



# The New Multi-Dimensional Talent Force: Multi-Local Differences

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## Introduction

Much has been written about the many dimensions of today's modern work force. From the multi-generational differences with the veterans, boomers, Gen Xers and Gen Yers to the pluralities of cultures and variety of global mind-sets, the work force of today is more diverse than ever before. The first two articles in this series on the Multi-Dimensional Talent Force discussed the characteristics and challenges with the multi-generational<sup>1</sup> and multi-cultural<sup>2</sup> aspects of today's work force. This article addresses another aspect of the multi-dimensional talent force in the modern digital age – “multi-locality” – the phenomenon that individuals can and do work anywhere, anytime and anyhow.

The worker of today is no longer bound by space and time, constrained by the nine-to-five work day, confined in rows of cubicles. While off-site work and telecommuting have been a part of our work environment for many years, the increasing numbers of people working remotely and virtually is fundamentally changing the nature of the modern workplace. Now, rather than an exception to be dealt with, remote, virtual workers are the norm, and accommodating schedules and time zone differences and providing appropriate tools are now critical aspects of modern work. And this is not only true for professional staff; blue collar work is also done offshore and piecemeal, leveraging part-time, retired, and lower cost workers, so that the company's work force is truly spread across the globe.

One critical implication of the multi-locality aspect of our work environment is the blurring of boundaries between professional and personal lives. Not only can work be done anywhere, but also at any time, creating expectations of 24/7 availability and instant response times. These heightened expectations can place increased levels of stress on the modern worker, as they pursue the ever more elusive quest for work/life balance. This article describes some approaches and tools that companies can adopt to better support the modern, virtual worker and to increase management effectiveness in today's global, digital age.

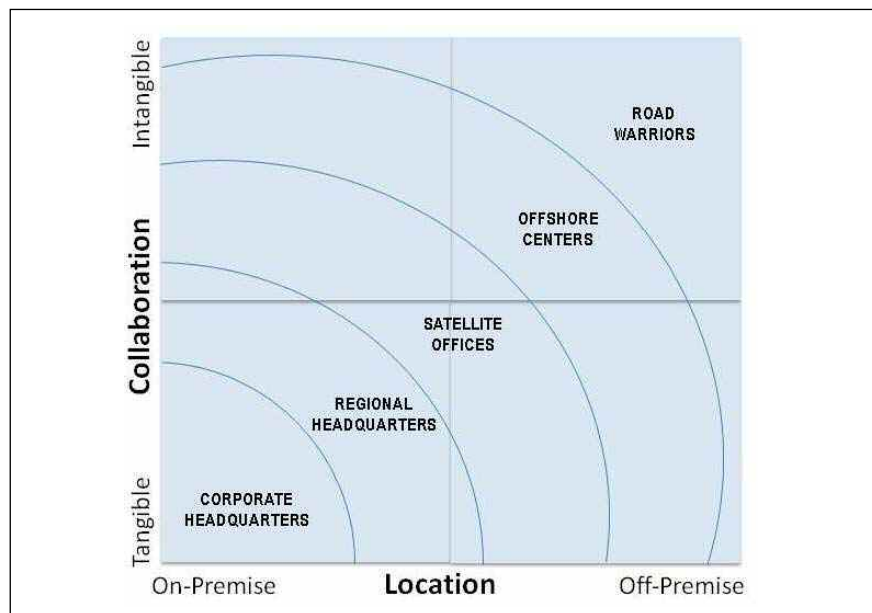
The goal of this article is to explore the impact that differences in locality have on our ability to collaborate and work effectively across the modern organization. We first discuss the concept of location – from on-premise to off-premise – and describe the characteristics and needs of broad groups of workers in varying locations. We then look at collaboration – from tangible to intangible – and identify four distinct types of collaboration and characteristics that create an effective work environment. Finally, looking at the interaction of location and collaboration, we identify methods, processes, tools, and management strategies that can enhance communication across the company's entire global work force.

