The impact of the mobile phone on work life balance

The Impact of the Mobile Phone on Work/Life Balance 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Background The AMTA/ARC study is an exciting collaboration to provide an evidence-based understanding of the social impact of the mobile phone on work/life balance. It is the first study that is specifically designed to provide nationally representative data on how mobile phones have become integrated into the everyday lives of Australians. This innovative project employs a purpose-designed questionnaire, a phone log and a time-diary.

Together, this unique combination produces direct information about how people use their mobiles to manage and coordinate their lives. This preliminary report presents data collected March to May 2007 from our sample of 1358 individuals from 845 on-line households. When the data from the off-line household sample are added in the coming months, the total sample will be more than 1, 000 households. Key Findings • The lowest mobile phone use is found among those aged 60 years or more, but the mobile phone is so universally diffused that use is unaffected by income levels and occupation. The majority of users are subscribers and prepaid use is concentrated among those under 25 years. Around a quarter of managers and associate professionals have their bills paid by their employer, whereas in other occupations around 10% or less benefit from employer support. • Cost is by far the major reason given for choice of handset, while there is no single factor which explains the choice of service provider. • ' Convenience' of the mobile phone is the reason most frequently given for choosing to talk on a mobile rather than a landline. Cost' is a major reason for preferring to talk using a landline rather than a mobile. • There is a very high awareness of 3G (86% of males and 75% of females). But 61% of respondents indicate

that they do not access internet services via their mobile phone. The lag in take-up is a topic for further research. • Logs of actual calls made and SMS texts sent show that the predominant use of the mobile is for contacting family and friends, with work-related reasons far less important. Men make more calls for business purposes, while women use the mobile for social connectivity. Typically mobile phone users call relatively infrequently, with 28% making calls less than once a day. • Calls cluster by time of day, according to purpose. Most work-related calls are made in standard working hours. The rate of calls to family and friends are low in working hours but high at the end of school hours and in the evening. • Perceived reasons for using a mobile are talk and messages. Other uses, including data transmission, are at this point minor. • Asynchronous communication practices, such as turning off your mobile to avoid being disturbed, are common techniques.

Ninety per cent of the respondents ' normally' switch off their phone in the cinema, two- thirds switch off their phone at work meetings, and almost half turn off their phones in restaurants. Women are more reluctant than men to take their mobile phone on holiday ' to talk to work colleagues'. • A third of workers say that it would be difficult to do their job properly without their mobile. This is particularly the case for men. • Half of employed respondents think that mobiles increase their workload, for 42% the effect is neutral, and a few (9%) think mobiles reduce their workload.

This is offset by productivity gains. Over half (55%) of employed respondents indicate that job-related mobile calls increase their productivity. • Over two-thirds of the respondents report that the mobile phone is an important

medium for maintaining kinship ties, especially for women. The mobile is a device well suited to maintaining intimate relationships at a geographical distance. • Conveying information about ' timing of the arrival at home' and ' arranging to meet with other family members' are the major uses of the mobile phone for micro-coordination.

Among parents, ' arranging to deliver goods or children' and ' finding out where children are' is rated as important. • More than half of the employed respondents believe that the mobile helps them to balance their family and working lives. Very few report that the mobile phone has a negative impact on their work-life balance. • The mobile phone is an indispensable part of the everyday life of Australians. More than 90% report that their lives could not ' proceed as normal' if they were suddenly without their mobile phone. • Carrying a mobile phone makes most people (75%) feel more secure. When asked about the impact of the mobile phone on their sense of time pressure, 39% report that the mobile reduces time pressure, while 33% report it increases pressure. • Most people (59%) find that the mobile phone does not affect their level of stress. Of those who report that it has some impact, respondents are three times more likely to say that it reduces their stress level. • Contrary to fears about the intrusive character of the mobile phone on leisure, few respondents (4%) report that the mobile reduces the quality of their leisure time. 2. RESEARCH AIMS AND BACKGROUND

No other device has been diffused as rapidly as the mobile phone, but its social impact is unknown. This project aims to provide a sound empirical research base for assessing the impact of the mobile phone on work/life balance. In particular, it examines the ways in which the mobile phone

affords perpetual social contact. The project is based on collaboration between university-based researchers and the peak organization of mobile phone service providers, the Australian Mobile Telecommunication Association (AMTA), under the umbrella of the Australian Research Council Linkage grant scheme.

AMTA's mission is ' to promote an environmentally, socially and economically responsible and successful mobile telecommunications industry in Australia'. The collaboration follows a workshop held in May 2004, jointly sponsored by AMTA and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. The invention and diffusion of information and communication technologies are said to be revolutionising work and family life. Wireless mobile devices increase the scope for work and family flexibility by enabling the micro-coordination of time, tasks, and schedules.

This is particularly significant as people are now working at times and places outside of the traditional workday and place. It is widely believed that technologies like the mobile phone and e-mail are blurring boundaries between personal life and the workplace. While for some commentators these developments represent a threat to the quality of modern life, for others they represent new opportunities for integrating the spheres of work and family. To date, social research on the mobile phone has been limited and has yet to be consolidated into a body of evidence about its social impact.

