



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

ICMA Management Perspective

March 2009

Mobile Workforce Management

Introduction

Virtually every city and county across the country has a mobile workforce. At any given time, some percentage of the workforce is conducting local government business away from the traditional office, cubicle, or meeting room. And it's not just police officers, firefighters, or other fleet vehicle operators. It's building and health inspectors who move from site to site; managers and economic developers who travel for official business; teleworkers and flextime employees who spend part of their week working from home and remote facilities—all are part of a mobile workforce. Employee mobility is an executive-level issue because it spans the entire organization, although its management is often decentralized and almost invisible from a comprehensive point of view. As the private sector has long realized, strategic management of employee mobility can yield substantial bottom-line and productivity improvements, as

leading edge local governments are discovering.

Mobile worker programs touch all aspects of local government, from fleet vehicles and government buildings to ongoing expenditures such as fuel and personal vehicle reimbursements to the mobile workers themselves. Looking at this issue holistically can help shape policies that leverage expenditures across departments more effectively while retaining employees who need flexible and creative approaches to where and how work gets done.

Controlling Costs and Maximizing Benefits

Local governments are under increasing pressure to maximize service and to minimize costs during a time of resource scarcity and flattening or declining budgets. A recent study by Runzheimer International, an ICMA strategic partner, estimates that an employer's average mobility costs—such as for

travel, virtual offices, relocations, fleet vehicles, and aircraft—are equivalent to or higher than what an organization spends on health care. Relocation and aircraft are often minor or nonexistent items for local governments, but travel, fleet vehicles, and virtual offices/telecommuting are integral to nearly all operations. Understanding the financial impacts and opportunities related to mobile employees can alleviate fiscal duress and makes good management sense.

GPS Improves Snow Plow Routing

According to David Holmes, assistant city manager in Cincinnati, Ohio, GPS technology on snowplow trucks helped to analyze and improve vehicle routing, saving 22 percent in fuel costs and valuable time. The city has been so pleased with the performance of the technology and the assumed savings that it is purchasing two dozen more GPS units in 2009.

Philadelphia Reduces Fleet Vehicle Costs

In 2003, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, developed a fleet reduction process that removed 330 vehicles from its rolling stock inventory of 4,500, of which approximately 60 percent were sedans and SUVs. On a related front, the city started an automated car-sharing program with a vendor, resulting in five-year estimated cost avoidance of more than \$4.5 million in maintenance and fuel. Other savings occurred in reduced parking costs and reductions in the acquisition of new vehicles.

In 2008, the city developed comprehensive vehicle assignment and usage policies to facilitate further streamlining of the fleet (e.g., they included stringent requirements for take-home vehicles), with the goal of reducing the fleet by 500 vehicles over the next year. Also, the city continues to extensively use car sharing for passenger vehicle transport and has no centralized vehicle pool.

Mobility and Sustainability

ICMA members have identified sustainability as the issue of our age. It's clear that managing the mobile workforce impacts the sustainability goals of communities, whether by reducing commuter traffic, improving the fuel efficiency of fleet vehicles, or cutting the carbon footprint of local government facilities.

As part of ICMA's larger Sustainable Communities Initiative, an ICMA member advisory group

recently convened for two days to explore workforce mobility. The objectives were to identify the challenges of strategically managing a mobile workforce and to discover opportunities and innovative approaches to draw from. "We are at a critical juncture. For all the right reasons, this is the time to rethink how we strategically manage our mobile workforce," said advisory group participant Roger Fraser, city manager of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Defining the Mobile Workforce

Borrowed from a definition common in the private sector and used by Runzheimer International, Total Employee Mobility™ is *a management concept and business strategy that takes a more holistic and integrated approach to the mobile workforce, all with the goal of improving an organization's talent management results, profitability, and agility, and ensuring employee satisfaction and well-being.*

Managers in the private sector have paid attention to workforce mobility for years. They realize that a well-managed approach can lead to cost savings, improved employee satisfaction, and better recruitment and retention, especially among young knowledge workers. Given the variety and nature of duties performed outside city hall or the county administration building, it makes sense for city and county managers to recognize the importance of strategically

managing the mobile workforce. A large part of the work that comprises local government responsibilities is mobile: maintaining roads; operating utilities; providing social services; supervising new construction; and inspecting businesses such as restaurants and day care centers. That's without mentioning police, fire, and emergency medical departments.

The ICMA advisory group agreed that there has been a marked evolution in how local government employees travel and work throughout the jurisdiction, commute to work, and, in some cases, telecommute from home and satellite offices. But it also concluded that the policies, guidelines, and reporting mechanisms that support a mobile workforce have developed incrementally and in response to individual and department needs. Too often the management of mobile and telecommuting workers is ad hoc and dispersed among departments—such as human resources, finance, accounting, and purchasing. A strategic approach to managing local government mobile workforce resources can yield positive measurable outcomes.

