Smarter Working Britain:

How to overcome the connectivity deficit and enable employees to be more productive

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The UK:
getting back to growth

The UK economy is on course for its strongest economic growth in years[1]. But significant challenges still remain and growth and efficiency sit at the top of boardroom agendas across the UK.

While increased business confidence is expected to create new jobs, workforce scarcity and skills shortages will have an impact on our future economic growth. The challenges are exacerbated by reports showing that in recent years workforce productivity has declined.

Had productivity growth continued at the rate seen prior to the financial crisis, then average output per hour worked would be more than 20% higher than it is today.

To address this slump in productivity, we need to embrace new working practices and start to work smarter. At O_2, we passionately believe that better technology for the UK workforce could be part of the answer. To test this belief, we commissioned a report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) to look into the impact a more 'Connected Britain' would have on the economy.

Smarter Working Britain

Historically, the adoption of new technology has played a significant role in unlocking workforce productivity. This was particularly evident between 2000 and 2012, when office-based workers achieved a productivity increase of around 35%, thanks to the adoption of Information and Communications Technology (ICT)[2].

Cebr's new study, Smarter Working Britain, set out to understand what could be achieved in the coming years if organisations were to take full advantage of existing technology.

The research confirms that the UK is missing out on additional growth worth £30 billion due to a connectivity deficit in Britain's biggest businesses and the public sector.

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1. Sources: International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the National Institute of Social and Economic Research (NIESR).

2. Source: O2/Cebr Individual Productivity Index – how ICT drives the UK office economy (October 2013)

Work is no longer a place you go

New technology is already changing the way we work. It's enabling people to stay connected and 'work' remotely – from home, from a customer or partner location, or even from a coffee shop or an airport lounge.

However, we are seeing varying levels of integration of this new technology and there is a lack of consistency in what the ability to work remotely really means. At the basic level, it may simply mean giving people access to email when they're out of the office. At its most evolved, remote working can mean allowing full connectivity to core business systems, enabling people to complete their work without the need to return to base.

Smarter Working Britain highlights wide variations in connectivity:

• Home workers now enjoy much the same access to business information and communication tools as they have in the office – only 8% lower access on average across tools.

• When workers move away from office and home environments, that access to information and systems suddenly becomes inhibited – an average of 22% lower access across all tools.

• And when looking at more sophisticated information and communications tools, people are only half as well connected outside of the office and home environments.

• 80% of organisations say staff are still without full remote access to key business systems that allow them to work effectively away from the office.

Secure, real-time access to business systems allows employees who are working away from their traditional workplaces to have the same office experience, wherever they are. They may be nurses or social workers working in the community, engineers or architects on construction sites, or sales people on the road. The right kind of connectivity means they have less need to go back to the office to upload, download or re-key information, making meetings and appointments much more effective.

The Cebr study states that better connectivity from remote locations would reduce the need for follow-up meetings, unlocking annual productivity gains worth £9.3 billion. An additional £8.8 billion could be realised by allowing tasks to be completed more efficiently, through real-time access to data from remote locations.

Accelerated growth through improved connectivity

Getting UK plc fit for growth

We believe that the UK's future growth can be accelerated through the wider adoption of three main technologies to improve workforce productivity.

• Collaboration tools to improve real-time communication and enhance decision-making.
• The wider adoption of business video.
• The implementation of mobile apps to mobilise business processes.

These three technologies, underpinned by the right combination of device, connectivity, security and management, will help to plug the connectivity deficit and deliver on the opportunity highlighted in Smarter Working Britain.

Healthcare: iPads at the point of care

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust provides the widest range of mental health and substance misuse services in the UK. They wanted to improve care while managing financial challenges. The underlying challenge was to reduce the number of operational sites from over 100 to fewer than 70, while maintaining high standards of service to patients. Using managed iPads, clinicians and care providers can have complete access to all the electronic records they need, as part of a mobile work solution. They can now make the most informed decisions in the best interest of individual patients, at the point of care.

Working smarter

Improving collaboration

To be effective, workers need to interact frequently with colleagues and customers, and must be able to access data (not just email) regardless of location or device. New collaboration tools can tie in real-time presence information with instant messaging, video conferencing and voice communication. They can also be integrated with email and other back-office applications.

Bringing teams together with video

Video collaboration brings people face-to-face whatever the distance. There's no comms delay, which drives productivity and more informed decision-making. Meetings can happen when they're needed. Fewer people have to travel, saving them time and expense. And energy bills come down, supporting the green agenda. Organisations can now host meetings, run training programmes and can even get an expert virtually on-site, just by making a video call.

Better processes with business apps

Corporate applications are the backbone of the workplace, but their productive power often does not extend beyond the traditional office environment. Giving mobile apps automatic connection to the back office can make significant improvements to business processes, helping remote workers to increase productivity and manage their work while out of the office, with secure real-time collaboration.

