



The Hidden Costs of "Unlimited Data"

Why 9 out of 10 Dollars Are Wasted



Executive Summary

Enterprises overspend on mobility. Employees use only ≈6.6 GB/month, yet corporate plans provide 50–200 GB at ≈\$36.50 per line. As a result, 93% of data is wasted, raising the real cost from \$0.36/GB on paper to ≈\$5.15/GB in practice. Beyond data waste, companies also lose the equivalent of one full-time role per 250 employees to administration. Combined, unused data and admin overhead cost a 1,000-employee firm ≈\$866K annually without improving productivity or employee experience.

Figure 3. Employee Data Usage Distribution - On Mobile Data

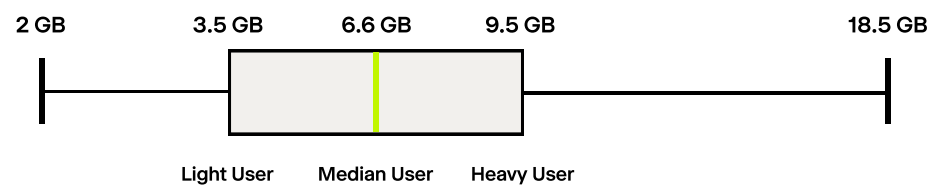


Figure 4. Mobile Data Waste Per Employee Per Month

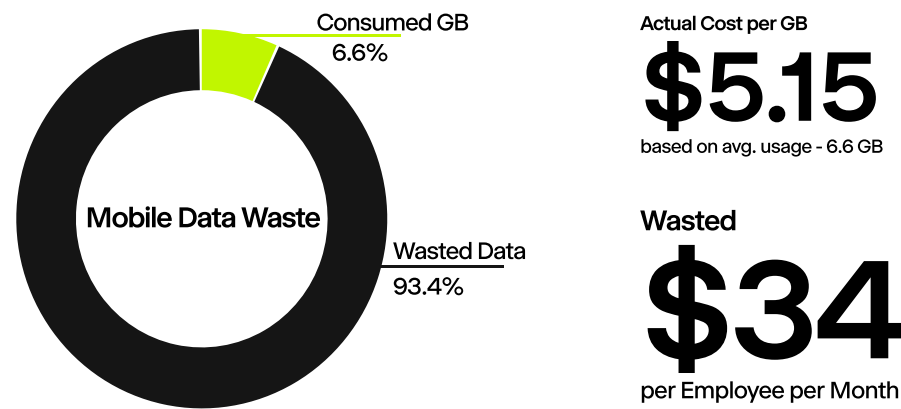


Figure 6. Total Cost as a Result of the Time Required for Admin

Total Employees	Full-time Employees Required	Cost/Year
250 Employees	1	\$114.5K
500 Employees	2	\$229K
1,000 Employees	4	\$458K

Figure 7. – Total Hidden Costs of "Unlimited" Data at Different Headcounts

250 Employees		
Mobile Data Waste	\$102,000	
Time Cost	\$114,500	
Total Waste Cost	\$216,500	

500 Employees		
Mobile Data Waste	\$204,000	
Time Cost	\$229,000	
Total Waste Cost	\$433,000	

1000 Employees		
Mobile Data Waste	\$408,000	
Time Cost	\$458,000	
Total Waste Cost	\$866,000	

1. Employee Usage

Understanding how employees use mobile data is the starting point for evaluating plans and identifying waste. A March 2025 survey of 3,400 U.S. workers reports 186 minutes/day on phones at work across social, messaging, audio, and web (Figure. 1; RSS, 2025). Using conservative data-rate benchmarks – web 50 MB/hour, audio 115 MB/hour, social 2–6 MB/min, and treating messaging as light web – gives an average of 6.6 GB per employee per month when accounting for 21 workdays per month (Figure. 2; Utility Warehouse, 2025).

