

Mobile Applications for Human Resources

By Humair Ghauri, Oracle

We all remember our first mobile device. The anticipation of getting that little gadget made us giddy with excitement at the mere thought of how it would make our lives easier and more productive by allowing us to be continuously connected and reachable. It made that US\$599, or US\$299 with a two-year contract from your mobile provider, appear cheap. And, there is little doubt that in the past couple of years, these devices have finally delivered on the value we expected.

The reinvention of the tablet, with enough computing power to rival your standard laptop of five years past, and with smartphones now commonplace, the question is no longer a matter of “Should Human Resources capitalize on this medium to better support the workforce?” but “How can HR do so?” The facts gathered from the past year have clearly put that question to rest.

2010 Mobile Device Facts

- Gartner determined that consumers bought 1.6 billion (yes, billion) mobile devices in 2010, of which, 304 million, or 19 percent, were smartphones: <http://www.computerweekly.com/Articles/2011/02/09/245333/Smartphones-drive-surge-in-mobile-device-sales.htm>.
- Forester projects that tablets will overtake desktop sales by 2015: <http://www.inquisitr.com/76157/tablets-to-overtake-desktop-sales-by-2015-laptops-will-still-reign/>.
- Statcounter tells us that more people in the U.S. browse the Web from an iPad (around for just one year) than from Linux-based desktop operating

systems (around for 20 years):

<http://royal.pingdom.com/2011/04/20/ipad-used-more-than-linux-computers/>.

- On May 11, 2010, there were 4,935 positions posted on Monster requiring applicants to have some domain in mobile devices.



<http://www.androidpolice.com/2011/03/14/number-of-apps-in-android-market-rapidly-gaining-on-apples-app-store-but-android-tablets-arent-so-lucky/>

2010 Mobile Application Facts

To put this into perspective, in 2010 there were more than twice as many people buying smart phones (304 million) than there were people signing up for Facebook (118 million users). It's now just a matter of how and when Human Resources will deliver functionality to these devices.

Before You Start

Before seriously pursuing a mobile HR initiative, organizations need the following questions answered:

Does your organization support mobile devices?

Does your organization already have corporate accounts with mobile device providers (AT&T/Verizon, etc.), have they decided which mobile devices to standardize on, e.g. Apple iPhone and iPad versus HTC Android and Motorola Xoom, and are all these programs accessible to your targeted workers?

Can your organization support mobile devices?

E-mailing and calendaring support will now be just one facet of your mobile strategy, not your entire mobile strategy. Some things like support processes can be leveraged but mobile applications will require new capabilities and possibly the hiring of new people to maintain them. Also, for your major work centers, you need to make sure you have enough 3G/4G towers nearby and local Wi-Fi infrastructure to support the increased bandwidth demand.

Can your organization afford mobile devices? E-mailing and calendaring for a worker on a mobile device is relatively low data usage and costs the organization only a few dollars per month. If you add applications to this, a worker's data usage and costs could jump through the roof. One large enterprise organization in Europe did a pilot program on HCM analytics/apps and the data costs jumped from a few Euros to over 100 Euros per-month, per-worker. In the U.S., we are lucky to have cheaper "all you can eat" smartphone data plans that cost, on average, US\$49 per month domestically or US\$69 per month globally. If you are going to support tablets, get the Wi-Fi version for the non-road warriors. Data plans for tablets do not support the "all you can eat" usage plans and charge by the gigabit.

Are your mobile devices secure and compliant? With mobile applications, you are forced to potentially publish and locally store worker and organizational data such as head count, compensation, performance ratings, etc., on the mobile device itself (if you want offline capabilities). Not only will you need to deploy a multi-level security scheme, e.g., password upon entry, VPN, encryption of local data, if device lost-recovery or remote wipe capabilities, but you will also have to ensure that you are compliant with federal and local regulatory rules (Is passing employee data on a mobile device outside the corporate domain across international boundaries and then stored locally compliant?).

Do you know which workers need mobile applications? Not all workers should be provided with a mobile device, let alone access to mobile HCM analytics. The standard workers who need mobile applications are executives, road warriors, sales, potential new hires, and workers always in the field, e.g., geologist looking for oil deposits, on-site project managers at a construction site or consultants. This roughly means that only about 20 percent of your total workforce needs them immediately and even then, they will all probably need different applications.

If your organization answered "no" to any of the five questions, you should wait until there is a "yes" to all. If all were answered with a "yes," then you probably already have mobile applications deployed to some extent and rolling out HR mobile applications just became a whole lot easier.

What Should these "Apps" Look Like?

