Study examines personality traits that make some home-based employees more likely to stray on Internet

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(Medical Xpress)—Psychologists from the University of Calgary have conducted a study isolating key personality traits that might make some employees more predisposed to cyberslacking than others, while working from home.

The study, published in the scientific journal *Computers in Human Behavior*, identifies such distinct [personality traits](#) as procrastination, honesty, agreeableness and conscientiousness as being factors that may influence the Internet habits of those in distributive [work](#) arrangements.

The authors - organizational psychologist Thomas O'Neill, an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, Laura A. Hambley, an adjunct professor in the department, and Angelina Bercovich (BSc, Psychology) - believe that cyberslacking can be avoided with proper self-management and understanding of how personality influences work behaviour.

"Our goal is to give people feedback about their personality in respect to cyberslacking, to help them better manage themselves when they're working remotely," says O'Neill. The findings also let managers know what the risk factors are when their employees are working from home, so they can develop a plan for supporting these people.

"If managers find they have an employee for whom working at home is

not a good fit, it lets them know that maybe that person shouldn't be working at home as frequently as someone with a strong fit," O'Neill adds.

When the Internet became widely available in the modern workplace the problem of cyberslacking - which involves surfing the Internet on company time for non-work related purposes - emerged almost immediately.

In recent years this dilemma has become more complicated than ever with the integration of distributed work arrangements, by which employees are increasingly able to work from home. The rise of distributed work has been linked to many benefits for modern organizations, but it also poses new challenges. For one, when a person is working at home, they may be more tempted by the lure of the Internet when there's no threat of being caught cyberslacking by supervisors and co-workers.

Of course, personalities predisposed to procrastination are more likely than others to indulge in cyberslacking. Conversely, people who ranked high in the area of conscientiousness were less likely to succumb to Internet temptations while working.

Honesty and agreeableness were also factors at play in the cyberslacker profile, with subjects who ranked low in these areas more likely to be led astray. "Honesty has to do with high integrity, so people like that aren't going to feel comfortable collecting a pay cheque while they slack off at home," explains O'Neill.

"This study is not meant to be a barrier to letting employees work from a distance," O'Neill stresses. Indeed, he points out, given the high cost of office real estate, and the cost effectiveness of technology allowing employees to work from home, it's virtually impossible to stop that

revolution.

"The study is not a witch hunt either," O'Neill says. "We don't want people to feel that if they're screened and have certain personality traits that they'll be prevented from working away from the office. That's not the case at all. What we're trying to do is show people how they can better understand themselves, their habits, and their tendencies in order to be more effective."

Provided by University of Calgary

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