The box plot (Fig. 3) illustrates employee data usage. Q1 sits at ~3.5 GB, the median at 6.6 GB, and Q3 at ~9.5 GB. The whiskers extend from ~2 GB up to ~18.5 GB, capturing the vast majority of users. Most employees consume less than 10 GB, while heavier users occasionally push into the 10–18 GB range. Outliers appear beyond 18.5 GB, including individual cases in the 20–40 GB range and, more rarely, extreme users approaching 100 GB. Checked across an organization, these are isolated instances and not considered representative of normal usage.

As a secondary check, we have analyzed mobile data usage across Telgea’s current clients consisting of employees at enterprise teams within multiple roles, functions and geographical locations. Yet, Telgea users average around 4 GB per employee per month, making it a suitable sanity check against external benchmarks

Two clear conclusions emerge. First, for most employees, mobile data use is modest, typically within single-digit gigabytes per month. Second, usage is dominated by activities with steady and predictable data needs, such as web, messaging, and audio. These findings suggest that current corporate plans, often marketed with “unlimited” or very high allowances, are misaligned with actual usage patterns. Any strategy for right-sizing plans should be based on measured employee needs rather than headline inclusions.

Figure 1. Employee Data Distribution - On Mobile Data

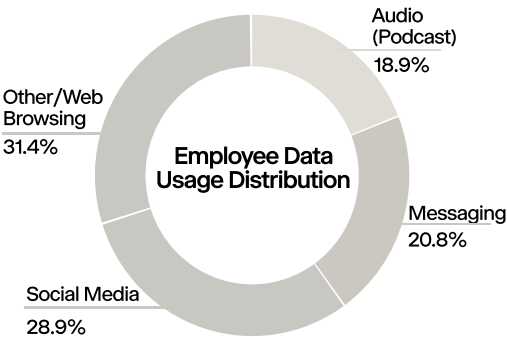


Figure 2. Employee Average Data Usage - On Mobile Data

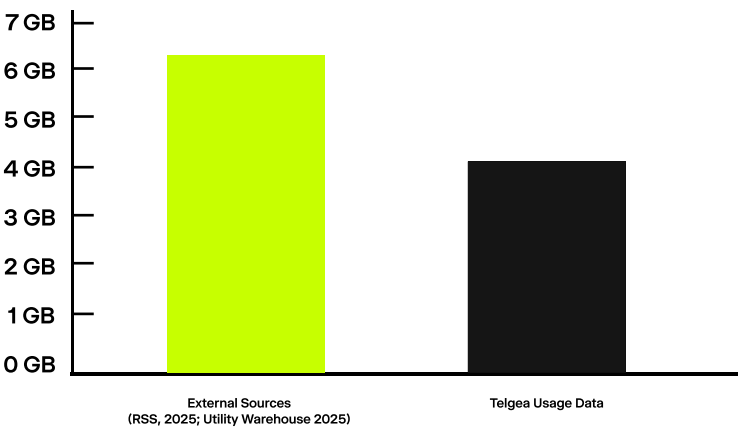
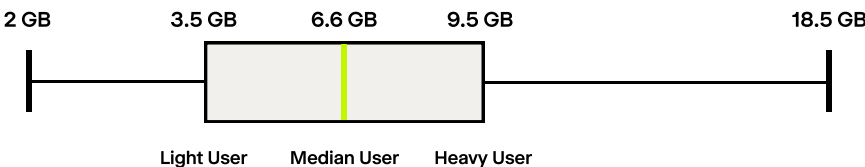


Figure 3. Employee Data Usage Distribution - On Mobile Data



2. Plan Allowance & Pricing

Mobile providers compete on ever-larger allowances, positioning “unlimited” or high-capacity plans as standard for business. In practice, firms paying \$36.50 per employee/month receive 50–200 GB per line (Samsung & Oxford Economics, 2022; AT&T, EE, O2, T-Mobile, 2025), while measured need for most employees is 6.6 GB/month (RSS, 2025; Utility Warehouse, 2025).