## Location

The broadest dimension of the multi-local work force is whether work is performed on-premise (or on-site) versus off-premise (or off-site). Traditionally, work was performed on-premise, within the four walls of the organization and under the direct supervision of a watchful manager. With the growth of the Internet and the advent of the modern, digital age, it is now possible for people and teams to work effectively off-premise, and hence the amount of off-site work has been increasing steadily year after year. From off-site processing and off-shore service centers to application service provider (ASP) and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) business models, work and location are becoming increasingly disassociated. It is now commonplace for managers to be located in different offices – even different continents – from their teams and for team members to be dispersed across distant geographies and multiple time zones.

Figure 1 depicts the cross-section of two continua: one continuum of *Location* from on-premise to off-premise and the second continuum of *Collaboration* from tangible to intangible. Tangible is defined as “discernible by the touch; real or concrete; possible to understand or realize.”<sup>3</sup> Intangible is something that is “incapable of being perceived by the senses, of being realized or defined; incorporeal.”<sup>4</sup> In the modern Internet age, intangible work comprises the increasing number of activities that are done online, real-time, dispersed, and disconnected across space and time.

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**Figure 1. Multi-Locality.**

In the lower left quadrant of Figure 1, there are Corporate and Regional Headquarters, where people work in groups and teams, physically on-site and generally through face-to-face collaboration. Moving toward the off-premise dimension are the company's Satellite offices and Offshore Centers, including third-party outsourcers. Finally, the most remote and most detached workers in the organization are the Road Warriors – those individuals who constantly shuffle from site to site. They can be the glue that ties diverse groups across the organization together or they can be isolated, disconnected from the main happenings in the company.

*Corporate Headquarters* – Individuals located at corporate headquarters work in tightly knit groups, generally co-located in the same building (and hence the same time zone), using the same support infrastructure and tools, e.g., telephone systems, desktop computers, LAN/intranet, and sharing a common company culture, e.g., team outings, lunch presentations, company picnics.

*Regional Headquarters* – Depending on the size of the organization, individuals at regional offices work much like those at corporate headquarters, co-located in the same building, using the same infrastructure and tools. Effective collaboration between corporate and the regional headquarters is influenced by the geographical distances and cultural differences and by the standards and commonality (or lack thereof) in the products, processes, methods, infrastructure and tools.

*Satellite Offices* – Often located in remote locations and generally separated from corporate and regional headquarters by multiple time zones, large geographical distances, and differing tools and infrastructure, collaboration between individuals located in satellite offices and those in other parts of the organization can be challenging. Beyond technological and infrastructure issues, company (and/or national) culture and organizational barriers influence effective collaboration across such vast location differences.

*Offshore Centers* – Offshore operations and third-party outsourcers present yet another step along the on-premise/off-premise locality continuum, putting even greater demands on intangible collaboration. In addition to geographical and time zone differences, different organizational models, culture, missions, goals, and success metrics can be a challenge to effective cross-organizational collaboration between such disparate entities.

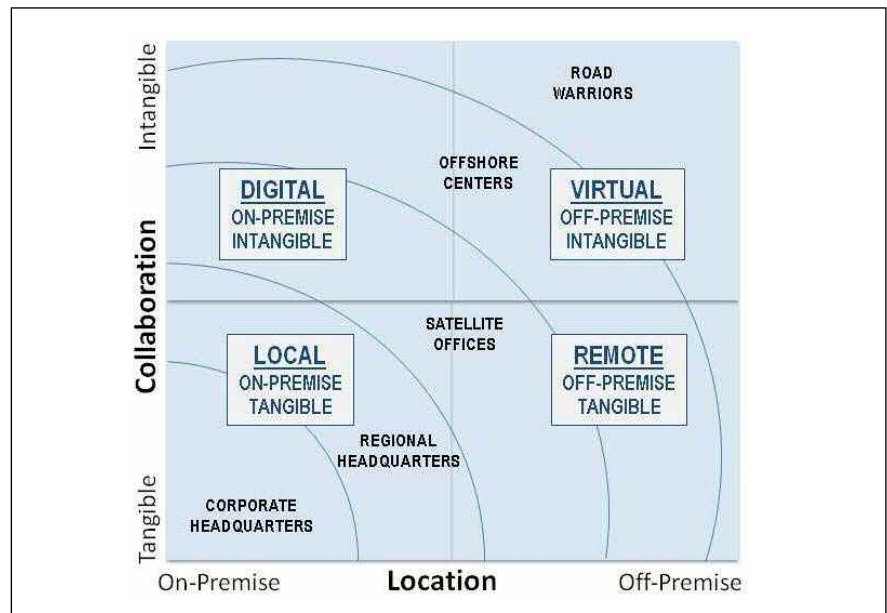
*Road Warriors* – Individuals working from airports and hotel rooms and other remote workers operating from home or single offices represent the most distant group of off-premise workers. Road warriors deal in the most intangible of all environments, working most of their time in the virtual world, needing to assimilate

