



Workplace Scheduling Technologies Help Organizations Rock Around the Clock

By Jason Main, AsureForce and Jeff Root, AsureSpace

In the not-too-distant past, work was something done almost exclusively at the office or place of business during scheduled hours or standard hours of operation. Hourly or shift workers who had questions or requests regarding their schedules or time off either tracked down their manager or an HR contact while they were on-site, or they left voicemail or email messages and waited for replies. Office workers with extra work stayed late and/or came in on weekends because all of their work resided on the office network, accessible only via their assigned PC in their office or cubicle.

Now, with the growing prevalence and advancements in mobile technologies, mobile networks, and cloud solutions, an increasing number of work and work-related functions are no longer anchored to a central location or standard hours. Although some types of jobs and work functions inherently require a physical presence, a growing number of workplace solutions are no longer constrained to the network in the office, and employees can access these technologies from their own laptops, tablets or smart phones – any time and from almost anywhere.

Just consider these statistics. A 2013 Forrester study reported “anytime, anywhere workers” in the U.S. and Europe grew from 15 percent to 29 percent of employees between 2011 and 2012, and IDC projects that 1.3 billion workers worldwide will be mobile by 2015. Forrester also projects 905 million tablets will be in use for work and home globally by 2017, and Silicon India recently projected the number of active cell phones will reach 7.3 billion in 2014. Two-thirds

of U.S. consumers currently own smartphones, according to Nielsen’s Digital Consumer Report – anytime, anywhere indeed.

Keeping Engagement Goals On Task

Workforce and workspace scheduling solutions are rapidly evolving to adapt to and leverage the way today’s workforce uses and interacts with mobile technologies, which have dramatically changed when and how work is done. Empowered with greater access and improved flexibility and agility, these systems enable employees to be more productive, collaborative, and engaged.

For employers, workplace scheduling technologies provide rich data to support better business decisions, identify opportunities for efficiencies, manage top operational costs, and attract and retain top talent. These tools also help to support employee engagement, which is critical in a time when engagement levels are running low.

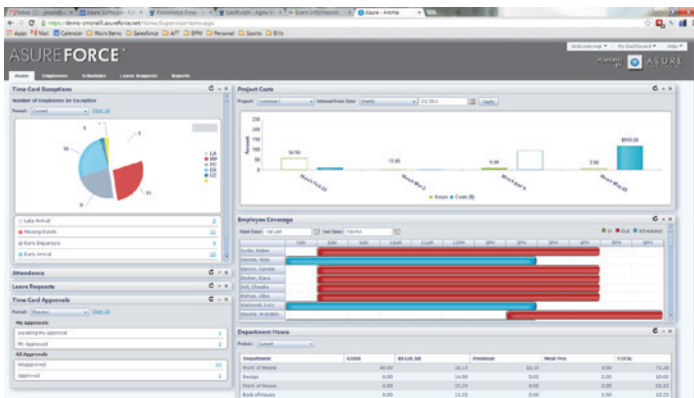
According to Gallup’s 2013 employee engagement survey, less than one-third of U.S. employees are engaged in their work, more than half are disengaged and 18 percent are actively disengaged. These numbers clearly indicate that the majority of today’s employees have their work cut out for them. According to Aon Hewitt’s 2013 employee engagement study, “The companies that get engagement right can enjoy a surplus of competitive advantage in talent strategy and business results that is hard for others to replicate.”

Engagement, empowerment, agility, and productivity are key elements for employers that aspire to build a high-performing workplace. In fact, today’s advanced time and labor management (TLM) scheduling systems can be used to entice, and nearly require, employees to be more engaged, not just show up on-site and punch in like the “old days.” For example, managers can inform employees of shift openings via text alerts that enable employees to bid on the openings from their smartphones.

A 2011 study published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* found that hourly employees who are provided with schedule control as a form of flexible work practice were more engaged and satisfied with their schedules, and perceived their supervisors as more supportive. Today’s systems help organizations and their employees make the best use of their time, location, and technologies so that both sides can operate in-sync.

