

Cyber loafing – a holistic perspective

By **Prof.(Ms).S.Malhotra**

ABSTRACT

Contributing to significant business opportunities and the enhancement of employee's productivity, the Internet has changed how work is done. These benefits, including cost reductions, decreased product cycle time, and easier access to information are not without a downside. The use of the Internet in the workplace has also raised concerns regarding privacy, organizational liability and a new workplace threat to productivity— CYBERLOAFING, as a result of employees' non-work related Internet activities. From a more general perspective, Cyberloafing can be classified as a form of procrastination. This is because when employees cyberloaf, they are delaying work till a later time period (Lay & Silverman, 1996). Researchers argued that personality, specifically, the Big Five Personality factors (i.e. Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness to new experiences and Conscientiousness) plays an important role in determining why some people procrastinate more than others. Research has shown that individuals who are high on conscientiousness tend to engage in less loafing behavior's (Colbert, Mount, Harte, Witt & Barrick 2004). In this paper, we explore the role of various factors over and above the Big-Five personality traits that influence the degree to which individuals engage in Cyberloafing. The paper attempts to achieve a holistic perspective on cyberloafing.

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in online technologies have redefined the confines in which internet can be accessed, allowing us to tap on the World Wide Web on the go. Organizations, in particular, have been quick to identify and harness the potential offered by the internet as a platform for conducting business in nontraditional ways, and as a tool for enhancing employee performance (Lim, 2002:675-676). However, as additional new technologies get incorporated to the workplace, new problems arise. Internet has also brought along with it several caveats, one of them being the use of workplace internet access for non-work related purposes (Lim and Chen, in press; Lim, Teo & Loo, 2002). Anecdotal evidence revealed that some employees spend as much as **6 hours per day surfing the internet** at their workplace (Fox, 2007). The non-work related internet usage has lead to huge monetary and productivity losses for organizations (DebtCubed, 2006). Thus, it is apparent that non-work related internet use constitutes one of the most prominent counter-productive activities that modern organizations have to grapple with.

Although previous studies have examined non-work related internet usage as an outcome of personality (e.g. Zoghbi, 2007), little has been done to investigate how various individual personalities and personal factors affect the abuse of internet access. This paper attempts to amalgamate the results of prior researches and delve deep into the topic and establish a more multi dimensional perspective on cyber loafing by examining the antecedents and consequences of cyber loafing.

CYBERLOAFING

There are variety of approaches and definitions for non-work-related Internet use in organizations. Most popular terms used in the literature are **Cyberloafing**, cyberslacking and non-work related computing. Consistent with Lim (2002), we defined Cyberloafing as

“voluntary acts of employees’ using their companies’ internet access during office hours to surf non-work related web sites for personal purposes”. Li and Chung (2006) conceptualized the **four activities of Cyberloafing**:

- **Social,**
- **Informational,**
- **Leisure,**
- **Virtual Emotional.**

The nature of Internet usage makes Cyberloafing much more difficult for coworkers to discern by observation. Workers can now maintain the guise of being hard at work in the real world, while travelling through cyberspace visiting non-work related websites for personal interests and purposes. Unlike other forms of loafing, Cyberloafing does not require one to be physically absent from the office for long periods of time and, thus, is not as visible as other loafing behaviors. In fact, employees can spend substantial amounts of time engaged in personal pursuits without even leaving their desks. Not surprisingly, the costs of such behavior can have a significant impact on an organization. For instance, a study of employee web surfing in the **United Kingdom pegged the cost to employers at some \$600 million dollars annually (Taylor, 2007). Web spy 2004 reports that employees spend 31% of time on non-work related activities.**

ANTECEDENTS OF CYBERLOAFING

Since Cyber loafing can lead to negative consequences for the organizations, it is important for organizations to understand why employees engage in Cyber loafing in the workplace and understand the factors that contribute to this behavior so that organizations can effectively manage employee’s Internet usage at work (Lieberman et al, 2011:2193). In order to get a global

perspective on cyber loafing it is important to look into the personal and organizational factors that influence cyber loafing. The organizational factors that could play a role in influencing cyber loafing are:

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Several organizational factors may influence propensity of employees to Cyber loaf, some factors are discussed below:

