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Cyberloafing Management in Organizations

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Abstract

Entering into the third millennium and current information age, organizations and people are increasingly using technologies and networks. In recent decades, technological progresses have rapidly dominated the world. In this vein, the emergence of the Internet in different aspects of life is considered to be the greatest development of the 21st century. The Internet, along with technological advancements in the workplace, has created new opportunities for individuals' deviational behaviours. As a result, organizations face serious challenges. Internet emergence in the workplace has created many opportunities for organizations, e.g., increasing the velocity of communications in the organization. On the other hand, employees can use the internet for personal and non-working purposes. Online activities with personal aims are called cyberloafing/ cyberslacking. Hence, cyberloafing management is highly important. In this paper, we analyse the importance of this subject, as well as the different aspects of this phenomenon. To do this, we discuss relevant literature and texts. We also show these aspects in an Antecedents Behaviour Consequences (ABC) model. In this model, personality, job demands, role conflict, organizational policies and organizational justice are considered as the antecedents. Cyberloafing as behaviour, productivity and exhaustion are the consequences.

Keywords

Internet, Cyberloafing, Organization.

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Introduction

While IT innovations continue to change business, social and individual areas in different ways, they also increase the opportunity for deviational activities. Such activities have remarkable financial impacts on organizations. The annual estimated cost for organizations due to security violations, viruses, lower productivity (because of spam), identify and information theft, hacking, time wasting and nonworking usage of the Internet is over one billion dollars. In addition to the direct costs of cyberloafing, there are indirect costs that result from procedures, destroying brand images, customers' loyalty and general trust. Many events are not reported which increases the costs. IT borderless identity doubles the potential costs and risks of cyberloafing. Recently, organizations have begun to monitor and legalize employees' usage of information technology in workplaces. However, the effectiveness and neglected outcomes of such initiatives are vague. In order to effectively combat cyberloafing, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive understanding of such behaviours (Venkatraman, 2008).

Theoretical Basics

Cyberloafing is a new term introduced by the emergence of cyber sciences and the World Wide Web in particular. The term 'cyberloafing' was coined by Tony Cummins (1995) and in New York's daily news. The term grew notoriety when it was used in a 2002 paper by Lim (National Singapore University) which was published in the *Organizational Behavior Journal* (Selwyn, 2008).

Cyberloafing consists of two parts. Firstly, 'loafing' is extracted from 'loafer' which means a person who wastes his/her time. In 1995, 'cyber' was used as a prefix for phrases based on computer sciences in which computers were used as tools. Thus, cyberloafing is when a person wastes his/her time engaging in an act which is initially based on the computer and Internet. It means that someone wastes his/her time or he/she conducts personal affairs rather than business affairs through the space provided by the Internet (Gregory, 2011).

In another definition, cyberloafing means the deliberate usage of IT for nonbusiness affairs in the workplace and during defined working hours that do not need huge technological skills. They radically impact the organization. Such employees do not use time and resources properly or they create the lowest quality and quantity of work and violate the expected job outcome standard. In addition to violating such standards, such employees waste valuable organizational time by using technological resources to implement their personal tasks. As a result, they greatly weaken organizational productivity. Furthermore, such personal usage of workplace technologies can lead to serious problems in online networks and effective usage of organizational broadband (Venkatraman, 2008).

It is important to separately identify and study types of cyberloafing. Firstly, it is highly important for organizations to identify different types of cyberloafing. With this, they can be aware of the types of cyberloafing which repeatedly occur. Secondly, an organization can devise proper policies and interventions in order to decrease or manage cyberloafing prevalence. Recently, the focus of media and specialized journals has been on the personal use of Internet and relevant technologies in workplaces. A number of specialists have attempted to study the mental and functional impacts of this on businesses (Belanger, 2009).

Studies estimate that employees' browsing the Internet can cost organizations $183 billion every year. This amount relates to the damages to productivity, problems in broadband, legal issues and other associated costs and problems. A recent study by Websense (2005) indicates that, on average, employees spend six hours of their time per week using the Internet for personal aims.

Companies, like Xerox and HP, have alarmed their employees on the use of Internet for personal aims and violation of policies regarding the use of organizational computers. Some have even fired employees as a result.