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late quickly to the culture and collaboration methods of the different sites they visit. Because they work primarily as individual contributors or as “visitors” within an existing team, this group presents its own unique set of challenges for uniting the work force and building connectedness, cohesiveness, communication and collaboration.

**Collaboration**

As work has spread to multi-localities, the nature of and methods for collaboration and team work have also changed. Collaboration in the traditional, single office setting is vastly different from collaboration across a modern, global, multi-local organization. Work performed on-premise at corporate and regional headquarters locations is largely of a tangible, physical nature in contrast to work done off-premise in satellite offices and offshore centers, which requires more intangible and virtual cooperation. Figure 2 shows how work across the continua of Location and Collaboration can be grouped into four broad categories.



**Figure 2. Multi-Local Talent Force.**

*Local – On-premise and Tangible* – Collaboration in the local setting is personal and visible. Meetings take place face-to-face, and teamwork (or the lack thereof) is real and apparent. Individuals bond easily in tight-knit groups, sharing a common history and company culture. Much communication takes place in face-to-face meetings and conferences, as well as in hallways, lunch rooms and around the water cooler.

*Remote – Off-premise and Tangible* – Collaboration in the remote setting is also personal, but disconnected and, therefore, much less visible. Telephones (land and cellular) and conference calls facilitate communication and collaboration tying remote locations and off-site workers to corporate and regional offices.

*Digital – On-premise and Intangible* – Digital collaboration grew out of the computer era, leveraging the Internet, LAN/WAN technologies, and electronic media such as intranets, e-mail and PowerPoint. Communication in the digital era has shifted to the Internet with e-mail, Web sites, online newsletters, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, and so on.

*Virtual – Off-premise and Intangible* – Virtual collaboration takes the digital age one step further by removing the constraints on time and allowing individuals to work not only anywhere, but anytime – separate time zones but connected via tools and software such as wikis, blogs, social networking software and more. The next session explores in more detail the communication and collaboration tools and technologies that have evolved over the last decade to support and connect the global, disparate, multi-local work force.

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Communication is the focal point for all successful interaction within and across organizations. As communication tools and technologies have evolved over the decades, the nature and expectations of the work force have changed. Figure 3 shows a collection of sites, services, methods, and technologies mapped along the axes of Location and Collaboration. In the lower half of the graphic are the traditional, tangible methods of communication, such as company directories, manuals, newsletters, meetings, conferences, as well as the company picnic, hallway discussions and informal chatter around the water cooler.

The collaboration and communication technologies in the top half of Figure 3 have grown out of the digital age: In the upper left are those referred to as Web 1.0, and in the upper right are what have collectively been called Web 2.0. The term Web 1.0 is a “retronym” – a term developed after the creation of the term Web 2.0 in order to refer to the previous state of the Web. Web 1.0 can be generally characterized by the development of static Web sites with read-only material, widespread computer illiteracy, and slow Internet connections. Some examples of Web sites that have evolved from the Web 1.0 era are Yahoo! and Amazon.