Plan Allowance	Actual Usage	Avg. Spenditure
50-200 GB	6.6 GB	\$36.50
Per Employee	Per Employee	Per Employee

This pattern is consistent across major carriers: T-Mobile offers ~200 GB of high-speed data per line; AT&T provides ~100 GB before throttling; EE includes 100 GB with commitment or 50 GB on shorter terms; O2 offers 50 GB on SIM-only business plans with EU fair-use limits (T-Mobile, 2025; AT&T, 2025; EE, 2025; O2, 2025).

The outcome is structural over-provisioning: companies pay for a ceiling that few reach. A minority of heavy users – such as frequent travelers, tethering, or video-call-intensive roles – may consume well above average, and for them a 50 GB buffer has value. But in a typical mid-size firm, most employees remain below 10 GB/month, so when combined, the unused share dominates total spend.

Understanding this misalignment is essential. Providers deliver the promised capacity, but the volume of unused data is built into the model, creating inefficiency that scales directly with headcount. For companies with hundreds or thousands of employees, this unused allowance translates into substantial and recurring waste.

Figure 4. Plan Allowance For 36.50/Month Per Provider



*Available List Prices And Without Long-Term Commitment

3. Mobile Data Waste

The gap between what companies buy and what employees use is direct and measurable. Firms pay \$36.50 per employee/month for plans that include ~100 GB (Samsung & Oxford Economics, 2022; AT&T, EE, O2, T-Mobile, 2025), while actual use averages 6.6 GB per employee/month (RSS, 2025; Utility Warehouse, 2025). This results in less than 7% of purchased data is used while more than 93% is wasted (Figure. 5).

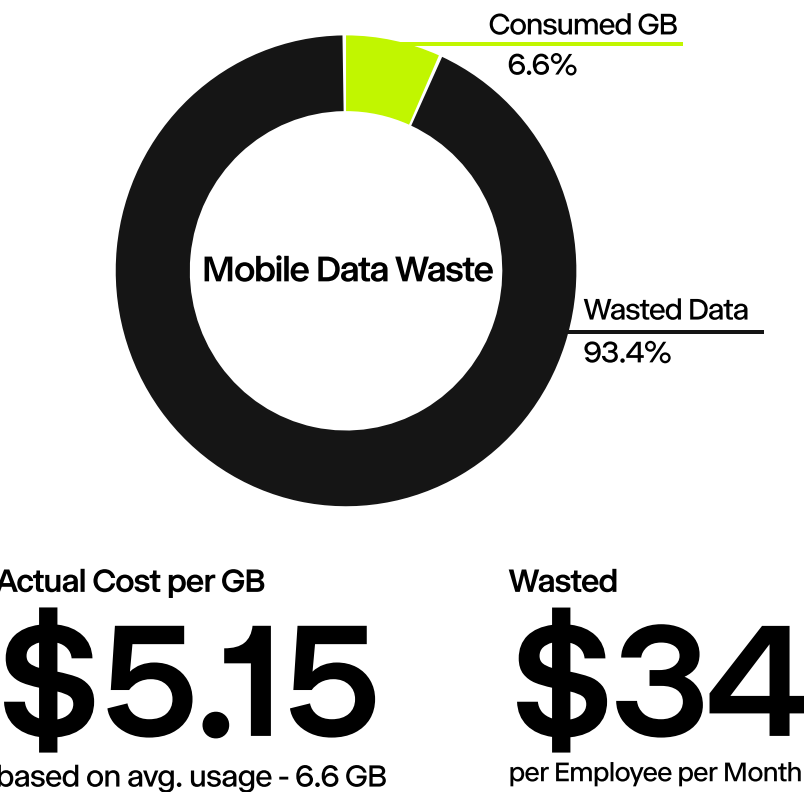
The effect on cost per gigabyte becomes noticable. Based on plan allowances, companies appear to be paying only \$0.36 per GB ($\$36.50 \div 100 \text{ GB}$). In reality, when adjusted for what employees actually use, the effective price is closer to \$5.15 per GB ($\$36.50 \div 6.6 \text{ GB}$).

