

Chapter 63

Cyberloafing and Constructive Recreation

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ABSTRACT

“Cyberloafing” in workplace and educational contexts refers to the uses of computer-related applications and devices in ways or at times that are not directly sanctioned by employers, managers, or teachers. It has often been considered as a kind of “time theft” on the part of employees, possibly decreasing workplace and educational productivity by consuming attention, energies, and resources designated for organizational operations. In contrast, many employees and students have construed cyberloafing as a stress reliever and as support for personal wellbeing, often with the rationale that they are able to engage effectively in alternating or multitasking between and among their various work and off-work endeavors. “Constructive recreation,” in contrast with cyberloafing, comprises online recreation and gamification initiatives designed by employees along with managers; these initiatives are designed to be in sync with productive efforts and support the wellbeing of all organizational participants. The chapter analyzes research trends and public discourse related to both to cyberloafing and to constructive recreation.

INTRODUCTION

“Cyberloafing” in workplace and educational contexts refers to the uses of computer-related applications and devices in ways or at times that are not directly sanctioned by employers, managers, or teachers. It has often been considered as a kind of “time theft” on the part of employees and students (as described in Block, 2001), possibly decreasing workplace and educational productivity by consuming attention, energies, and resources designated for organizational operations. In contrast, many employees and students have construed cyberloafing as a stress reliever and as a support for personal wellbeing, often with the rationale that they are able to engage effectively in alternating or multitasking between and among their various work and off-work endeavors (Adler & Benbunan-Fich, 2013). “Constructive recreation,” in contrast with cyberloafing, comprises online recreation and gamification initiatives that are designed by employees along with managers; these initiatives are designed to be in synch with productive efforts

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and support the wellbeing of all organizational participants (Oravec, 2002; 2004a). This article compares and contrasts cyberloafing processes with constructive recreation approaches, the latter involving conscientious consideration of how online leisure activities can enhance workplace and educational activity and improve organizational productivity. The article analyzes some current research trends and public discourse related to cyberloafing; it also describes some constructive recreation approaches that have been explored over the past decades.

Many recent computing technology and gamification advances have helped to blur the conceptual and pragmatic boundaries between “work” and “play,” distinctions that have great cultural variation (Deterting, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011; Oravec, 2015). This article indeed focuses on cyberloafing issues within the US and UK, but international dimensions can also become especially salient in a world of globalized corporate interactions and relations. Cyberloafing practices that are acceptable in one nation may be seen in harsher lights in other places, given cultural and ethical differences that affect how work is structured and evaluated (Cheng, Li, Zhai, & Smyth, 2014; Sheikh, Atashgah, & Adibzadegan, 2015). International and regional variations in organizational approaches to cyberloafing can illuminate other significant aspects of workplace culture (Canaan Messarra, Karkoulia, & McCarthy, 2011), variations that can become salient as many organizations deal with international outsourcers or with units that are rooted in various nations.

BACKGROUND

The term “cyberloafing” emerged in academic and popular discourse in the 1990s as a way of characterizing the growing phenomenon of non-sanctioned online recreation and other activities (Oravec, 2002). Cyberloafing has been defined by Lim (2002) as the “act of employees using their companies’ internet access for personal purposes during work hours” (p. 675). Researchers have generated associated concepts such as Anandarajan, Simmers, and D’Ovidio’s (2011) framing of “personal web usage” or PWR, which is a more specific characterization of cyberloafing activity. As outlined in the “Key Words and Definitions” section below, “cyberbludging” is often used in some nations to refer to individuals’ use of computers in the workplace for recreation while shirking responsibility for work outcomes (Hernandez-Castro, 2016; Liaskos & Sandy, 2004). An alternate term, “cyberslacking,” is often used to label computer usage by students or younger members of the workforce (although it sometimes also emerges in broader discussions of the issue). Other characterizations of these phenomena include “non-work-related computing, cyber deviance, personal use at work, Internet abuse, workplace Internet leisure browsing, and junk computing” (Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011, p. 1751). Cyberloafing has also been examined as an aspect of the larger construct of “counterproductive workplace behavior” (as formulated in O’Neill, Hambley, and Bercovich, 2014), which also refers to a broader assortment of online workplace dysfunctions such as hacking, manipulation of metrics, and theft of resources (Oravec, 2017). Burnay, Billieux, Blairy, & Larøi (2015) linked some forms of cyberloafing with “obsessive passion” (p. 28). Askew (2012) explores the relationship between cyberloafing and task performance, and Jia, Jia, and Karau (2013) examines the influences of personality and workplace situational factors on cyberloafing. Some researchers portray cyberloafing as a kind of “deviance” (Weatherbee, 2010), despite the wide proliferation of cyberloafing behaviors and their normalization in some settings.

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