Researchers have employed a variety of terms to describe non-productive Internet use in the workplace. Some of these terms include: personal web usage, cyberslacking and cyberloafing (as used in this

study). The following table provides a summary of the definitions used to describe this construct (Hartke, 2008).

Table 1. Definitions of cyberloafing construct

Term	Definition	Authors
Cyberloafing	"any voluntary act of employees using their companies' Internet access during office hours to surf nonwork related Web sites for nonwork purposes, and access (including receiving and sending) nonworkrelated email"	Lim, Teo & Loo, 2002, p.67
Personal Web Usage	"voluntary online Web behaviors during work time using any of the organization's resources for activities outside current customary job/work requirements"	Anandarajan & Simmers, 2004, p.19
	"extensive personal use of the Internet at work"	Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2004, p.32
Cyberslacking	"the overuse of the Internet in the workplace for purposes other than work"	Whitty & Carr, 2006, p.237

Cyberloafing Categorization/Typology

The main focus of cyberloafing literature is on identifying its categories. One of the earliest categorizations of cyberloafing was introduced by Lim (2002). It indicated that cyberloafing consists of two factors: 1. Slacking in the web and 2. Emailing. Slacking refers to reading news webs, online shopping and other activities other than emails which involve loafing in the network. Emailing means to check emails and send unrelated work messages (Rajah, 2011).

Lim defined cyberloafing as Internet misusing during work hours. However, there are many behaviours adapted to Lim's definition on cyberloafing. For example, Internet income generation (using Internet for additional income), sending messages, downloading nonbusiness information, using chat rooms and online games. These examples are all homogenous to Lim's definition of cyberloafing. However, they are not covered by his scales.

In this vein, two separated research teams created new scales which further cover cyberloafing. Blao *et al.* provided a new criterion. They extended Lim's cyberloafing to cover more items than in his original definition. These include talking with other people and online games. When the data were analysed, Lim's initial factors (slacking and emailing) were proved, whilst the factors introduced by Blao *et al.* in 2003 (interactive cyberslacking) were added as a third factor.

According to Blao *et al.* interactive cyberslacking is a kind of cyberloafing which involves active accountability by other people or software. They suggested that cyberloafing consists of three factors:

1. Cyberloafing in network,
2. Emailing and
3. Interactive cyberloafing (Zoghbi, 2012).

Mahatankon *et al.* (2004) was the second group that studied Lim's scale deficiencies and named these three factors as 1. E-commerce, 2. Information search and 3. Personal communication.

The fourth categorization was introduced by Blanchard and Henel (2008). They agreed with other authors that cyberloafing is a multidimensional concept. However, they argued that the difference between minor cyberloafing behaviours (i.e., studying CNN news page) and serious ones (visiting adult websites) is incredibly important. Consequently, they criticized previous categorization for not highlighting such differences. They stated that the difference between minor and serious cyberloafing is important since these are different antecedents which relate to other variables.

Ultimately, Ramayah (2010) introduced another type of cyberloafing. He recognized four activities:

1. Personal communications,
2. Access to personal information,
3. Personal downloads, and
4. Personal e-commerce.

Although new Internet activities are constantly being discovered, one can categorize them in the above mentioned four activities. This is due to their absolute levels.

- Social activity - this involves expressing yourself (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) or sharing information via blogs (e.g., blogger).
- Informational activity - this consists of search information like news sites (CNN).
- Leisure activity - this consists of activities like playing games online or downloading music (e.g., YouTube) or using software (Torrent-sites) for leisure purposes.

- Virtual emotional activity- used to describe online activities that cannot be categorized within the other activities. Examples of these activities are shopping online or searching for a relationship online (Doorn, 2011).

Table 2. Typology of cyberloafing.

Typology of Cyberloafing	Authors
slacking in the web and emailing.	Lim, 2002
cyberloafing in network, emailing and interactive cyberloafing	Blao *et al*, 2004
e-commerce, information search and personal communication.	Mahatankon *et al*, 2004
minor cyberloafing behaviors (i.e. studying CNN news page) and serious ones (visiting adults' websites)	Blanchard and Henel, 2008
Personal communications;Access to personal information; Personal downloading; and Personal e-commerce.	Ramayah, 2010
Social activity, Informational activity, Leisure activity, Virtual emotional activity.	Doorn, 2011

Antecedents of Cyberloafing

In some previous researches, the antecedents of cyberloafing are studied in three general areas: personal, work and organizational.

