



Chapter XIV

From 9 to 5 to 24/7: How Technology has Redefined the Workday

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Abstract

This chapter explores the use of work-extension technologies such as e-mail, Black-Berry devices, portable computers, and cell phones. After a review of the literature, the chapter presents the usage patterns of these work extension technologies by Canadian knowledge workers and describes how work is being performed in a variety of nonoffice locations outside normal working hours. Our findings with respect to the impact of work extension technology were contradictory. Some technologies were

found to lead to an increase in employee workloads and stress, while others were found to have less of an impact. We also discovered that many respondents reported that technology made them more productive and made their work more interesting. After an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of these technologies, the chapter concludes with suggestions of ways in which employers and employees can use them more effectively.

Introduction

Technology has changed the workday and business practices of millions of knowledge workers. The hardware and software that revolutionized the ways people worked initially were found only in the workplace and were used only during traditional 9-to-5 working hours because the technology was simply not portable. Such was the situation 15 years ago. Nowadays, however, the act of performing work is not limited to specific hours at a specific location. The latest incarnations of work-related technology for knowledge workers support work outside the confines of the office at almost any time of the day or night.

This chapter focuses on work extension, which we define as the act of engaging in work-related activities outside of regular office hours in locations other than the business office. We refer to the technologies that permit work extension as work extending technologies (WET). These include cell phones, BlackBerry devices, portable computers, and PDAs, to name a few. While this term is not currently in use in the academic literature, it has been used by information technology practitioners (IDC Research, 2002).

The following research questions are addressed in this chapter:

- How much do Canadian knowledge workers use WET?
- How do employees use these different types of technology?
- What are the effects on employers and employees of using WET?
- What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using WET?
- How can employees and employers manage the use of WET in order to enhance the usefulness and reduce the challenges associated with its use?

While this study was done in Canada, many of the firms that participated in the research were multinationals with operations in the United States, Europe, and Asia. This, plus the literature showing the growth in use of WET internationally, suggests that the findings from this study may be generalizable to employees and employers who compete globally.

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