

# Internet Work/Play Balance

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## INTRODUCTION

Productivity gain can be achieved through utilitarian use of the Internet. Networked organizations foster intra- and inter-organizational communications, which amplify team collaborations, information sharing, and relationship building. The Internet also provides linkage to external global information sources, allowing organizations to analyze market trends, predict competitors' movements, and search for competitive advantages. However, Internet usage in the workplace is also a double-edged sword that can bring liabilities to modern workplaces. Employees can utilize their Internet connectivity and e-mail accounts for a variety of purposes. Publicized cases of Internet abuse in the workplace (i.e., pornography, employee harassment, information leakage, software piracy, etc.) have generated different ethical and legal concerns for many organizations.

To prevent such occurrences, practitioners utilize several strategies to deter Internet abuses (e.g., training of proper Internet usage, communicating Internet usage policy, installing Internet monitoring, and filtering software, etc.). These strategies have been effective against such behaviors, but they often decrease employees' job satisfaction and motivation. Understanding the underlying determinants of workplace Internet usage can bring balance to organizational work and play, and allow practitioners to apply the most effective Internet usage policies to increase job satisfaction.

A feasible balance between proper behavioral controls and employee motivation is attainable through the equilibrium of organizational and individual psycho-socio-technical factors. The ultimate goal of this balance is to maintain and improve employee satisfaction and organizational well-being. To identify the appropriate balance, this article examines different perceptions of Internet usage activities and suggests three Internet management strategies.

## ASPECTS OF INTERNET USAGE

Any Internet behavior can be classified as a productive, personal, or pathological Internet usage. This article defines these perceptions as the 3Ps of Internet usage. These perceptions have a direct influence on social/technological/psychological situations of individuals and organizations. Studies of Internet usage behaviors are interdisciplinary in nature; therefore, the stimuli behind each perception still

require extensive research that involves a different set of determinants and outcomes.

Productive Internet usage provides a utilitarian view of Internet technologies. Research on information technology adoption, information systems success factors, and technology-task fit all contribute to increase productive Internet use. Studies in this area include creating positive employees' attitude, establishing organizational/social usage norms, and lowering the psychological barriers of Internet usage. Ideally, productive Internet usage occurs at work. With today's networked organizations, productive work also can be performed at various virtual offices.

Personal Internet usage involves a recreational use of the Internet. This type of usage occurs privately at home and occasionally at work. Anandarajan and Simmers (2002) define these behaviors as voluntary online Web behaviors during working time in which employees use any of the organization's Internet resources for activities outside current customary job/work requirements. These activities include any personal use of the Internet at work such as searching for news and entertainment information, conducting electronic commerce, booking a vacation, and using personal e-mail (Mahatanankoon, Anandarajan, & Igbaria, 2004). Most people who engage in such behaviors are aware of their environment, social norms, and organizational policies. The consequences of personal Internet usage also have contradictory ramifications. Some studies suggest that these behaviors lead to productive work life (Stanton, 2002) and organizations should encourage a balance between work and play (Belanger & Van Slyke, 2002; Oravec, 2002). Other studies find that these behaviors can lead to cyberloafing (Lim, 2002). Table 1 summarizes the benefits and potential risks of personal Internet usage.

The norms of Internet usage in the workplace are "co-evolving" (Kraut & Kiesler, 2003) and it is difficult for organizations to associate the relationships between personal Internet activities with any individual and organizational outcomes. However, excessive personal Internet usage is counterproductive. Internet abuse is a general term that often refers to any wrongful or improper use of the Internet in the workplace. Behaviors related to Internet abuse often are more severe in nature such as viewing pornography, harassing other employees, downloading illegal software, excessive gaming, etc. Extreme cases of Internet abuse habitually result in many negative, uncontrollable psychological consequences.

Table 1. Benefits and potential risks of personal Internet usage

Benefits	Potential Risks
Information sharing Team collaboration Job satisfaction/performance Stress reduction Work-life balance Empowerment and motivation Social networking Relationship building Organizational learning	Cyberloafing Productivity loss Social disintegration Wasted network bandwidth Possible legal liability Information leakage Cyber-workplace deviance

Pathological Internet usage or Internet addiction involves excessive Internet usage as a way to cope with personal problems or difficulties (David, 2001; Greenfield, 1999; Young, 1998). Pathological Internet users have low self-esteem and are socially suppressed (Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyard, 2005). Mood-altering, denial of responsibilities, guilt, and craving are the common symptoms of Internet addicts (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000). Other symptoms include loneliness, boredom, salience, and lack of control (Nichols & Nicki, 2004; Widyanto & McMurrin, 2004). They have a higher tolerance level, withdrawal symptoms, and a craving for the Internet as compared to normal Internet users (Brenner, 1997). Occurrences of Internet addiction are rare in the workplace, and most organizations have taken harsh measures to punish Internet addicts including workplace reprimand, employee termination, and pressing criminal charges (Warden, Phillips, & Ogloff, 2004).

The next section explains how a proper balance of Internet usage can occur, and suggests potential strategies for effective Internet management in the workplace.

### BALANCING OF WORK-PLAY

Work/play balance is based on the equilibrium between employee extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Extrinsic motivation is related to productive Internet use. That is, employees utilize the Internet to achieve work-related rewards such as monetary, promotion, and/or recognition. Intrinsic motivation is related to personal Internet usage at work. Occasionally, such activities can lead to both positive and negative outcomes, as indicated earlier. Self-determination theory suggests that people seek out stimulating and challenging activities in order to fulfill their interests and enjoyment. When they do, these activities generate the sense of competence and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which can facilitate positive emotional experience (Matsumoto & Sanders, 1988) and individual learning (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992).

As personal Internet usage influences the well-being of employees, Internet usage policy (IUP) must be examined carefully so it will not decrease any positive motivation or work morale. The policy should include training and education, which can be used as a tool for effective communication between management and employees. When Internet monitoring is necessary to enforce appropriate behavioral norms, the policy should be based on maintaining employee job performance. To achieve work/play balance, the article recommends three Internet management strategies.

- Individual-organizational Internet behavioral alignment:** Employees' perceptions of proper Internet activities need to be aligned with organizational policy. The act of alignment is not as straightforward as it seems, because the 3Ps of Internet usage also asserts its "weight" on individual and organizational psycho-socio-technological situations. In other words, increasing an individual's "productive" Internet usage will reduce the occurrence of personal/pathological Internet usage. However, the increase in productive Internet usage also is related to the ways in which a person behaves socially, technically, and psychologically.

A proper balance occurs when there is a fit among psycho-socio-technological factors of an individual and those of an organization. Figure 1 shows the intricacies of various concepts described earlier. To create a balance, (1) organizations must have sufficient technological support and infrastructure that match the knowledge and efficacy of their employees; (2) the need for social relationships of an individual must equal the general social norms and culture in the workplace; and (3) organizational psychology (e.g., the organizational analyses of job, career paths, personality, ethics, morale, and attitudes its employees) must adhere to individuals' psyche and motivation. Once there is a mutual understanding of psycho-socio-technological factors, an adaptive internet monitoring and filtering policy (AIMF) can be implemented.

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