

Consumer Technology and the Evolution of Mobility - Personalising the Employee Experience

According to a recent article* 55% of HR Managers in the US state that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will become a part of their function in the next 5 years, while 13% already experience it. Compare this to a consumer report stating 55% of households will own a 'smart speaker' by 2022 and 16% of households already own one, and we can see that in the wider business world, technology development and adaption may finally be catching up with the consumer world.**

Consumer tech has been driving technological development ever since the arrival of the personal computer in the 1980's. Adapting consumer tech trends to the workplace is widely accepted as more successful in achieving employee adoption and motivation than utilising specifically developed enterprise technology – or technology developed without consumer trends in mind. Unfortunately, many of us in mobility have long suffered from lack of budget or recognition that mobility-specific technology is required to manage compliance and operations across so many different service areas – from immigration to tax, to relocation and compensation. It hardly needs to be restated that this de-prioritising of mobility tech has led to low-grade solutions, disconnected databases, basic in-house developed HRIS bolt-ons, and – let's face it – a fundamental reliance on MS Office applications.

One Size Does Not Fit All

However, for many organisations the mobility ecosystem is now firmly established and facilitating true data collaboration through digitalisation of the mobility network. Advanced data analytics supports evidence-based decision-making as organisations are able to use real-time information and hard facts to support agility in GM. Integration via standard APIs has encouraged the use of specialised companies and apps that focus on doing one or two things really well, rather

than striving to do everything but achieving mediocrity at most. HR systems consistently fail to provide sophisticated capability across generalist HR, Recruitment, Performance & Talent Management, Reward and Benefits, Payroll and Mobility – and as a result, separate refined applications are developing with focus on specific areas – further evidence of how even in mobility, enterprise technology is following consumer tech trends.

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Now consider employment changes over time. There are five generations in the workforce currently, ranging from those who remember black and white televisions, to those who have never known life without the internet. The implications of such skills and experience spread are impacting every aspect of current work and life. In recent years, while there has been a distinct shift back to focus on the needs of employees in very different ways

to the days of legacy generosity in policies. Companies claim to be listening to their employees, appreciating generational variety and delivering more to multi-generational motivations rather than throwing money at them. But is that really true?

Consumerism & Personal Choice

Employee focus has so far manifested in expanded policy suites, direct access to information, user friendly apps, Core-Flex policies and shifting emphasis from mobility team tech to employee focused tools. However, pressure by the multi-generational workforce on current employers is forcing a new level of flexibility, one we see well established in the consumer world. Simple, user-friendly employee elections are becoming fundamental – choices such as cash versus home leave tickets, 'better' housing versus more travel, even complete cafeteria plans are now becoming the norm. True flexibility is stretching beyond the business and the traditional core concerns of mobility – those of compliance and logistics versus an occasional cost-benefit election.

In chapter 5 of the 2018 RES Forum Annual Report – 'Alternative Forms of International Work' we are seeing that the lines are blurring between business travel and international assignments – just as we see the lines blurring between work and personal life. Employee demands are becoming more personal – stretching beyond traditional compensation and benefits. New workplace demands include 'bleisure', or tagging personal trips on to business travel, complete flexibility over vacation time and strong demand for cutting-edge software and mobile devices to work with on a daily basis – anything less and your millennial talent will think twice about coming to work for you. On the other hand, Gen X and Boomers are more likely to request work from home and flexible schedules to support their work-life balance and family demands.

Employee Well-Being And Happiness

Now that evidence-based decision-making is firmly established in mobility, the mobility ecosystem could be extended – leveraged to bring further data insights on employee

opinion and wellbeing into the mobility 'bigger picture'. Stress levels, work-life balance, even loneliness and depression are often addressed through impersonal awareness campaigns in larger organisations, but there is a failure to link well-being and happiness to direct demands of the job. How much do organisations really know about how their employees feel about being on the road continuously, or travelling without their families? What are the direct impacts of cost control on travel policies, such as travel class cut-backs, forcing employees to travel multiple times per week on budget airlines and use public transport for the sake of cost over convenience? In a world of five star and smiley-face selection, I suspect airport security has better informed data on employee happiness than most companies.

As full compliance and operational excellence become easier to obtain, it is no longer attractive to provide compliance over experience, it is essential to provide flexibility and personal choice. In the broader HR world, low cost solutions such as robots and AI are already replacing humans in the process where it makes sense – utilising chat bots, virtual accommodation tours and self-driving trucks to name a few. The next generation of technology offers an opportunity to combine compliance and logistics data with point-in-time pulse checks and employee feedback solicitation and soon

clever AI will link such feedback exercises with previous choices and responses – true personalisation in the manner of merchant recommendations (the 'you might also like...' approach to advertising).

Humanising GM

From a technology perspective, platforms must be up-to-date and capable of true data collaboration – utilising the latest in standard APIs to connect with multiple mobility services. They must also be simple yet sophisticated enough to future-proof your programme by allowing flexibility – functionality and service area add-ons, eliminating barriers to the changing nature of mobility, supporting what Accenture terms 'frictionless business'***. The natural progression of 'consumerising' mobility technology is that it enables GM to focus human interaction on especially emotive services such as providing personalised briefings and conducting housing, school and area orientations once in a location. Mobility has the opportunity to at least keep up with the wider HR world – but we need to be speedy in order to be agile – the pressure is on to tool-up for the future with flexible technology that leverages consumerism and offers choices that speak across the generations.

* *HR Dive, Feb 2018*

** *TechCrunch article on a Juniper Research Nov, 2017*

*** *Accenture Tech Vision 2018*



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