Rapid ROI

Investment in these technologies is rapidly paid back in the form of savings in hardware, software and maintenance costs, as well as the reduced cost of supporting separate communication tools, such as phone lines and third-party conferencing solutions. And there are also big savings in business travel costs and a smaller carbon footprint.

4G: video collaboration

An on-site contractor has a query about a building's specification and contacts the structural engineer. With a ruggedised 4G smartphone or tablet, the contractor can create an HD video walk-through and send it to the engineer. This kind of video collaboration allows engineers to make quick site assessments without leaving their desks, and manage and address more site queries in a day. They can remotely annotate, amend and swap large CAD files. Both the building contractor and the structural engineer can work more efficiently, reducing project delays and risks.

Smarter working:
a holistic approach

Despite the obvious advantages of implementing these key technologies, Smarter Working Britain highlights the fact that organisations are still facing a number of significant barriers to their adoption. Costs are still seen as an obstruction, but security concerns were identified as the primary obstacle, with over 50% of businesses citing this as a blocker.

But these concerns need no longer be seen as barriers. In practice, organisations that have taken a holistic view of how to connect their workforce, through the adoption of Managed Mobility (MM) approach, are realising substantial benefits, such as improvements in collaboration and communication.

MM combines four key areas:

• Selection of the appropriate mix of devices and operating systems.

• Implementing a platform for management and security.

• Implementing suitable connectivity for employees across locations, whether public or corporately-owned networks, fixed or mobile.

• Development, deployment and management of applications to provide access to business processes.

Compliance and data protection concerns can be mitigated by implementing sensible policies and procedures, controlled through a robust Mobile Device Management (MDM) solution, underpinned by the appropriate levels of security provision.

Professional services: communication unified in the cloud

O_2 has provided a pioneering deployment of cloud-based unified communication to Civica, who offer fully-managed IT services and business process management, mainly to the public sector. Civica's view is: "Ultimately, this initiative is about people having access to each other at any time, achieving more for our clients, while cutting back on travel and achieving a better work-life balance. It's making us more responsive, improving the quality and consistency of service internally and externally". It's helped Civica to save 25% of its travel budget too.

Managing mobility

Smarter infrastructures

As the explosion of 'smart devices' puts even more strain on corporate network and storage infrastructure, a different approach is required. An infrastructure that supports smarter working needs to be running powerful services and applications, IP telephony and video communications – generating masses of data. And that data needs to be accessible from anywhere, while remaining secure.

The integration of fixed LAN/WAN, mobile 3G/4G and wifi networks can be complex, but through simplification this infrastructure is not only easier to manage, it is also more efficient, costs less to operate and is inherently more secure.

Controlling costs

Cost control can be designed into the fabric of a smarter infrastructure. Data use can be monitored and managed to avoid exceeding limits. Different types of connectivity can be used to link locations, optimised in line with usage. Devices can be selected according to each user's role and requirements, while consolidation of technology, suppliers and contracts can help to reduce costs and drive improvements in operational efficiency.

It's also important to review financial operating models. It may be possible to move away from significant capital expenditure (CapEx) and look at operational (OpEx) finance options as a way of improving financial exposure.

Passenger services: converging on a stable platform

East Coast runs railway services on the East Coast main line between London and Scotland, travelling to stations across the UK. Alan Sherwen, IS Programme Manager for East Coast, needed a partner that could deliver real-time information anywhere, through a single network. He says: "The project was about combining four work streams – the LAN, the WAN, the IPT and the mobile phones. We were looking for a stable, strategic platform. The key for us was O_2's ability to deliver a reliable, secure and innovative solution. And we wanted one supplier to do the end-to-end solution. Because of our resilient O_2 network, customers are now seeing less downtime. We look at technology as an enabler, so we're already starting to look at deploying applications over the O_2 network on to the current handsets. What we have now is a trusted partner we can go forward with."

Taking advantage of the £30 billion opportunity

Smarter Working Britain clearly shows that UK plc is on the edge of an incredible opportunity, worth a potential £30 billion a year in productivity growth. A Managed Mobility approach, which underpins careful investment in the latest collaboration technologies with the appropriate infrastructure, will stimulate new ways of working. Allowing employees to be more effective from wherever they chose to work, improving collaboration between colleagues and customers, and delivering immediate financial and productivity benefits.

Why O₂

With a heritage in mobile, O₂ is redefining the way organisations change their traditional ICT approach to take advantage of smarter connectivity.

We help organisations empower their people to work more productively and effectively.

We have a comprehensive portfolio of products and services, and a distinctive approach to managing risk, protecting your company's assets and business activity, while reducing cost and complexity.

We'll work with you to understand your business and use our expertise to develop a solution that meets your strategy. Wrapping it all up in a service that suits you, making it simple and flexible, for now and the future.

Find out more

Download the full Smarter Working Britain report here.

And talk to us about a Smarter Working discovery session, to see how your organisation can unlock its share of the growth and productivity made possible by being better connected.

Call us on 01235 433 507

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