

Segmenting Today's Employees Bob Morison – July 2012

The consumerization of IT has thrown a monkey wrench into IT's conventional approaches to segmenting employees for information technology use:

- There used to be a big distinction between “road warriors” and more office-bound employees. Warriors got the powerful portable devices. But now we see more people working away from company locations, and the smartphone or tablet is often the device of choice for employees anywhere, including in the office.
- There was a distinction between managers or executives and other employees. Executives got fancier equipment and extra support. Today, however, the low cost of consumer devices is an equalizer. Senior executives and other key contributors may get special attention, applications, and support, but employees of all ranks benefit from using high-performance, low-cost mobile devices.
- Even the category of field workers needing specialized and “ruggedized” equipment is losing relevance. Companies are replacing expensive “ruggedized” laptops and phones for with regular smartphones and tablets that can be inexpensively replaced as needed.

Meantime, more and more employees want to use their preferred personal devices on the job, and a majority of major corporations in the U.S. now have “bring your own device” (BYOD) permissions or programs for at least some employees.

With the old distinctions evaporating, the variety of devices proliferating, and employee self-service becoming more the norm, is segmentation itself obsolete? Not quite. We see both opportunity and necessity to concentrate on the segmentations that matter most – by the nature of the work and the ability of the employee.

Segmentation by role and work remains essential in order to control access by the right employees to the right applications and data. If this is based on robust employee identity management (privileges are known) and asset virtualization (access rules are embedded), then the company can be much more precise in controlling access regardless of device.

We suggest that companies also become more granular regarding the software “kits” recommended to employees or downloaded to their devices. For example, in our recent research on *Applications and Implications of Cloud-Enabled Mobility*, we offered a starter segmentation of workers based on patterns of usage:

- **Analytical knowledge workers** generate, use, and communicate information. They use their devices largely for personal and professional

productivity and to gain access to information and expertise. Portals, search capabilities, and social networks are all essential to them.

- **Social knowledge workers**, such as sales people and managers, spend more time working with and influencing others – “reading” people as well information. They use their devices largely for personal productivity and to communicate and coordinate with others. Ease of use – of both devices and productivity tools – is key to their productivity.
- **Structured task workers**, such as service technicians and customer support representatives, solve problems using a combination of proven templates and their own ingenuity. Field technicians may rely on their devices for a variety of uses: communicating with customers and dispatchers, looking up product specs or consulting with more colleagues, scheduling and recording their tasks, and using their devices as sensors or for direct diagnostics of equipment. Here the key to success is technology’s fit with workflow.
- **Repetitive task workers**, such as on an assembly line, perform closely specified tasks repeatedly. Their levels and variety of mobile usage are the lowest, typically focused on coordination with co-workers.

All these worker segments may have similar smartphones in their pockets or on their belts, but each benefits from a different set of starter software and introduction to its effective use.

Segmenting employees on the basis of their technological aptitude is essential today, as more and more technologically adept employees enter the workforce, but the overall range of employee aptitude remains wide. As much as IT might like to get out of the user helpdesk business, that’s not feasible until all employees are reasonably self-sufficient. So measure employees’ ability, certify those who are adept, and give them privileges and responsibilities accordingly. For example, the BYOD employee should be willing and able to self-serve, in compliance with corporate policies, and knowledgeable about device management and asset protection. Freedom of choice belongs to the technologically self-sufficient.

As much as you may encourage and incent self-sufficiency, some employees will not be interested in or ready for self-service and BYOD. For them, there should still be a simple and standard company-issued technology kit. Nobody, however, should be exempt from using the tools that go with the job – email, instant messaging, corporate directory, whatever the basics may be. Given the central role of IT in business communication and corporate coordination, we see no excuse for refusing to use the common toolkit or failing to maintain basic proficiency. That’s a disservice to the business and to one’s colleagues. There’s no segment for technological luddites.