

## 'Cyberloafing' at work no bad thing, study says

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Andrea Polzer-Debruyne checks out YouTube in her own time

(PhysOrg.com) -- Employees who cyberloaf - use the Internet at work for their own interest - may be doing their bosses a favour, a Massey study suggests.

Although potentially open to abuse, the fluid border between work and personal life created by the Internet is a boon for employees and employers, says Massey University PhD student Andrea Polzer-Debruyne, who studied personal Internet use at work for her psychology thesis.

She found that people whose employers tolerated a reasonable amount of personal emailing and other Internet use at work tended to be more open

to doing work from home in their own time or making themselves available on-line to deal with clients or handle after-hours matters.

She says it is one of few such studies internationally into the reasons and attitudes behind the ubiquitous practice of personal Internet use at work.

Some workers she surveyed said they felt the boundary between work and life is becoming increasingly blurred, with growing expectations of being available online for work at home. As a result, workers feel justified in shopping, banking and paying bills online at work and are therefore less resentful of being expected to carry out work duties outside office hours.

Using the Internet for personal use at work may also reduces stress for employees, giving them mini breaks that can potentially make them more productive, she suggests.

“Using the Internet for private use at work can be good for an organisation,” says one respondent in her survey. “If an employee orders a present or groceries over the net at work, it takes half the time it would if they had to leave the office and do it. In reality people can be more productive and balance their work and private lives better.”

For many workers, however, using the Internet for "cyberloafing" or "cyberslacking" is a way of alleviating boredom, regardless of how busy they are with work or how much they have to do.

“The Internet-enabled work station is, for many employees, the ideal place to regain some purpose and enthusiasm during their working day, and to balance boredom with more meaningful stimuli,” she says. “These stimuli can, for example, be provided by email contact with others, reinforcing that one has purpose as a friend, colleague or family member.”

But the push to do so is tempered in varying degrees by the individual's moral norms about whether using the Internet at work for purely personal reasons, such as emailing friends, booking holidays or concert tickets or playing online games, is wrong.

Mrs Polzer-Debruyne, who graduates on Thursday from the Albany campus, says her interest in the topic was aroused during a stint as human resources consultant. She was struck by how extensively her office co-workers used the Internet for their own interests and began the study with the view that personal web use at work was a form of time theft and therefore wrong.

But having surveyed nearly 300 people (two thirds from New Zealand and the rest from Finland, Germany Singapore, South Africa, Sweden and the United States) she has altered her view dramatically.

She says the Internet is an endemic, pervasive tool of modern life whose multifaceted uses cannot be rigidly restricted within a work environment. If used within reason, personal [Internet use](#) can be an acceptable aspect of a “give and take” work culture based on mutual respect and trust between employee and employer.

While most New Zealand [work](#) places have rules and policies restricting personal Internet, with some banning or blocking access to particular websites, she was not aware of anyone being fired solely for breaching such rules. Companies that install electronic monitoring systems to deter personal use could end up creating mistrust and resentment among staff, she says.

Provided by Massey University

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