Organizational Factors

Organizational Policies: these antecedents are taken into account because it is important to know whether a policy positively or negatively influences cyberloafing. Policies that are included are politics that describe the use of the Internet (Caplan, 2002). Research indicates that a clear and transparent policy regarding the use of the Internet by employees in organizations is an effective way of controlling this phenomenon.

Organizational justice: literature suggests that if employees feel they are being unfairly treated by the organizations, they experience feelings of displeasure, rage and are more likely to seek retaliation against the organization. Studies show that employees seek to engage in deviant behaviours by working less or performing low quality work. One sign of this is cyberloafing. This is because technology provides a safe environment for such individuals as cyberloafing behaviours are more difficult to observe than chatting with co-workers. Three components of justice perceptions include distributive,

procedural and interactional. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes relative to one's contribution. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the procedures. Interactional justice refers to the perceptions of interpersonal treatment by the supervisors. Studies indicate justice perceptions are strongly related to cyberloafing (Venkatraman, 2008).

Work Factors

Job demands: cyberloafing activities studies show that when employees are confronted with low work demands, the possibility of engaging in cyberloafing is higher. This is caused by the spare time of the employees. When employees do not have enough work to do, he or she will engage in cyberloafing activities to pass the time. Henle and Blanchard also showed that high work demands result in an increased possibility of cyberloafing. Both extremes of work demand increase cyberloafing. Thus, Henle and Blanchard recommended finding a level of work for employees which results in minimum cyberloafing (Kidwell, 2010).

Role conflict: defined as irreconcilable demands in the workplace. These include conflicts in work duties and organizational polices, as well as conflicts between an employee's personal values and work duties. Henle and Blancard argued that this factor is a significant predictor of cyberloafing. Thus, employees who experience a heightened role of conflict in the workplace were more likely to cyberloaf (Freimark, 2012).

Personal Factors

Personality traits: the relationship between personality traits and the Internet are important when studying cyberloafing. This is because personality traits are characteristics of a person and also predict a person's behaviour in relation to the Internet. Landers and Lounsbury (2006) studied the well-known 'Big Five' in relation to Internet usage.

Extraversion: implies an energetic approach to the social and material world. It includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness and positive emotionality.

Agreeableness: contrasts a prosocial and communal orientation

towards others with antagonism. It includes traits such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust and modesty.

Conscientiousness: describes socially prescribed impulse control which facilitates task and goal-directed behaviour. For example, thinking before acting, delaying gratification, following norms and rules and experiential life, as well as planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks.

Neuroticism: contrasts emotional stability and even-temperedness with negative emotionality such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad and tense.

Openness to experience: (versus closed-mindedness) describes the breadth, depth, originality and complexity of an individual's mental ability. They found no relationship between Internet usage and neuroticism and openness. At the same time, agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion were found to be related to Internet usage.

- An explanation for the negative relationship between agreeableness and Internet usage is that the Internet is an environment in which agreeableness is less needed. This is with regard to the lack of interaction as opposed to an interpersonal setting. This fit between person and environment has led to less agreeable people using the Internet more often. This is demonstrated in research by Wyatt and Philips (2005).
- The negative relationship between conscientiousness and Internet usage is explained by the lower level of Internet distraction with persons who are more organized and reliable. This is relative to people who have a low level of conscientiousness.
- With regard to cyberloafing, the study of Wyatt and Philips (2005) found a positive relation between Extraversion and Cyberloafing (Hartke, 2008).

Locus of control: locus of control is the degree to which individuals believe they have the ability to control a situation. Specifically, individuals who have a high external locus of control believe that external forces have a greater control over a situation than they have.

Studies indicate a positive relationship between external locus of control and cyberloafing. Employees who cyberloaf believe that getting caught is outside of their control and is up to chance (Freimark, 2012).