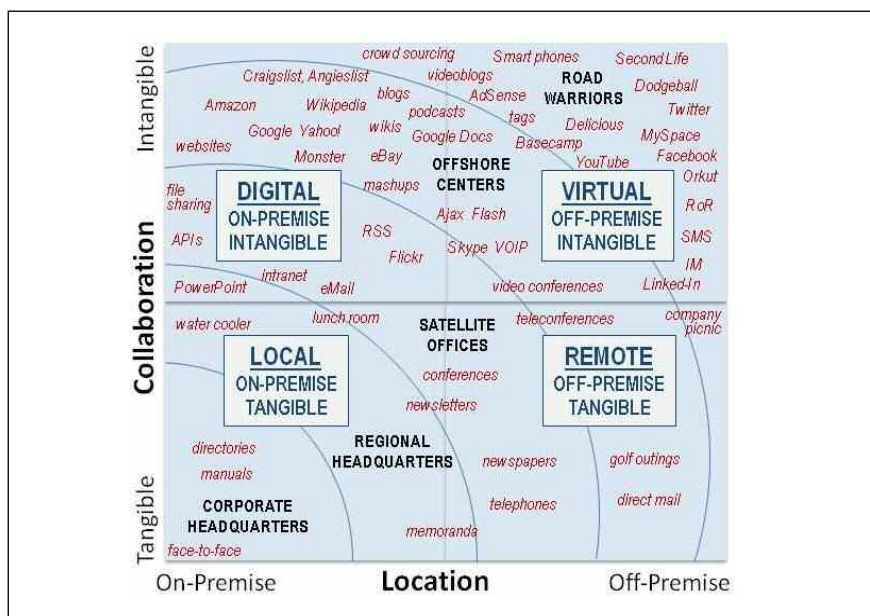


Figure 3. Multi-Local Communication Methods and Tools.

According to Wikipedia, “Web 2.0 describes the changing trends in the use of World Wide Web technology and Web design that aim to enhance creativity, communications, secure information sharing, collaboration and functionality of the Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of Web culture communities and hosted services, such as social-networking sites, video sharing sites, wikis, blogs and folksonomies.”<sup>5</sup> The main difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is that of programmer-generated content versus user-generated content, hence Web 2.0 places a heavy focus on ease-of-use so that users can easily contribute content on a real-time basis.

Web 2.0 technologies cover a broad spectrum of Web sites, services, methods, and tools such as the following:<sup>6</sup>

*Online Marketplace* – where buyers and sellers collaborate over offers and purchases, such as pioneer eBay, and later Amazon, Craigslist, Angieslist, and now all major retailers;

*Mass Communication Tools* – where workers communicate freely in a subscription-based or ad hoc approach, such as RSS feeds, readers, blogs, podcasts, videocasts, YouTube, Flickr;

*Instant Messaging* – tools that facilitate remote collaboration over the Web through real-time messaging, such as trailblazer ICQ and now Yahoo, AIM, MSN, Google Talk and Skype;



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*Social Software* – where users network and communicate with others of similar interests, such as MySpace, Facebook, Linked-In, Plaxo, Orkut, Xing, Ning, SelectMinds, and many others;

*Collaborative Documentation or wikis* – where people contribute knowledge to build a common database, such as pioneer Wikipedia, and others such as Answers, Google Docs, Jive, SocialText, Confluence and Basecamp;

*Web Meetings* – screen sharing, audio, and video via the Web allowing users to conduct virtual meetings and collaboration sessions, with such products as WebEx, GoToMeeting and Dimdim;

*VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol)* – A method for transmitting voice over the Web enabling real-time conversations, such as Skype, Vonage and MagicJack;

*Web Development Software* – collaborative Web 2.0 programming languages and tools that improve the user experience, such as Ruby on Rails, Drupal, Ajax, Flash, Dreamweaver, etc.;

*Tags and Social Bookmarking* – a framework for storing, organizing, searching, and managing Web sites via metadata and making information publically available to others, such as Delicious and Google Bookmarks;

*Smart phones* – Web-enabled, multi-function cellular telephones, incorporating telephony, calendaring, Web surfing, music/video and gaming, such as the iPhone, Blackberry and Palm Treo;

*Status Updates* – tools that facilitate staying in touch with friends and colleagues, such as SMS (Short Message Service) commonly known as text messaging, as well as microblogging tools like Dodgeball and Twitter;

*Crowdsourcing or Community-based Design* – taking an activity generally performed in-house and outsourcing it to a large group of undefined people to enhance work and innovation, such as vendors using potential customers to help design new products; and,<sup>7</sup>

*Virtual Reality Software* – software that simulates another world that can be used to create more effective, life-like training scenarios, such as Second Life and World of Warcraft.