Restrictions and anticipated outcomes of Internet Use

By limiting employees' use of work computers, whether through policy, technological deterrents, or both, employers reduce the benefits of using the Internet for nonwork purposes while promoting employee self-regulation. (Garrett and Danziger, 2008: 942 - 950). Conversely, employees who would face stronger penalties for engaging in deviant behaviors were less likely to cyberloaf (Vitak et al, 2011:1752). Research found that employees are less likely to engage in cyberloafing activities that they perceive to have serious negative consequences for their organization and hurt their personal interest (e.g. Lim and Teo 2005, Blanchard and Henle 2008; Lim and Chen, 2012: 346; Vitak et al, 2011: 1758; Woon and Pee, 2004:81).

Perceived Coworker Cyberloafing Norms

Research showed that coworker and supervisor norms supporting cyberloafing are positively related to cyberloafing (Woon and Pee, 2004: 83). Blau et al. (2006) suggested that employees look to other coworkers as potential role models in the organization and that cyberloafing is learned through copying the behaviors that they see by individuals in their organizational environment (Lieberman et al, 2011:2197)

Job Commitment

Job commitment is another individual-level factor that might play a powerful role in shaping personal Internet use at work by influencing its expected benefits. It is argued that employees who are emotionally attached to their work organization will find personal Internet use to be less compatible with work routines than those who are not. For a committed individual, non-work related activity reduces productivity, is inconsistent with self-image, and might undermine workplace status. These considerations suggest that individuals more committed to their work should be less like to engage in cyber loafing (Garrett and Danziger, 2008:942).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is shown to be a significant factor affecting Internet abuse in relation to employee's detachment with aspects of their job and desire to disengage by substituting other activities. Garrett and Danziger (2007) did not find any relationship between job satisfaction and cyberloafing.

Job Characteristics

It is feasible that specific job characteristics may lead to more cyberloafing to increase creativity or relieve boredom. On the other hand, creative jobs are likely to have more varied demands and be less boring, and so are less likely to motivate communicative cyberslacking (Vitak et al, 2011:1753).

PERSONAL FACTORS:

In order to get a complete understanding of multi dimensional nature of cyber loafing we should also analyze the personal factors that have an impact on cyber loafing. Review of prior literature brings forth an array of factors that influence cyberloafing, this paper attempts to list down some of the factors

The Big Five Personality factors

The Big Five personality theory developed by McCrae & Costa, (2008) outlines five significant traits: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness- these basic tendencies are inborn and develop throughout one's lifespan, influencing an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions

The relationship between personality traits and Internet usage can be important when studying Cyberloafing, because personality traits are characteristic of a person and also predict a person's behavior related to the Internet or to any other form of Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) in general (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003; Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006; Spector & Fox, 2002). Landers and Lounsbury (2006) studied the well-known "Big Five" in relation to Internet usage. The five personality traits with their definitions are:

- Extraversion, describes *"the extent to which individuals are gregarious, assertive, and sociable versus reserved, timid, and quiet"* (Salgado, 2004, p.569)
- Agreeableness is defined as *"the degree to which individuals are cooperative, warm and agreeable versus cold, disagreeable, rude and antagonistic"* (Salgado, 2004, p.569)
- Conscientiousness refers to the *"the degree to which individuals are hardworking, organized, dependable, reliable, and persevering versus lazy, unorganized, and unreliable"* (Salgado, 2004, p.569)
- Neuroticism addresses *"the degree to which individuals are secure, non-anxious, calm, self-confident, and cool versus insecure, anxious, depressed, and emotional"* (Salgado, 2004, p.569)
- Openness is defined as *"individuals who are creative, curious, and cultured versus practical with narrow interests"* (Salgado, 2004, p.569)

Landers and Lounsbury (2006) found no relation between Neuroticism and Openness and Internet usage. However, **Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Extraversion were all negatively related to Internet usage.**

- Internet is an environment in which Agreeableness is less needed regarding the lack of interaction as opposed to an interpersonal setting so the internet is more often used by less agreeable people, which is acknowledged by the research of Wyatt and Phillips (2005)
- The negative relation between Conscientiousness and Internet use is explained by less distraction of the Internet preferred by people who are high on Conscientiousness
- Introverted people spent more time online than extraverted people. This can be explained by social activities, not involving computers, in which extraverted people are more likely to engage in than introverted people.