Consequences of Cyberloafing

Antecedents of cyberloafing have been frequently studied. However, research into the consequences of cyberloafing are much less common. The concept of task performance is a particular concern, since cyberloafing could potentially have an extremely negative impact on productivity. Despite the lack of research conducted on the influence of cyberloafing on task performance, there has been much written speculation. This has led to the development of four competing perspectives.

The first one is that cyberloafing results in lower task performance through lost work time. In this regard, time spent on cyberloafing is time that would have been spent on work. Here, any loss of work time is expected to translate into lost productivity. If this perspective is correct, one should expect a negative relationship between cyberloafing and task performance (Vitak & LaRose, 2011).

The second perspective is that certain types of cyberloafing behaviours are either harmful or more harmful to productivity than other cyberloafing behaviours. Lim and Chen (2009) believe that social behaviours are more harmful to productivity. This is because relationship building nature of these activities requires more energy, time and cognitive resources. Lim and Chen (2009) also argue that these demands make it harder for an employee to switch back to work –related tasks compared to non-social behaviours, e.g., web browsing. Blau *et al.* (2004) made a similar argument for interactive behaviours which include social behaviours and online games. If this perspective is true, we should consider interactive and social behaviours to have negative associations with task performance. Moreover, these behaviours should more strongly relate to lower task performance than behaviours like browsing the web (Askew, 2012).

The third perspective has more positive associations with

cyberloafing. It suggests that cyberloafing can provide a respite from work and boost productivity when the employees return from work. The boost is assumed to be sustained enough to overcome any loss in productivity incurred during the cyberloafing session itself. The mechanism for this effect is one of recovery. Cognitive resources are drained during work-related tasks. Engaging in cyberloafing recovers these resources, allowing employees to become more productive. If this perspective is correct, there should be a positive relationship between cyberloafing and task performance. Furthermore, the amount of cyberloafing one does in short breaks should be associated with an increase in productivity (Weatherbee, 2012).

The fourth perspective is that cyberloafing only impacts task performance in certain cases. According to such a perspective, people have a certain amount of work to accomplish and they resort to cyberloafing when they have the time to do so. It does not mean that anyone is equally productive; it suggests that each employee has a certain standard of work they aspire to and they put enough work in to obtain that standard and engage in cyberloafing with some of the leftover time. If this perspective is correct, then there should be no relationship - or a small relationship - between cyberloafing and task performance. Moreover, it is also the case that cyberloafing is only harmful if done in excess. Frequent long durations of cyberloafing should negatively predict task performance (Askew, 2012).

Exhaustion is another consequence of cyberloafing. Studies indicate that high cyberloafing exhausts people, leaving them with a lack of focus on their next job. Consequently, exhaustion impacts their work. On the other hand, some researches show that, when there is a high volume of work, recovery is needed to prevent exhaustion. Cyberloafing can have a positive effect on the well-being of an employee. Thus, cyberloafing in relation to exhaustion can serve as a micro break. Hence, low and controlled cyberloafing can help to create better morale as a recreational time. At the same time, high and uncontrolled cyberloafing can exhaust employees and yield to their inefficiency (Doorn, 2011).