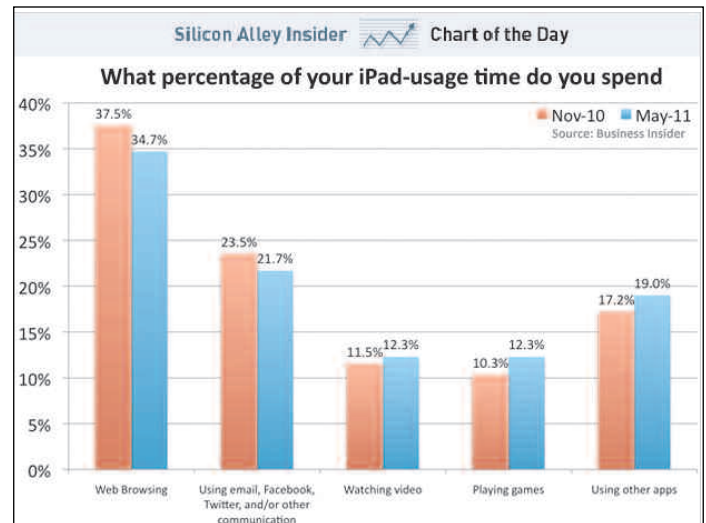
To get a sense of what and how people are using mobile devices, let's take a look at what applications people are using and how they are using the devices.

Top Grossing Applications on Smartphones

Ranking	Top Grossing iPhone App	Top Grossing Android App
1	Texas Poker	Paradise Island
2	Zynga Poker	Bakery Store
3	iMobster	Documents to Go
4	Tap Zoo	Exchange
5	Angry Birds (I am a big fan.)	Restaurant Story

Source: iPhone App Store, <http://www.web-designers-directory.org/articles/top-rated-android-applications-for-2011-20.html>

iPad Usage



<http://www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-ipad-app-2011-05>

What's noteworthy about this is not the fact that people seem to play a lot of games, but that people are not using applications that require any substantial typing. Ever try filling out a form on a smartphone or a tablet? Not a fun experience. For the 21 percent of time spent on an iPad "communicating," they are, at most, either sending a quick one- to two-line response to an e-mail, writing a 140-character tweet and maybe a one-liner comment or update on Facebook.

This is due to the fact that the form and function of a smartphone or tablet is significantly different than a laptop or desktop. This may seem obvious, but people are not interacting with their mobile devices through a mouse and keyboard. They are primarily interacting through their hands (specifically their thumbs) and probably doing a hundred other things at the same time. Because of this, most existing human resources applications won't be practical for use in a mobile device. But some applications, which match the profile below, would be a good fit.

No Need for a Portal – Most of our HR application mind-set centers on connecting transactions, analytics, and information to some sort of role-based HR portal. However, a smartphone's "desktop" should be the portal for an organization's workers. The icons on the desktop replace the links on the portal. Some smartphones allow for widgets on the desktop and content, such as alerts, can be pushed to the device.

Mobile Application versus Mobile Browser – The easiest and fastest way to get applications mobile is to make the existing ones accessible through a mobile browser. As stated earlier, most HCM applications won't be a good fit for mobile devices, but certain ones such as an employee directory, may be better suited. There are a lot of benefits to this approach – an organization can leverage existing skill-sets, support processes, will not have to support two code lines (HCM Web-based applications and HCM mobile-based applications), and your workers won't have to learn a new application.

There are certainly some downsides to browser-based mobile applications. The screen size is significantly smaller, whether you are using a smartphone or tablet, and this will make navigating and filling out information more difficult for users. It will also take longer for users to complete actions. Mobile applications take fewer thumb presses to get access, they load faster, navigation from page-to-page takes less time, and mobile apps are geared for completing actions with your thumbs.

End-to-End Actions – The reality is that 95 percent of the time, a worker will only go to an HCM mobile application if they need to take action on a single item, like a vacation request, looking up a co-workers information, etc. A more complex example could be when a manager is trying to retain a worker while traveling. Managers would go into a mobile HCM application to review the salary of their team, and then look at their department's salary budget to determine if there is room in the budget to allow a salary increase, and finally, be able to give an out-of-cycle increase to a specific worker.

Completed in Two Minutes or Less – Human Resources needs to take a page from Facebook's exceptionally easy-to-use mobile application: a quick glance at an analytic, one or two thumb presses to take an action or, at most, one or two thumb presses followed by a quick one-line write-up of a note or justification. Since workers have a hard time writing long e-mails on the iPhone or a BlackBerry, would you really want them to fill out a performance review on one of those devices? A tablet, like the iPad, is a bit better, but it still takes two to three times as long as it would on a laptop or desktop. Trust me, I did not write this article on an iPad.

