

All play, no work: Policy, enforcement may stop employees from wasting time online at work, researcher finds

January 31 2013, by Trevor Davis

(Phys.org)—Businesses must deal with weary-eyed office workers who are sitting behind computer screens and watching cat videos, shopping online and updating their Facebook statuses.

A Kansas State University researcher studied cyberloafing—wasting time at work on the Internet—and the effects of Internet use policies and punishment on reducing cyberloafing.

Joseph Ugrin, assistant professor of accounting at Kansas State University, and John Pearson, associate professor of management at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, found that company policies are not enough to stop workers from wasting time at work and that sanctions with policies must be consistently enforced for policies to be effective.

The study will be published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*.

Cyberloafing results in lost productivity and could put companies in legal trouble when workers conduct illegal activity or unacceptable behavior like viewing pornography on work computers. Between 60 and 80 percent of people's time on the Internet at work has nothing to do with work.

Although organizations benefit from positive aspects of the Internet like improved communication, some have trouble addressing cyberloafing, Ugrin said. Companies spend time, money and effort trying to monitor computer usage, detect what employees are doing online and write policies for employees on acceptable Internet behavior.

The researchers, who surveyed [office workers](#) and university students, found that both older and younger workers find ways to waste time on the Internet—but in different ways.

"Older people are doing things like managing their finances, while young people found it much more acceptable to spend time on [social networking sites](#) like Facebook," said Ugrin, who studies behavioral and ethical issues related to accounting and information systems.

Threats of termination and detection mechanisms are effective deterrents against activities such as viewing pornography, managing personal finances and personal shopping, according to the study. However, that may not be enough.

Policies must be enforced to discourage activities like excessive personal emailing and [social networking](#).

"We found that that for young people, it was hard to get them to think that social networking was unacceptable behavior," Ugrin said. "Just having a policy in place did not change their attitudes or behavior at all. Even when they knew they were being monitored, they still did not care."

Researchers discovered that the only way to change people's attitudes is to provide them with information about other employees who were reprimanded.

But that strategy can have negative consequences in the workplace and can lower morale, Ugrin said.

"People will feel like Big Brother is watching them, so companies need to be careful when taking those types of action," he said.

The study allows questions for further study, Ugrin said.

"We don't want to make everyone at work upset because the corporate office is watching over their employees' shoulders," he said, "but what if [workers](#) are wasting all of their time online? Where's the balance?"

Provided by Kansas State University

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