Getting Strategic

"Sarasota County's mobile workforce management initiative has a direct connection to our environmental and sustainability ethic," said Larry Arnold, the county's executive director of community services. "This community made a commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030." With this mandate in

mind, Arnold, together with Hugh Henkel, the county's manager of strategic operations, convened a group of county employees to brainstorm about how best to manage their mobile workforce. They decided to take a holistic approach and look at what would serve the bottom line while allowing the county to achieve its environmental goals and satisfy customers and constituents. To do this, they categorized the nine most important elements of a mobile workforce. (See graphic, "Complexities of the Mobile Employee.") Then they examined important considerations in each category. They asked themselves, for example, what kind of communications procedures need to be in place to best manage mobile employees? How do we keep our mobile workforce informed? What kind of human interaction is needed and how often?

Among many useful recommendations gleaned from Sarasota's brainstorming sessions was one to closely examine building usage, which accounts for 30 percent of the county's carbon footprint. "If we can't address that 30 percent, we'll have a lot of challenges reaching our carbon-neutral goal," said Arnold. "We either have to reduce the footprint or get rid of the building." For these reasons, the county has begun to look at telecommuting more structurally and to find greater efficiencies in managing space.

The county is also examining the value that could be created if field workers in operations and maintenance were given more flexibility. Says Henkel, "It might



be that the worker's day starts from when he turns on his truck in his home driveway. He doesn't have to drive the 30 minutes to the dispatch place, check in with the boss, pick up gear, and then start the workday. He checks in before he leaves his driveway and the workday begins. It's a huge cultural change."

Leadership is Central to Success

As with any government initiative, leadership can make the difference between success and failure, or whether an issue is even identified as something worth acting on. Such was the case in Loudoun County, Virginia, where the commitment and vision of the county administrator, Kirby Bowers, propelled a cutting-edge workforce mobility initiative. Loudoun County is located north and west of Washington, D.C.,

has more than 3,000 employees, 55 percent of whom live outside the county and 21 percent of whom live outside the state. In 2006, the county relaunched a telework program to improve space efficiencies, alleviate traffic congestion and pollution, reduce staff absences, and create opportunities for a better work-life balance, and ultimately to establish a resilient continuity of operations capability. To lead this effort, Diane O'Grady was hired from the private sector.

The county recognizes three kinds of teleworker:

- Worker has predefined schedule; works at home at least 1 day a month
- Worker has short-term remote work, based on illness or temporary assignment
- Work is primarily in the field such as an inspector

The results of the initiative have been promising. Approximately 20 percent of the county's teleworkers share an office space in one of the government's owned or leased facilities. The program is estimated to reduce the number of car trips by more than 3,000 per month. This corresponds to a substantial reduction in automobile emissions and mileage logged on personal vehicles. Time spent getting to and from work—with commutes that average 48 miles and close to 90 minutes daily—has been avoided, leading to happier and more productive employees. (The county estimates a 20 percent gain in employee productivity.) Interestingly, O'Grady found that the retention rate is substantially better for teleworkers when compared with non-teleworkers. The turnover rate for people who telecommute is about 3 percent, versus more than 13 percent for personnel who did not.

Getting Started

Managers eager to take the first step toward creating an integrated mobile workforce can begin by looking at how Sarasota County got started and how Loudoun County put in place its telework program. After establishing baseline practices and metrics, they established the goals and objectives for their mobile workforce programs. They then built their program to address the objectives, working collaboratively and seeking input from all departments.

At its basic level, employee mobility management is a strategic set of approaches for accomplishing the traditional work and service delivery of local governments in new ways that make sense across a spectrum of financial, client, and human resource variables. Local government managers will need to

identify which approaches make the most sense to meet their particular challenges: cost containment and increased productivity, sustainability, meeting the flexible schedule needs of employees, or some combination of these and other strategic issues.

Next Steps

ICMA, its sustainable communities advisory committee and mobility workforce committee, and strategic partners such as Runzheimer International will continue to explore ways to help local government managers understand the mobile workforce. This management perspective is an addition to the series of new knowledge products and resources that are part of the ICMA Sustainable Communities Initiative.

About ICMA

ICMA is the premier local government leadership and management organization. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advancing professional management of local government worldwide. ICMA provides member support; publications, data and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to nearly nine thousand city, town and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. More information about ICMA's Sustainable Communities Initiative, including the mobility project can be found at www.icma.org/sustainability.

ICMA

Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

About Runzheimer International

Runzheimer International is the leader in mobile workforce management, providing an innovative and comprehensive range of Total Employee Mobility™ services relating to business vehicles, relocation, travel management, corporate aircraft, and virtual office programs. Its deep experience in these areas, combined with its unique benchmarking databases, position the firm to help organizations optimize employee productivity while containing costs. Runzheimer serves 60 percent of the Fortune 500, many middle-market companies, and numerous U.S. and Canadian government agencies. More information about Runzheimer's products and services for local governments can be found at <http://government.runzheimer.com/services/government-local.aspx>



runzheimer
INTERNATIONAL