"Mashed" with other Functional Areas – For ease of use and adoption, HCM mobile applications should be "mashed" with other functional areas like Sales. Other than the employee directory, HCM-only mobile initiatives generally have a hard time getting off the ground, and being teamed up with other functional areas gives them a much better chance of being funded and helps them to provide a complete offering to workers.

Which HR Applications should go Mobile?

Workers would greatly benefit from the ability to access certain HR applications at any time. The greatest benefit would be in areas where information is needed or an action must be completed at a moment's notice.

Learning – Mobile learning applications for tablets will have the greatest impact and benefit for workers. I am not talking about traditional full-blown Web-based training classes, but imagine *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Daily Journal*. Instead of news, organizations would provide highly interactive searchable content, videos, surveys, multiple-choice test and the ability for other workers to comment on or share material with others on topics such as product releases, latest marketing campaigns, targeted profiles, etc.

Worker Directory – If a human resource organization is only able to deploy one mobile application, it should be an employee directory. The good news is that most HCM vendors are beginning to provide this in their latest releases and the basic smartphone version will have abilities such as a search by name, title, location, etc.

Tablet versions will have significantly more robust functionality and should be viewed as a light-weight ERP. Along with the standard smartphone features, they will have organizational charts, full worker profiles, social networking, and the ability to complete simple employee actions such as small job changes, updating of a goal, etc.

Workforce Communications – Intranet portals, e-mail, and Twitter make up the bulk of formal workforce communications. For workers who are always on the road, they may not have seen the employee portal for some time and e-mails that don't concern them typically don't get read. However, they are always on their mobile device. Publishing important workforce communications through a mobile RSS type feed may get them to notice that an acquisition happened or that the employee stock purchase program is about to start.

Workforce Analytics – Similar to a worker directory, all of the major business intelligence vendors provide mobile applications today and there are several mobile-only providers who can build mobile dashboards off information coming from data sources like Excel. All this makes getting workforce analytics out to your workers practical, relatively inexpensive and possibly deployed in a week or two.

Recruiting – Whether candidates are new college grads or seasoned pros, a recruiting mobile application is a great way to keep them engaged while making it through the sometimes tedious hiring process. It's a great medium in which to inform candidates of upcoming interview schedules, provide background on the organization, the people they are interviewing with, sharing of recruiting collateral like videos, and if an offer is extended, you can provide an updateable list of pre-boarding activities.

HR Applications that can wait to go Mobile

Not all HR applications should go mobile right away. Usually the ones that would be the coolest looking are, unfortunately, the ones you probably want to wait on, and some human resources applications are just too time-intensive for workers or just too complex to have on a mobile device. Major areas to wait on are:

Performance Reviews or anything requiring lots of typing – Approval of performance reviews, definitely. Typing performance reviews, responding to the worker's review, or co-workers providing 360-degree feedback should not be aspects of a mobile application. Not only is typing difficult on these devices, but do you really want a manager or co-worker providing feedback on a worker's performance while walking from the car to the office building, walking the dog, or while grocery shopping? They are

mobile. Where do you think they are going to do it?

Other major areas that are not ready for mobile applications include: new hire paperwork, termination paperwork and the entry of a résumé.

Compensation Planning or any very complex transactions – Mobile applications are great for taking one to two actions such as an approval and adding a comment to that approval. They don't do as well when you have to take multiple actions. Compensation planning would make a great demo on an iPad and would probably make sense if that was the only way you allowed workers to give compensation increases. For the time being though, it isn't, and organizations should stay away from replicating large pieces of functionality on different mediums because it is very cost and time prohibitive.

Summary

The facts speak for themselves – mobile devices and applications are in your workers' everyday lives and Human Resources has a great opportunity to improve engagement and productivity of its workers by providing targeted, action-packed mobile applications that will make them giddy with excitement. The challenge now is whether Human Resources will be able to deliver mobile applica-

tions in the near term to meet the demand, because if they don't, workers will do what they usually do – develop what they need on their own, and when HR ultimately delivers, it will be difficult to displace what's already been adopted.

About the Author



Humair Ghauri is senior director, Human Capital Management Strategy at Oracle. Ghauri leads the HCM Strategy team responsible for applications that enable companies to align their workforce goals and business objectives. He brings more than 15 years of industry experience to Oracle's strategy organization. He spent more than 11 years at PeopleSoft working closely with customers in various roles of ERP consulting, product development and product strategy. Prior to Oracle, Ghauri was director of HCM Product Strategy at PeopleSoft, Inc., where he helped design new product roadmaps and drove strategic decisions for the company's technology and workforce management suites. Before joining PeopleSoft, he was with IBM where his focus was technology and business intelligence. He holds a M.S. in Computer Science from Pace University, and BBA from Baruch College, The City University of New York. He can be reached at humair.ghauri@oracle.com.