



# Improved Work-Life Balance: The Role of ICT

## 1. Introduction

The world of work is changing: new technology, new global pressures, more women working, fewer young people and an expansion of the older generation.

- Almost 19 per cent of employees work in workplaces operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- One in eight employees work both Saturday and Sunday.
- Almost 11 per cent of employees work 60 or more hours a week – typically in professional and managerial jobs.
- More than one in eight men with dependent children works 60 hours or more a week.
- 56 per cent of women preferred greater flexibility in their working arrangements to longer maternity leave on their return to work following maternity leave.<sup>1</sup>

The UK Government and Opposition parties, government agencies, think tanks and many parliamentarians all talk about their support for improving the work-life balance.

- The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has legislated to improve work-life balance, through the Work and Families Act 2006 and other earlier legislative developments to improve rights at work.
- HM Treasury has used tax, tax credits, grants and other financial measures, such as support for childcare, to assist employees to improve their work-life balance.
- The Women and Equalities Unit, now part of the Department for Local Government and Communities, has particularly focused on work-life balance and flexible working for women in the workplace. This is now being taken forward in proposals in response to the Commission for Women.
- The Conservative Party, in its Aims & Values paper, 'Built to Last', aspires to enable people to strike a better balance between work and life through flexible working as part of its overall aim to enhance the environment and increase general well-being.

Orange welcomes these various initiatives. However, in doing so, **we argue that Information Communications Technology (ICT), such as mobile technology and broadband, is one of the most significant drivers for improved work-life balance.** We're not saying it's the solution to all our problems. Technology can only achieve so much and it is important for people to 'switch off'. And we are not advocating 'technology for technology's sake'. Nevertheless, in many cases, the role and impact of ICT is over-looked and often taken for granted. To this extent, this paper seeks to raise awareness of ICT in improving work-life balance, and urges the Government (and others) to place it at the core of its strategies.

## 2. How can ICT help?

Flexibility has gradually improved over the last ten years. A recent survey shows that employers taking part in flexible hours schemes have increased from 17 per cent to 22 per cent.<sup>2</sup> According to the Work Foundation, 60 per cent of employees now say their employer supports flexible working.<sup>3</sup> One of the big enablers is mobile computing and high speed communications. Technology unleashes new possibilities for organising work in ways that are more aligned with other priorities, from family life to civic duty. According to *The Mobile Life Report 2006*, 61 per cent of employees who use a mobile device of some

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<sup>1</sup> The Second Work-Life Balance, DTI 2003

<sup>2</sup> Working in Britain Survey, LSE/PSI Survey 2002

<sup>3</sup> *About Time for Change*, Work Foundation June 2003

sort say that their quality of life has improved as a result.<sup>4</sup> However, the adoption of a technology strategy amongst UK companies to foster more flexible working conditions remains low. 41 per cent of organisations provide their commuting office workers with no form of mobile device whatsoever.<sup>5</sup>

As a mobile communications business, Orange has helped to change the way people communicate and do business. For anyone who spends any time away from the workplace, being without a mobile handset is unimaginable. Mobile communications technology has made working 'out of the office' or 'homing' (working at home) common place. The average Blackberry user converts 54 minutes of downtime into productive time each day.<sup>6</sup>

- Mobile handsets, smart phones and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), such as the Blackberry, allow us to talk, text, access location-specific information and access office facilities, such as e-mail, contacts, diary appointments and the corporate network, all whilst on the move and at a time and place convenient to the user.

#### ***Coventry University Enterprises: Flexible Working***

Coventry University Enterprises Ltd (CUE Ltd), the commercial trading arm of Coventry University, provides a range of business and IT services to companies across the UK and Europe. In 2002 CUE Ltd introduced an initiative called 'Location-Independent Working' (LIW) to trial employee flexible working. The initiative, which has received a DTI E-Commerce award, has led to the development of a formal written flexible working policy that covers areas such as hours of work, health and safety, insurance, travel arrangements, data security, training and equipment. Employees are encouraged to work 'out of the office' between 40-60 per cent of the time. Orange's mobile technology plays an important part in enabling this flexibility in creating an easy to use mobile working environment. Since the initiative began 100 per cent of the participants have chosen to work flexibly. Flexible workers are equipped with the appropriate technology to do their jobs, including smart phones, laptops, PDAs, tablet PCs and thin client computers.

- Fast Internet access via a broadband connection in the home (72.6 per cent of UK Internet connections are now broadband<sup>7</sup>) allow more people to access the office server from the comfort of their living room offering the freedom to work from home unrestricted. Faster connections enable us to access more advanced and beneficial services, such as video conferencing and training facilities.

#### ***Redbrick Enterprises Ltd: Boosting Productivity at Home***

Redbrick Enterprises Ltd is a consultancy business run from a homely head office in Shrewsbury, Shropshire. The company has 5 home-based employees who utilise broadband connections to service clients across the UK. The employees communicate using instant messaging tools and keep in touch with client projects through online project management tool, Basecamp. Founder, Emma Jones, and her team have reaped the rewards of being home-based by saving up to one day per week through cutting out the daily commute and the increased productivity that comes with working at home. Time saved is spent with family & friends or, as Emma prefers, doing more work! Having recognised a dramatic increase in the number of businesses being started from a home base (around 75 per cent of new start-ups are based at home) Redbrick has launched a website at [www.enterprisenation.com](http://www.enterprisenation.com) that offers information and inspiration to home workers across the UK.

