Chapter XII

Internet Abuse and Addiction in the Workplace: Issues and Concerns for Employers

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ABSTRACT

The Internet as a communication medium has become an increasing part of many people’s day-to-day working lives. As with the introduction of other mass communication technologies, issues surrounding use, abuse, and addiction have surfaced. For instance, according to a recent report carried out by the company SurfControl (Snoddy, 2000), office workers who while away one hour a day at work on various non-work activities (e.g., trading shares, booking holidays, shopping online, etc.) could be costing businesses as much as $35 million a year. The survey found that...
59% of office Internet use was not work related and that those who traded in shares, played sports, shopped, and booked holidays cost companies the most. It is clear from research such as this that Internet abuse is a serious cause for concern—particularly to employers. This chapter has a number of objectives. It will first introduce readers to the concept of Internet addiction, before going on to look at the wider issue of Internet abuse in the workplace. Generic types of Internet abuse will be described, in addition to further examination of the reasons why Internet abuse occurs. The chapter ends with an overview of three very specific types of Internet abuse (i.e., online pornography, sexually related Internet crime, and online gambling), that will be of concern to employers, before concluding with some guidelines and recommendations for employers and human resources departments.

INTERNET ADDICTION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

There have been a growing number of reports in the popular press about excessive use of the Internet under the guise of “Internet addiction,” “Internet Addiction Disorder” (IAD), and “Internet Addiction Syndrome” (IAS) (Griffiths, 2000a). For many people, the concept of Internet addiction seems far-fetched, particularly if their concepts and definitions of addiction involve the taking of drugs. Despite the predominance of drug-based definitions of addiction, there is now a growing movement which views a number of behaviors as potentially addictive including those which do not involve the ingestion of a psychoactive drug (e.g., gambling, computer game playing, exercise, sex, and now the Internet) (Griffiths, 1996a).

Research has suggested that social pathologies are beginning to surface in cyberspace. These have been termed “technological addictions” (Griffiths, 1995, 1996b) and have been operationally defined as non-chemical (behavioral) addictions which involve excessive human-machine interaction. They can thus be viewed as a subset of behavioral addictions (Marks, 1990) and feature core components of addiction (Brown, 1993; Griffiths, 1996a), i.e., salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Young (1999) claims Internet addiction is a broad term that covers a wide variety of behaviors and impulse control problems. This is categorized by five specific subtypes:
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