Workforce Scheduling – Get with the Times

If you think workforce mobility trends only apply to staff who are able to do their work off-site, guess again. Most on-site staff these days – factory workers, patient care staff, retail staff, construction workers, etc. – own mobile devices, tablets, laptops, and other technology that they use to plan and organize all aspects of their lives. In fact, most people these days have become accustomed to expect that the information they need can be found online and they often question processes and questions that are not available electronically.



The Employee Coverage dashboard, located on the product home screen, gives the administrator or manager insight into the current shift coverage. It also allows these users to manage people that are scheduled versus actually punched in.

Equipped with increasingly powerful mobile devices and networks, today's employees want access to work-related tools wherever and whenever they need them. Time and labor management (TLM) is no longer a system of paper time cards, schedules posted on bulletin boards, and paid time off (PTO) or scheduling availability forms dropped off in the manager's inbox.

Workforce scheduling/TLM solutions are adapting to the times. Increasingly, today's TLM technology is in the cloud, where employees and managers can access it whenever needed. Work schedules are posted online for staff to access at their convenience. Workers can submit their upcoming availability and block off their unavailable dates/times online, and they can search and sign up for shift openings if they want to pick up extra time. They also can check their PTO availability online, submit PTO requests and track the status – all in real-time.

Simple apps enable smartphones to serve as mobile time clocks, with facial recognition and geolocation technologies that verify field staff members' identities and location – simply by taking and submitting a “selfie.” This emerging technology is especially useful for organizations with hourly staff who work off-site. It provides employees with a quick and convenient way to clock in and out, while providing organizations with an effective way to verify staff members' identities and whereabouts in order to manage time fraud among staff in the field.



These scheduling tools empower employees and support engagement by providing them with the convenience and access they not only need, but also that they have come to expect in this age of mobile technology. In fact, as Millennials and the next generation enter the workforce, organizations that want to attract and retain these young workers will be increasingly challenged to provide solutions that address the ways they interact with technology and their expectations for flexibility.

In addition to supporting employees, workforce scheduling technology advancements also provide employers with effective tools and robust, real-time data to plan and manage

personnel costs and make informed decisions with confidence and agility. Visual schedule dashboards enable managers to see, in a glance, who is on the clock and who is late or absent. For schedule planning, they can easily see who is available and who is not. Workforce scheduling systems also can help supervisors control personnel costs, such as overtime and potentially costly compliance errors. They can set scheduling parameters to limit how much time, in advance of their shift, that employees can punch in, or prevent employees from signing up for extra shifts that would put them into overtime.

And, keep in mind that busy managers may be anytime, anywhere workers too. Cloud-based solutions can be useful tools for providing them with flexibility to plan and organize schedules, review and respond to scheduling requests, analyze time and attendance trends, and other scheduling responsibilities at their convenience. Better scheduling also may enable managers to decrease full-time employees (FTEs), optimize existing staff, or repurpose talent to areas with more need.

Organizations that have effective workforce scheduling tools and systems in place to support flexibility, access, and empowerment can reap the benefits of a more engaged and productive workforce.

Workplace Scheduling – Balancing Time & Space

Gallup's employee engagement survey found that remote employees are slightly more engaged. While this topic needs to be explored for further details, the initial findings show that employees with some level of flexibility are more engaged in their work.

Other studies have shown that providing the flexibility to work when and where employees want is becoming a critical component to attracting and retaining top talent. A Harris Interactive 2012 study found that one in three employees rank the ability to work from home higher than perks such as company cars, so a flex-work strategy is essential for any forward-thinking company. A PriceWaterhouseCooper report on Millennials indicates these younger workers expect work/life balance and they prefer electronic communication over face-to-face or phone interaction. And, slightly older “Sandwich Generation” workers are seeking more flexibility and work/life balance to care for both their children and their parents.