Worldwide there are now over 1. 7 billion mobile phones, more even than fixed line phones. The overseas research focus up to now, however, has largely been on the internet and little research of any kind into digital

technologies has been done in Australia. This project will, for the first time in Australia, empirically examine the social impact of mobile technologies at work and at home. It will therefore fill a significant gap in the evidence base for the development of industry and social policy.

A more informed understanding of the conditions that have been conducive to this highly successful industry depends upon high quality research on how Australians benefit from owning mobile technologies. The research findings have the potential to influence the type and range of wireless services that will best serve Australians in the future. The effects of technological innovation are often less than straightforward. If there was ever a clear illustration of the inherent unpredictability of technological change, it is the history of the fixed line telephone.

The early phone, like the mobile, was designed for business and professional purposes. The major use of the landline by women as a tool for maintaining social ties was unanticipated, as was the heavy use of mobiles by adolescents exchanging SMS text as well audio messages. In both cases, it was consumers rather than designers who discovered what was to become the typical pattern of use. Like other technologies, the mobile phone is flexible and contains contradictory possibilities. The future impact of the mobile phone on how Australians balance their work and home lives is thus unknown and ripe for empirical investigation.

The team of researchers brought together for this project combine leading-edge expertise in the social aspects of information and communication technologies, the study of time-use, and communications policy. This report is based on a preliminary analysis of the first data to become available. The

data are from the on-line component of the Phase 1 survey. It has been available to us for only a few weeks. The preliminary analysis undertaken here is to provide all the project partners with some indicative data at the earliest possible opportunity.

In the coming month data from the off-line component of this survey will be integrated into a combined dataset representative of all Australian households. In the meantime, the results reported here should be treated as provisional, and may be subject to changes as more data come in. Planning for Phase 2 of the study has already begun, and as new data becomes available there will be further communications of relevant findings. After explaining the methods used in the survey and assessing its representativeness, the report proceeds with a preliminary analysis of a number of relevant topics.

We believe that our project will provide, for the first time, hard data on mobile phone use in the Australian context that will be of interest both to the industry and to those studying the social impact of technological innovation. It begins with an examination of the pattern of, and influences on ownership and service use, the choice of modality of communication, awareness of 3G capabilities, and take-up of 3G services. The report continues by presenting some preliminary analysis of the unique data on actual phone use, retrieved from respondents' own handsets.

In the next section, we present an analysis of respondents' perceptions of their patterns of mobile phone use and preliminary data on the importance of mobile phones in the workplace and for managing their personal lives (including work/family balance). Finally, we explored how respondents feel

about the relative balance of the social costs and benefits of mobile phone technology. 3. RESEARCH METHODS The research project has two phases: Phase 1 – A sample survey of all Australian adults living in private dwellings. Phase 2 – A study of the use of mobiles in work settings. This report deals with the first round of analysis of Phase 1 data. . 1 Survey design and sample Seventy-five per cent of the Phase 1 sample was recruited from the ' Your Voice' online panel maintained by ACNielsen. This panel is recruited using off-line methods (gathering respondents from other face-to-face and telephone surveys conducted by the ACNielsen). The characteristics of the panel match those of the total population which is on-line. The latest ABS data indicates that in 2005-06, 60% of Australian households had home internet access, but broadband is fast increasing and the current proportion of Australian households on-line is probably closer to 75%.

The remaining 25% of the sample were recruited by telephone. The on-line sample, the only information to hand as yet, was collected from March to May 2007. It comprises of all available individuals in households aged 15 years and older. Panellists (and additional household members) were invited via email to complete the survey on-line. Households were compensated for their time with financial incentives. Households completing the survey on-line were given a period of one week to complete the survey. It is difficult to calculate conventional response rates for internet surveys.

Of the 3, 469 households contacted by email, 19% of households started the survey but failed to complete it while 51% completed the survey. This gave a total sample of 1358 individuals from 845 households. The survey consists of three components - a questionnaire, a phone log and a light time diary. The

questionnaire asked respondents about the following areas: ownership and use of mobile phones; the perceived impact of mobile phone use on work and life balance (including measures of the quality of life); perceived effects on work and work/family spillover; effects on social support networks; and the phone's role in coordination and control.

The mobile phone log asked respondents to give details about their ten most recent phone calls and text messages, both those that they made and those they received. Information was collected on whom the call/text message was to or from (for example, spouse, work colleague, service provider), the gender of the caller, and the date and time of the call. The third component of the survey was a 24 hour light time diary, consisting of a grid format with a list of 30 predetermined activities and a range of context indicators in the rows, and time, divided into 15 minute intervals, in the columns.

Activities were grouped under the headings: personal care, eating, housework, work for paid job, education, voluntary work, care for others, leisure and travel. Context indicators were used to describe where the person was (home, main place of work, other indoors, outdoors), who they were with (alone, spouse, other adult, child) and whether they used a piece of technological equipment (landline, mobile phone, email, internet, Blackberry). For each 15 minute interval, respondents could choose up to three activities.

The diary covered a 24 hour period beginning at 4am. Respondents chose the day that the diary was to be completed. 3. 2 Profile of the internet-connected households 3. 2. 1 Representativeness of on-line sample In this section the character of the on-line sample is described and compared to the

best available population benchmarks. Table 1 shows that the on-line sample underrepresents older people, however this bias will be corrected when the off-line component of Phase 1 is available.