

Using mobile devices for work increases perceptions of productivity, but takes a toll on quality of family life

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Mobile technologies allow employees to maintain a constant connection with their workplace and deal with unaddressed work demands while at

home. Individuals try to compensate for the conflicts between family and work demands by increasing the use of their mobile phone for work outside office hours. However, the boosted productivity comes at the expense of personal well-being and family relationships, according to a new paper published in *Information Systems Research* by Massimo Magni (Department of Management and Technology), Manju K. Ahuja (University of Louisville) and Chiara Trombini (INSEAD Singapore).

In particular, a heavy usage of mobile devices for work purposes at home can lead to increase in self-perceived productivity, but also in stress-related level of somatic symptoms and need for recovery.

Family work conflict originates from the incompatibility of responsibilities for [family](#) and work because these two domains are characterized by different demands in terms of responsibilities, expectations, and commitments. Individuals have to make tradeoffs in allocating time and energy because they have a limited pool of resources (such as energy and time). "As family demands encroach into [work time](#), individuals will be more likely to use mobile phones to fulfill the demands of their work environment that are still untapped," Prof. Magni pointed out. "This is further exacerbated when their organizational environment is competitive."

"Individuals tend to show off their availability and willingness for work when they perceive an organizational climate that fosters competition among employees," Prof. Magni explained. "If you are part of the competition, you have no choice but to play the game." But there is a price to pay: "While these employees report significantly improved productivity, they also tend to suffer from stress-related physiological symptoms like headaches and have a higher need for recuperation. Unfortunately, they were also obnoxious at home."

The findings come from online surveys of 324 participants in the United

States and their live-in partners. Participants were asked to complete two surveys two weeks apart. The first measured the extent of conflict between family and work commitments as well as how competitive their workplace was. The second asked about their productivity (e.g. "I'm able to accomplish more work than would otherwise be possible"), whether they had experienced any somatic symptoms (e.g. headaches, stomach ache), their need for recovery (e.g. feeling exhausted at the end of the work day) and whether they had been unpleasant (e.g. behaving in a critical or passive-aggressive manner) to their family.

Separately, their partners filled in a single survey about participants' [mobile phone](#) use for work-related activities outside working hours. Among the questions were, "S/he spends much of his/her time using his/her smartphone" and "How much time does your partner spend on his/her smartphone?"

"Our findings could serve to raise awareness among individuals on the importance of being more conscious about managing the boundaries between work and [personal life](#)," Prof. Magni suggested, "Well-being and responsible use of technology can be traced back to individuals' behaviors and [organizational culture](#), and the right to disconnect should be respected."

Organizations can go a long way towards erecting healthy boundaries—if for no other reason than to retain and attract employees in a tight job market. Supermarket operator Lidl Belgium, for example, announced in 2018 a ban on emails among employees between 6pm and 7am. "It is not necessary for managers to set strict rules like this, while a favorable civic culture for work-life balance can be developed. Employees should keep in mind that they can decide whether to reply to the emails and answer the phone calls. Organizations may help [employees](#) learn how to prioritize through planning in advance, which was investigated in another related paper of mine," Prof. Magni concludes.

More information: Massimo Magni et al, Excessive Mobile Use and Family-Work Conflict: A Resource Drain Theory Approach to Examine Their Effects on Productivity and Well-Being, *Information Systems Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1287/isre.2022.1121](https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.2022.1121)

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