Locus of control: locus of control (Julian.b.Rotter 1954) is the amount of control that a person feels he or she has over the environment. People who are **externally oriented** known as externals, perceive little connection between their own actions and occurrences of rewards and tend to perceive themselves as powerless. **Internally oriented** people view the world as responsive to their action; they feel confident they can control when rewards and punishment occur and tend to display high levels of self confidence. Blanchard stated that as external locus of control is a significant antecedent of other counterproductive work behaviors, therefore it may also be related to both minor and serious cyberloafing. It is also found that employees with a high external locus of control and those with low self-esteem reported diminished self-control of Internet use which in turn affected their level of Internet abuse at work (Vitak et al, 2011:1752). Externally-oriented people or people who believe that powerful others or chance have control

over their lives were found to be less successful in controlling their Internet use (Chak and Leung, 2004:567)

Self-Efficacy: Self-efficacy is defined as the ability of individuals to perceive themselves as being highly focused and having a clear sight of their goals (Bandura, 1997). Bandura argued that those who score high on self-efficacy will tend to believe that they will perform well on a given task. These highly efficacious individuals will also have a ‘perception’ that they are capable of moderating and planning their behaviours in such a way that they will regulate their effort consistently over a period time (Locke & Latham, 1990). Thus, self-efficacy should amplify the negative relationship between self-regulation and cyberloafing since individuals who are high on self-efficacy will perceive themselves to be good regulators and therefore not cyberloaf.

Conscientiousness: As discussed in the Big five personality factor, individuals high on this factor are high on the degree to which they can control their behavior to reach their goals and not get influenced by their impulses and cyberloaf frequently.

Achievement Orientation: Individuals who are high on achievement orientation are found to be “more determined to pursue their goals, perceive greater urgency in pursuing their goals and are willing to invest time and effort to pursue their goal” (Diehl, Semegon, & Schwarzer, 2006). High achievement orientated individuals are highly focused so direct their efforts towards goal fulfillment and indulge less in cyberloafing.

CONSEQUENCES OF CYBERLOAFING

Cyberloafing may be constructive when it helps employees and the organization. However, it can be destructive when it prevents employees from being productive. Many researchers argue that Cyberloafing is wasteful and opens the organization up for lawsuits. Other researchers, however,

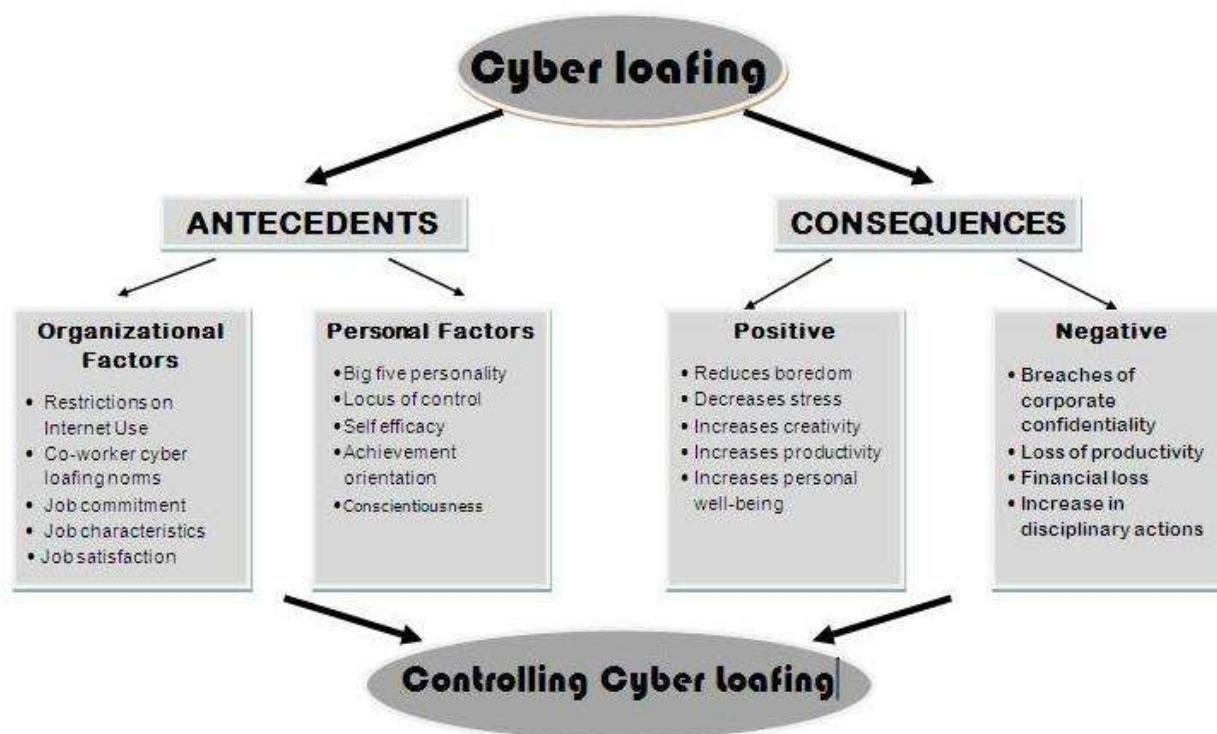
do not believe that Cyberloafing is necessarily bad or even inappropriate. The duality of cyberloafing can be best brought out by discussing both its positive and negative consequences.

