA (Australian Mobile Telecommunication Association) found some interesting things about impact of mobile phone on Australian workers (Wajcman et al., 2007). The key finding of survey is as follows,

- 40% workers admitted that mobile increase their work load and 55% respond with neutral effect.
- More than 50% field workers respond that mobile phone helps their work life balance and very few workers said that negative impact of mobile phone on work life balance.
- As per the survey 60% male field workers has separate mobile phone for work and private use.
- 58% female field workers said that work calls on weekdays and off time disturbed them and increase their mental stress.

As per the figure 1 and 2, Wajcman et al. (2007) described that around 20% male field workers found job difficult without having mobile phone. 30% male field workers found job very easy without mobile phone and even this percentage increases in female field workers up to 50%. Very few field workers said that their work life balance decrease a lot due to mobile phone. In contrast more than 50% workers said that there is no change in their work life balance. Around 40% field workers agreed that use of mobile phone somewhat increases their work life balance.

## **Mobile phone and work family issues**

### **1) Security of the children**

Most of the workers care about their children's while work especially in case of female field workers. According to State service commission NZ (2005) survey 72% workers purchased mobile phone for their children to monitor

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their action. Mobile phone makes field workers more relax about children's security on field because they know they can contact their children anytime anywhere (Breu, Hemingway and Ashurst, 2005).

## **2) In consistently separated couple relationship**

Field workers who lived consistently away from wife or family regarding job, mobile phone plays pivotal role in maintaining their relationship. In many cases where field workers are physically apart from their partner but with the help of mobile phone they can stay closer. According to the AMTA (Australian Mobile Telecommunication Association) survey 80% female field workers agreed that mobile phone plays very important role in their relationship when they are apart from each other (Wajcman et al., 2007).

## **3) Family household coordination**

Lowry & Moskos (2005) proposed that mobile phone and new technology can bring better coordination in work and family of the field workers. As per AMTA survey all workers gave some important points on question that, how mobile phone assist family and household coordination? In reply workers said, get-together of family members, picnic planning, sending good and gifts, general information like when they will reach at home are some important things they can manage through mobile phone when they are on work and they can manage their family household coordination (Wajcman et al., 2007).

## **Tethering effect of mobile phone on work life balance**

### **1) Negative effect**

National Institute of Labour Studies, Australia published a research on tethering effect of mobile phone on work life balance. In this study they interviewed various field workers depending upon occupation like electrician, estate agents, trade persons and ITC workers (Lowry & Moskos, 2005). In this research all field workers explained their personal experience stating that how mobile phone impact their work life balance. Most of the ITC workers and estate agents said that their personal time were occupied due to mobile phone. Estate agents shared their personal experience and said that mobile phone interrupted his home life. For example, their mobile phone rung at midnight or early in the morning regarding property queries. One estate agent admitted that his wife hates his mobile phone when it rings in the night. He also proposed that his small children's also get disturbed due to mobile phone in the night (Lowry & Moskos, 2005).

More than six electricians said that they have work based mobile phones and they can be fined on ignoring the work related calls. These penalties may include lost wages, and warnings from managers (Lowry & Moskos, 2005).

According to National Institute of Labour Studies not only field workers suffered from work related calls in night but their partners also get disturbed. One electrician said that he gets two or three work related calls in the night and he is tolerated to these calls. But his partner felt hard to sleep again after getting disturbed and lack of sleep affecting his job performance (Lowry & Moskos, 2005). For all of the surveyed occupational groups mobile phone

brings some emotional problems into their personal life. However no one agreed that mobile phone reduces their job performance and productivity.

## **2) Positive effect**

National Institute of Labour Studies also found some positive effects of mobile phone according to field workers. Some ITC workers described that they were benefited by mobile phone (Lowry & Moskos, 2005). Some positive effects described in survey are as follows,

- Field workers can contact with their family even if they are on work.
- Some electrician said they can hide behind mobile phone like they can pretend that they are busy in meeting or they are driving a car.
- According to estate agent they can contact with many clients on mobile phone when it is impossible to meet them personally.
- All interviewee's agreed that they can easily contact with their subordinates and managers while field work.