These trends toward flexibility also are being driven by technology. Today's workers are no longer at the mercy of a landline and PC at their desk. Their smartphone and mobile devices enable them to move more freely throughout the office, spend more time in the field with customers and vendors, or simply get away from typical office distractions without missing a beat with their work.

These and other factors are affecting the workplace and leading many organizations to consider new approaches to office design to make better use of space (note: business travel, off-site meetings, vacations, leaves of absence, teleworkers, and other factors can result in workspace utilization rates of less than 40 percent) and provide workers with flex-work options to support engagement, retention and recruiting.

While a flexible workplace frees workers from full-time work at their assigned workstations and enables them to work from almost anywhere in the field, the office remains a central hub for collaboration, connection and engagement. The key is providing agile workers with tools so they can do their jobs remotely while also ensuring they can continue to visit the office, when needed, so they can remain engaged with the organization at all levels.

Some progressive organizations are moving from assigned workspaces to shared space models by adopting “office hoteling” or “hot desking” strategies for staff who can work mostly off-site and therefore do not need a “permanent home” in the office. If the space is made available on a first come, first served basis – users must search for an open spot when they arrive and hope they find an open space and a desirable location – problems may arise if employee can’t find an available space to work, if they waste productive time trying to hunt down an opening, or if they aren’t able to organize and plan meetings just like their co-workers who are based on-site. These issues can lead to disengagement and reduced productivity.

Remember, the office remains a central hub of teamwork and collaboration. Mobile staff members still need convenient access to the office to maintain connection and engagement. They may need a reliable system that ensures they will always have a place to work for drop-in visits. And, they need to be able to easily find and reserve it so they don’t waste time hunting for an open spot to work. A welcoming and accessible environment helps to encourage and promote drop-in visits and the proper balance of home/office time so employees remain engaged with their supervisors, team members, other work colleagues and the organization, in general.

Cloud-based workspace scheduling systems and mobile apps enable remote staff access from mobile devices or laptops prior to their visits so they can easily find an open spot and hit the ground running, rather than spending time trying to hunt down an open space when they drop in. These systems can also help employees locate team members with whom they need to work so they can reserve adjacent or nearby space.

On-site kiosks can help workers find their reserved space upon arrival or make ad hoc reservations. Touch panel displays also are helpful for finding open space on-the-spot. Meeting room and resource scheduling systems can be offered in the same fashion so that on- and off-site staff members alike are able to easily and efficiently plan and organize meetings by accessing the systems whenever needed.

As technology continues to drive a highly mobile workforce that is no longer limited to the confines of the workplace walls and standard business hours, progressive business leaders are seeking dynamic solutions for rapidly evolving workplace trends to make their organizations more flexible, agile and adaptable. Organizations that approach mobility and technol-

Cloud Benefits for Workplace Solutions

The cloud plays a key role in delivering global, mobile, and highly talented workforces the information they need when and where they need it to make decisions, manage initiatives and drive meaningful business growth. Cloud access also frees workers from the constraints of office-based networks, and removes many disruptions and barriers that can limit employee productivity and leave mobile workers feeling isolated and disengaged.

For HR professionals, cloud solutions can minimize or eliminate the delays and frustrations of waiting for support from corporate IT, which may be overstretched due to a scarcity of skilled workers and are assigning low priority to HR in relation to the organization’s perceived mission-critical IT functions.

Additionally, cloud-based offerings allow organizations to rely on their solution vendors to manage upgrades, compliance requirements and software maintenance so the organizations can focus their resources on business-critical initiatives. Software-as-a-Service models also offer predictable monthly expenditures versus unplanned technology upgrades, and some vendors organize customer forums that enable participants to share best practices and provide product feedback.

ogy trends proactively and effectively can turn their largest expenditures – labor, real estate and technology – into strategic operational advantages with enhanced workplace and workforce productivity, and improved collaboration and engagement.

About the Authors



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