Positive consequences

While Cyberloafing is typically portrayed as a negative behavior leading to losses in productivity and revenue, engaging for brief periods of time on tasks not related to work may have positive effects, including relief from boredom, fatigue, or stress, greater job satisfaction or creativity, increases in well-being, recreation and recovery, and overall happier employees (Vitak et al, 2011:1752). It is found that taking time off work to browse websites for personal purposes may help to increase productivity. Researchers argue that the Internet provides a much needed diversion at work which can lead to creativity, flexibility and foster a learning environment (Blanchard and Henle, 2008:1069).

Negative consequences

Some of the negative impacts experienced by organizations include: disciplinary actions, termination or loss of employees, breaches of corporate confidentiality and reputation loss, or personal privacy, personal and organizational liability and the associated legal costs, as well as billions of dollars in lost productivity (Weatherbee, 2010:35-36). In addition, Cyberloafing can cause problems in the information system's security and general proper functioning, such as bandwidth clogging, spyware infection, and task postponement (Lara and Mesa, 2010:1039).



CONCLUSION

Cyberloafing is a common phenomenon in today's organizations (Lim and Teo, 2005) and the scope of Cyberloafing in organizational settings is quite broad, as are the associated outcomes. Besides, as the technology evolves even new types of Cyberloafing emerge and the range of Cyberloafing activities extends (Weatherbee, 2010:36-42). Reports related to the cost of Cyberloafing shows organizations the importance of controlling Cyberloafing behavior. Adverse effects of Cyberloafing on organizations cannot be neglected as well as its positive effects on

employees. Therefore, necessary measures should be taken in order to control and manage Cyberloafing in organizations.

Organizational and psychological research literatures offer **two main strategies for** controlling employee misconduct such as Cyberloafing -intrinsically oriented **self-regulatory** strategies; and extrinsically oriented **coercive strategies**; where employees' behavior is enforced by external contingencies in their environment (Lara and Mesa, 2010:1040). The self-regulatory approach focuses on an individual's inherent desires to follow the rules (Ugrin et al, 2008b:77-78). Coercive strategies, on the other hand, are linked to extrinsic motivational models of employee behavior, in which employees act rationally by weighing the benefits and costs of a decision (Lara and Mesa, 2010:1040). Common methods used in order to control cyberloafing in organizations will be listed as follows: educating and informing employees, adapting computer use policies, establishing monitoring systems, enforcement

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prof. Ms. Shubda Malhotra is Vice Principal and Head of the Department (Psychology) at St. Andrews college, Mumbai with over 17 years of teaching experience in general, social and industrial & organizational psychology. She stood 2nd in the University at the Masters level (psychology) and continued to pursue her M.Phil in Indl. & Org. Psychology from University of Delhi. Besides teaching she also has varied exposure in corporate assessment, adolescent
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