As a result, the average cost per gigabyte, when adjusted for actual usage, becomes many times higher than the nominal price implied by the allowance. This is not a question of occasional inefficiency; it is systematic across carriers and geographies.

This mismatch is not due to a few light users; it is structural. Carriers sell 50–200 GB per line even though only a small minority ever approaches that ceiling, while most employees remain well below 10 GB. As a result, companies pay for capacity they do not use, and the unused portion effectively supports provider margins.

At scale, the impact is material and linear with waste accumulating approximately \$408 per employee per year results in about \$204,000 for 500 employees, and more than \$400,000 for 1,000 employees.

Figure 5. Mobile Data Waste Per Employee Per Month



4. Time, A Cost Factor

Yet, the financial waste of unused mobile data is only part of the challenge. Enterprises also face a significant but less visible cost: the time staff spent on mobile administration. These hours are absorbed by routine tasks such as onboarding, support, invoice processing, and reporting. While necessary, they do not improve user experience or drive innovation, yet they consume substantial capacity in mid-sized and large organizations.

A 250-employee company spends about one full-time equivalent on mobile administration – ≈33.8 hours per week, or 145 hours per month – spread across IT operations, Finance/AP, and local admins (Samsung, 2022). This is cross-functional time that grows with headcount and the number of countries and providers involved. While not every task is mapped in detail, several core drivers of this workload are well documented.

Figure 6. Total Cost as a Result of the Time Required for Admin



Provisioning and changes account for about 30 hours per month (Tangoe, 2024), user support, order management, and AP allocation add roughly 37 hours (vCom/Telecare, 2023), usage and cost reporting requires 4–6 hours, and invoice processing adds around 2–3 hours (Tangoe, 2024). Together these activities explain about half of the full-time load. The remainder comes from recurring but less precisely measured work such as multi-carrier coordination and reconciliation, roaming monitoring, security/MDM checks, inventory and lifecycle audits, and month-end finance work (Gartner, 2024; Samsung/Oxford, 2022), which collectively bring the total to one full time employee per 250 employees.

Time spent on mobile management is predictable, recurring, and largely administrative and scales proportionally with international and headcount expansion. These tasks are not optional, they exist because of the way services are provisioned, billed and due to the fragmentation of the mobile plan market – requiring enterprise teams to operate in separate platform depending on carrier and international market. Although not accounted for in this report, the cost should not only be measured in staff hours but also in the lost opportunity to apply talent to more strategic and value-adding work.

“Manual processes are too slow and unscalable in complex estates. Enterprises seek single-platform inventories, deep integration to IT Service Management, HR, and automation for invoice processing and data validation.”

– Gartner (2024)

5. Summary

Enterprise mobility is structurally inefficient. Employees use on average 6.6 GB per month, with most staying in single digits. Light users consume 1–3 GB, heavier users occasionally reach 10–18 GB, and outliers above ~18.5 GB appear only as rare individual cases — sometimes extending into the 20–40 GB range or beyond (RSS, 2025; Utility Warehouse, 2025; Atto, 2023). Corporate plans, however, still provide 50–200 GB at about \$36.50 per line (Samsung & Oxford Economics, 2022; AT&T, EE, O2, T-Mobile, 2025). As a result, less than 7% of purchased data is consumed, pushing the effective price from \$0.36/GB on paper to \$5.15 per GB in practice, leaving a 1,000-employee firm with more than \$400,000 wasted every year.

On top of this financial waste comes an administrative burden. Managing mobility for 250 employees requires roughly one full-time equivalent (~33.8 hrs/week), equal to \$114,500 annually. This scales to two FTEs at 500 employees and four at 1,000 (Oxford Economics & Samsung, 2022).