<sup>4</sup> *The Mobile Life Report 2006: How mobile phones change the way we live* [www.mobilelife2006.co.uk](http://www.mobilelife2006.co.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Henley Centre HeadlightVision research conducted for Orange

<sup>6</sup> Ipsos research 2003

<sup>7</sup> Office of National Statistics June 2006 – this figure does not include mobile Internet connections

- And the Internet is now mobile. Faster Internet speeds over Third Generation (3G) mobile networks mean we can have quick access even when we're not in a certain place, such as at a desk or at home. 3G 'data cards' slotted into a laptop can give the user all the power of the fixed Internet at his or her fingertips when on the move. And wireless broadband connections are now available at an airport or on a train enabling us to work as effectively 'out of the office' as when we're behind a desk. Many 3G data cards can connect to 3G mobile networks, nearby wireless networks or 2G mobile networks to enable a seamless Internet connection.

***BDO Stoy Hayward: Greater Freedom to Work and Play***

Part of the world's fifth largest accountancy network, BDO Stoy Hayward is investing £2m to mobilise its workforce, improve its business performance as well as employees' work-life balance. The commitment is in response to its latest annual employee survey, which showed that the majority of its employees want to adopt more mobile working practices. Using Orange's high speed Third Generation (3G) network, 2500 employees can now access e-mail and the corporate network via laptop using a 3G data card or mobile device when off-site, traveling between meetings or working from home. It gives them the flexibility to work their own way, be more productive and have more time to dedicate to their private lives. Each employee has – to date – recovered an extra 40 minutes of working time per month.

It is not just the private sector that is deploying the use of ICT to improve productivity and enhance employees' work-life balance. In the public sector, organisations – such as local authorities – are using ICT to make cost savings, improve service delivery and enhance the work-life balance of employees. The Government recognises the benefits of ICT in public service delivery but a shift in thinking, driven by a central strategy as well a change in private sector practices, is needed to boost work-life balance benefits in the public sector.

***East Sussex County Council: Management by Output***

One of the largest local authorities in the UK with an annual budget of £489m and 15,000 employees, East Sussex is using a mobile working solution to provide staff with the opportunity to work flexibly and manage their work-life balance. Using PDAs and smart phones with the Orange network, the Council has adopted a shift in culture towards 'management by output'. It has also introduced significant efficiency benefits allowing the Council to deliver local services more effectively.

But this is just the beginning. In the next few years, the way we work and communicate with each other will continue to change, opening up more options for employees, greater opportunities for flexible working and posing greater challenges for our employers. And this is reflected in many of the service providers, including Orange, now offering a wide range of communications services (often known as 'triple play' or 'quad play'), such as broadband, fixed telephony, 'on demand' broadband TV and mobile communications. In the next few years:

- The take-up of broadband connectivity in the home will continue to grow and with it will come faster speeds enabling richer and enhanced services, such as interactive 'on demand' television to complement existing digital TV, as well as improving the quality of video conferencing and other office facilities. In terms of penetration levels, the UK will challenge the likes of Canada and Japan as global leader as competitive pricing stimulates demand.
- The distinction between the various mediums we know so well – the television set, the radio, the Internet and the telephone/mobile – will continue to blur, both in the home and when on the move. Witness the already popular trend to make voice calls over the Internet (also known as 'VoIP'), receive broadcast/streamed television on a mobile handset or listen to the radio via various digital television platforms.

- Advances in mobile communications technology (known as '3G+' or High Speed Downlink Packet Download Access (HSDPA)) will increase the speed of Internet access on the move, rivaling most existing fixed networks. This will greatly improve the quality of information that can be accessed whilst out and about and make working 'out of the office' even more productive enabling greater work loads to be managed whilst on the move.

### 3. What Action Should Government Take?

Advances in ICT will drive these changes and Orange believes this should to be recognised by the Government and others. We make several recommendations as to what action the Government should take to maximise the opportunities and to meet the challenges of improved work-life balance.

- I. **The Government should introduce a White Paper on Work-Life Balance.** This should pull together initiatives across government and look to future policy. It should consider how improved work-life balance and flexible working will contribute to achieving key public policy objectives: supporting families, tackling poverty and exclusion, reducing congestion and enhancing the environment, and creating a productive knowledge economy. It should also set out future solutions, including how government will support the use and development of ICT strategies for improved work-life balance. The former Cabinet Minister, Rt. Hon Alan Milburn MP, first called for such a White Paper in 2004.
- II. **The Government should embrace a new concept of work-life balance which recognises the benefits of ICT.** In particular, we urge the Government to place ICT at the heart of its response to the Leitch Review of Skills.
- III. **The Government should help promote a realistic work-life culture amongst employers by introducing a technology-based tax credit.** This would be particularly designed to help small businesses to enjoy the multitude of benefits that flexible and mobile working can deliver.
- IV. In support of this we advocate **the introduction of a Skills Portfolio to help capture some of the learning, skills and aptitudes that are not reflected in traditional qualifications. This would include a 'flexible working' skill set.** This was recommended by think tank, Demos, in a report examining the relationship between young people and organisations.<sup>8</sup>
- V. **There should be greater recognition by HM Treasury, Department of Trade and Industry and Department for Work and Pensions of the role of ICT in supporting work-life balance.** In particular, in implementing the Work and Families Act 2006 and other forthcoming initiatives. This should be linked to financial incentives and support for employers in the public and private sector to invest and utilise ICT to support flexible working.
- VI. **The Government should give further consideration to the role of ICT in responding to the recommendations of the Women and Work Commission.** The recently published 'Action Plan' should be integrated with strategies to support and promote the use of ICT, which will be critical to the success of proposals to improve flexible working arrangements for women.
- VII. **In its Comprehensive Spending Review 2007, the Government should set out proposals of how ICT strategies will be used to deliver improved work-life balance for public sector organisations and employees to improve efficiency and services.**

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<sup>8</sup> *Working Progress: How to reconnect young people and organizations* (June 2006) – Demos (funded by Orange)