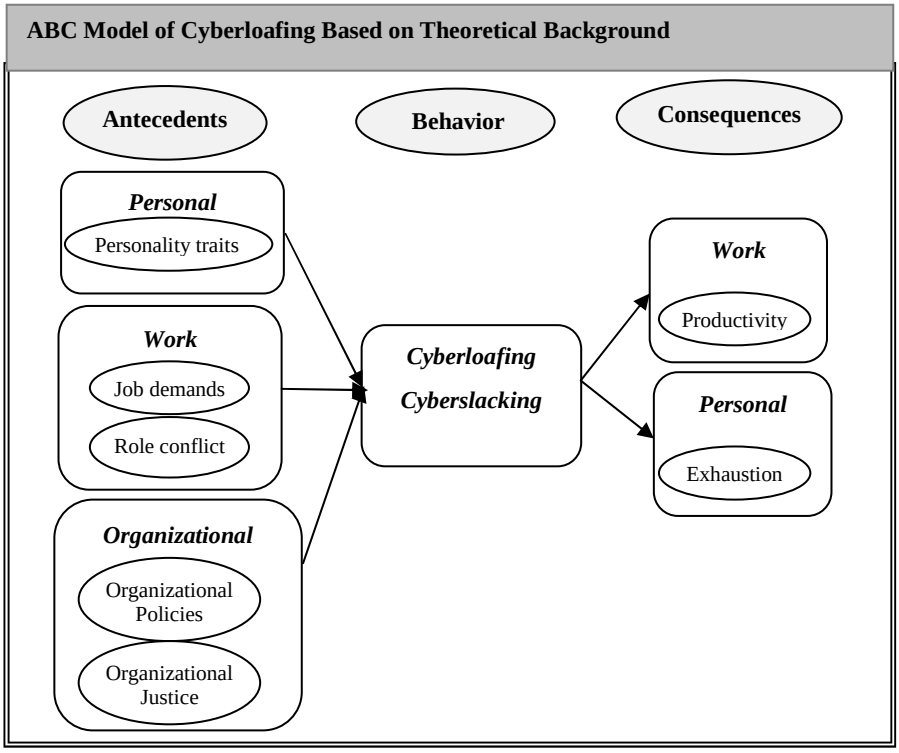

Fig. 1. ABC Model Based on Theoretical Background

Conclusion

Despite companies using control mechanisms and policies to combat cyberloafing, it is still being observed among employees. Studies indicate that control systems alone cannot prevent cyberloafing: "It is like a dog that barks highly but does not bite." It seems necessary that observers should have a negative attitude towards cyberloafing. Likewise, employees should have an appropriate understanding of controlling initiatives and security mechanisms. Information on punishments should be clear and such information should be disseminated among employees. Managers should resort to disciplinary procedures and sanctions from the beginning (Manrique & Mesa, 2010).

Overall, it is impossible to fully eliminate cyberloafing activities. Organizational managers need to make the policies of Internet usage

very clear. Employees should be aware that using the Internet system in work hours and navigating websites for personal aims that have no relation to their work, as well as checking personal emails, are, *inter alia*, included in such policies. Lack of attempts in preventing cyberloafing may leave organizations with huge losses (Manrique, 2008).

In fact, cyberloafing is responsible for a 30 - 40% decrease in organizational productivity. According to studies on 1,000 US workers, 64% have engaged in cyberloafing for personal aims. Recent studies indicate that companies complain of huge losses. These are mainly related to high costs, time wasting and lower productivity levels. With regard to current statistics, it is not surprising that companies have a serious fight in order to adopt Internet use laws (Henle & Blanchard, 2008). Regarding the above points, organizations should find an effective way for proper management so that their employees use available tools in the best manner. However, effective management of cyberloafing requires a set of techniques and utilizing one method alone is not effective. On an individual level, personality traits impact cyberloafing. This factor provides organizations with valuable information on pre-employment scanning. With this, organizations can measure traits (e.g., consciousness, internal locus of control, altruism) in their hiring of employees and selection of people for sensitive and critical positions, or those positions which need a strong relationship with clients. It is important to note that young forces who are incrementally entering organizations are fully familiar with the Internet. Thus, organizations should contemplate for a precise planning on effective management of such phenomenon to prevent productivity fall and organizational huge costs due to cyberloafing.

With regard to jobs, the human resource management should act more sensitively and consider suitable quantity of personnel for each unit based on work volume. In other words, there should be proper job designs in order to minimize role conflict and to prevent cyberloafing.

With regard to organization, as mentioned, companies should clearly proclaim their policies on staff's Internet usage so that employees are made aware of the consequences of cyberloafing.

Concerning organizational justice, organizations should pay more attention to motivational mechanisms in the workplace. An emphasis should be particularly made on organizational justice in distributive, interactional and procedural sections. This is because perceived injustice by employees is an important factor of cyberloafing. Likewise, organizations should plan on establishing a constructive and positive culture in their organization - a culture based on mutual trust and respect which expounds values. In an organization where the right culture of Internet usage is institutionalized, it would ultimately yield to such processes as self – management among employees and behaviours in line with values which would prevent any problems in this regard.

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