The hours are spent on predictable, recurring tasks – provisioning, reporting, invoicing, and coordination – grow with headcount and intensify in multi-country, multi-carrier setups (Tangoe, 2024; vCom/Telecare, 2023; Gartner, 2024). Together, data waste and administrative overhead exceed \$216,000 annually at 250 employees, \$433,000 at 500, and \$866,000 at 1,000 (Figure. 7). These costs are built into the current model: inflated allowances few ever use, plus fragmented systems that demand recurring staff time.

A different approach would use a shared data pool across employees, allowing light, median, and heavy users to continue their normal usage while balancing each other out. Combined with centralization of contracts, invoices, and reporting. This would cut both unused capacity and administrative overhead, ensuring enterprises pay only for what their employees actually consume. Addressing both the financial and time dimensions, shared pools provide a practical and scalable alternative to today’s inefficient model.

Figure 7. Total Hidden Costs of “Unlimited Data” at Different Headcounts

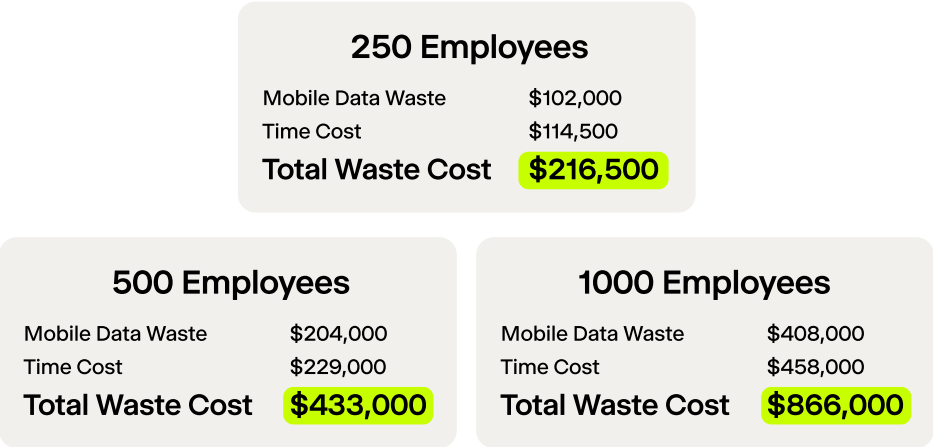
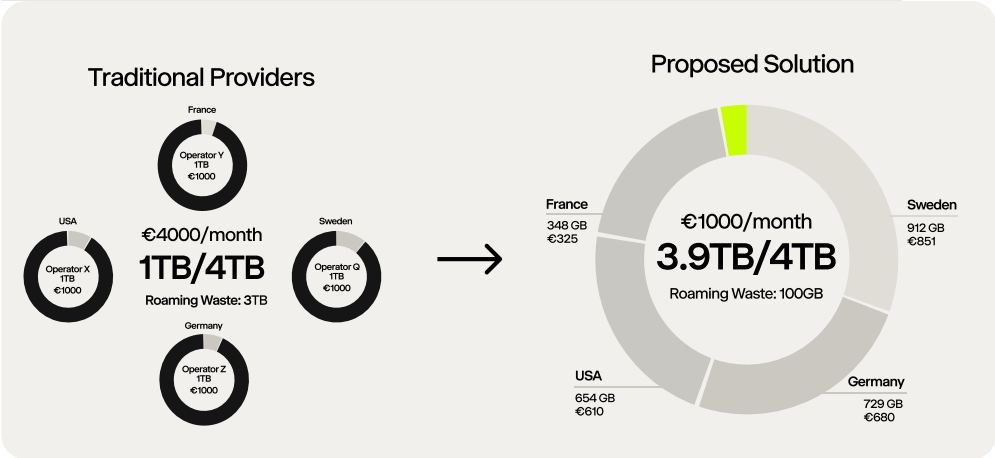


Figure 8. Current Mobile Management Model vs Suggested Solution



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Author: Jesper Palmborg

Contact: For more information contact info@telgea.com

Telgea Europe
Norrtullsgatan 2
113 29 Stockholm

<http://www.telgea.com>