Effective leadership of the modern, multi-local work force requires agility and mastery of skills along many dimensions, from informal chats to networking approaches to formal meetings and written documentation. Figure 4 summarizes key communication strategies common for each of the four groups of workers making up today's talent force: local, remote, digital and virtual.

Intangible	<b>DIGITAL</b> ON-PREMISE, INTANGIBLE		<b>VIRTUAL</b> OFF-PREMISE, INTANGIBLE	
	<b>Informal</b>	Hallway/Lunch	<b>Informal</b>	VOIP / IM
Collaboration	<b>Communication</b>	Email	<b>Communication</b>	Twitter
	<b>Documentation</b>	Intranet/Filesharing	<b>Documentation</b>	Internet/Wikis
	<b>Meetings</b>	PowerPoint Slides	<b>Meetings</b>	Web Meetings
	<b>News/Updates</b>	Online Newsletter	<b>News</b>	Blogs/RSS Feeds
	<b>Networking</b>	Online Directory	<b>Networking</b>	Online Community
	<b>LOCAL</b> ON-PREMISE, TANGIBLE		<b>REMOTE</b> OFF-PREMISE, TANGIBLE	
Tangible	<b>Informal</b>	Cube-mates	<b>Informal</b>	Telephone
	<b>Communication</b>	Face-to-Face	<b>Communication</b>	Memoranda
	<b>Documentation</b>	Manuals/Books	<b>Documentation</b>	Newspapers
	<b>Meetings</b>	Conference Room	<b>Meetings</b>	Teleconferences
	<b>News/Updates</b>	Printed Newsletter	<b>News/Updates</b>	Direct Mail
	<b>Networking</b>	Water Cooler	<b>Networking</b>	Company Picnic
	On-Premise	<b>Location</b>	Off-Premise	

**Figure 4. Multi-Local Communication Strategies.**

**Multi-Local Management Strategies**

So what does all this mean for the manager of a team in the modern, multi-local environment? According to Josh Bersin: “driving a performance-oriented

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culture demands a focus on new compensation models, improved forms of collaboration, and the development of clear goals-based performance management processes.”<sup>8</sup> How does this apply to the multi-local talent force?

First, we need to build *personal accountability* not only for individual performance, but also for effectiveness in collaborating across a diverse, multi-local environment, working seamlessly in a multi-functional, multi-organizational, multi-generational, and multi-cultural workplace. We must “inspect what we expect” by leveraging Web-based tools, such as wikis, Web meetings, customer relationship management (CRM) software, instant messaging, and social software to stay connected with the global, digital and virtual work force.

Second, we need to develop *management agility*, broadening our management practices and developing more multi-faceted and situational leadership skills. Traditional practices such as MBWA – management by wandering around<sup>9</sup> – are still valid and effective in the on-premise environment; yet modern practices, let’s call it MBSA – “management by surfing around” – the ability to lead using modern, Internet-enabled technologies – become paramount in the off-premise world.

Third, we must foster *social responsibility*, where each individual works toward the organization’s goals to the best of his or her abilities, while respecting and valuing the contribution of others. In the multi-local environment, diversity is no longer a program managed by the HR department; rather diverse work groups embracing differences in gender, age, culture, nationality, personality, and religious, political, and sexual preference are the norm in the evolving global village.

Finally, we must develop *pay-for-performance* strategies in which compensation is tied not only to individual performance but also to effective collaboration in the multi-local environment. Team-based pay structures and compensation for contributions to group knowledge bases help to direct and motivate individuals in sharing and disseminating knowledge across the global organization.

## Conclusion

Mastery of modern organizational models and management practices is a critical success factor for effectiveness in leading the modern, multi-local talent force. Management agility, personal accountability, social responsibility, and pay-for-performance are key themes that leaders must embrace to be successful in working with the multi-locality aspects of today’s organizations. Whether you are a corporate executive, regional manager, outsourcer, expatriate, or inexorable road warrior, there are a plethora of tools and options now available to improve communication and foster collaboration in supporting work anyplace, anytime, anyhow, helping individuals find greater work/life balance in the modern global, digital, remote, and evermore virtual world in which we now live.

## Endnotes

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