# PERSONAL INTERNET USAGE AT WORK: A SOURCE OF RECOVERY

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## ABSTRACT

Despite enormous productivity increases during recent decades, it has been claimed that workers' engagement in non-work-related activities severely damages companies' productivity development. Currently, personal Internet usage seems to be the most upsetting of these activities. There is a widespread notion among management-friendly researchers, employers, and the media that all non-work-related activities are deviant and should be defeated at all costs. This conceptual article gives an overview of the organisational behaviour literature dealing with non-work-related activities at work. The prohibitive approach is both inconsistent and in practice unenforceable. This is especially true since an increasing proportion of today's private Internet usage at work is carried out by employees using their private smartphones, a fact that has not been considered in previous research. This article contrasts theories and ideas that private Internet usage at work is deviant with theoretical overviews arguing that non-work-related activities are an expression of normal action and behaviour, which can be explained with the help of both work-life balance theory and theories on resistance. An additional concept is recovery, which has not previously been used in the debate on Internet usage. Today's workplaces are populated by engaged employees who work at a fast pace and need recovery, well-deserved micro-pauses, and breaks from demanding work. Furthermore, some Internet surfing is actually a consequence of organisations' inability to come up with decent work tasks to fill the whole day. The aim of this article is to point out the

recovery functions of personal Internet usage in today's working life, primarily in terms of employees' well-being and dignity. This article contributes to the debate by proposing eight situations in which the employee should be allowed to "cyberloaf" without being disciplined. The article also suggests empirical investigations that may be carried out with regard to the views and effects of personal Internet use at work in four different settings, that is, where employees' private Internet usage is officially forbidden, seemingly forbidden, allowed, or encouraged.

## INTRODUCTION

Technological innovations and advances, not the least of which are connected to the Internet, have an enormous influence on business, and on working and private life. Many employers stimulate this development and take advantage of it by providing their employees with cell phones, computers, software, and mobile Internet access. They expect work to be done after office hours. The boundaries between working life and private life are getting increasingly blurred, in the sense that a lot of people are no longer clearly separating the two spheres (see, e.g., Hochschild, 2001; Nolan, 2002). This not only leads to a situation in which technology facilitates work to be done at home in unpaid spare time. It also facilitates engagement in private matters at work. Anandarajan (2002) argues that the Internet is an efficient business tool, but that it also gives employees access to what has been called the world's biggest playground. According to existing research, almost everyone who has access to the Internet at work also uses it for various private affairs (e.g., Lim, 2002). This is true for both workers and managers (e.g., Garrett & Danziger, 2008).

What personal activities are workers and managers carrying out on the Internet? Blanchard and Henle (2008) conclude that sending and receiving e-mail is the most common activity (carried out by more than 90% of employees), followed by visiting various news sites (approximately 90%). Other common activities are shopping (approximately 65%), visiting sport sites (almost 60%), and booking vacations and travel (approximately 50%).

The fact that many people have access to the Internet at work seems to scare some academics, business managers, and the media, all of whom seem to think of employee access as a potential or even manifest addictive virus that will severely harm organisations and businesses. Because of the great fear of what employees will do, and even more of what they will neglect, due to Internet access, a considerable share of employers engage in surveillance of their employees' Internet activities. They also distribute threatening documents, warning of what will happen to those who violate the organisation's Internet policy. Obviously companies live up to these threats. Greenfield and Davis (2002) report that 30% of the companies in their study have terminated employees for inappropriate use of the Internet.

Despite the fact that many employers have taken action against employees' personal Internet use, not all employers are upset about the phenomenon. Verton (2000) reports that 15% of employers do not perceive it as remarkable or disturbing. In more recent studies, a changing attitude toward previously banned activities can be seen. One such example is that of Blanchard and Henle (2008), who divide personal Internet usage into minor activities (e.g., sending e-mails) and serious activities (e.g., accessing gambling and adult sites). For some employers, it is no longer a "big deal" if people send and receive personal e-mails or engage in some private surfing on the net. Perhaps these employers have realized that such personal activities do not harm or threaten the organisation as previously believed. In addition, it is becoming increasingly common for companies and public organisations to use social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and even blogging, for marketing and communication purposes. It looks odd if companies are present on Facebook, yet block or ban their employees' access to that very site. Furthermore, most prior research on employees' personal Internet usage has taken place at workplaces in which the employer provides the computers and Internet connections. Rapid technological development changes the playing field with smartphones, in which the Internet and the telephone are integrated into a common technical platform (Ivarsson, Larsson, & Pettersson, 2011). As these devices permeate the market, workers can surf the Internet at work without being confined to a desk or office. Personal Internet usage on smartphones will take place at warehouses and factories, on the assembly line, during meetings, and in restrooms or other places that give privacy. With these devices, employees have acquired the tools to engage in cyberloafing with fewer, if any, actual possibilities for the employer to monitor or prevent it. Therefore, traditional strategies of monitoring Internet usage and blocking certain sites, based on the employer's provision of computers and Internet access, will no longer work.

Quite a lot of research has assumed that private Internet usage at work should (and can) be prevented. This article argues that personal Internet usage at work will not diminish, and a tough employer attitude will not be successful. Rather, private surfing fulfills important recovery functions. Prohibiting personal Internet use may be a dead end, resulting in significant negative consequences in the form of acts of resistance, increased use of sick leave, and high employee turnover rates. Instead, this article argues for an essentially permissive attitude. The aim of this article is to point out the recovery functions of personal Internet usage in today's working life, primarily to the benefit of employees' well-being and dignity. The article proposes eight situations in which the employee should be allowed to cyberloaf without being disciplined.

This article will review and discuss the academic perspective that considers and explains personal Internet usage at work as a fundamentally deviant behaviour. It will then examine the opposite viewpoints, arguing that this phenomenon is natural and normal, ranging from the views of those who believe it is a way to deal with everyday life at work to those who claim that it can be seen as an

act of resistance. It will also examine the perspective of recovery, based on the importance of micro-pauses or short breaks from demanding work tasks.

## INTERNET SURFING AS AN ACT OF DEVIANCE

What people do at work has traditionally been a concern for management, focusing on the control and supervision of employees to ensure that they are actually doing the work they are paid to do. The pursuit of organisational efficiency and economic benefits has resulted in extensive research on desired employee behaviour. In terms of desired behaviour from a managerial standpoint, Bateman and Organ (1983) used the concept of *employee citizenship* in relation to employee conduct and actions beyond job descriptions and management's stated requirements. An important factor is often employees' loyalty and willingness to contribute to the success of operations.

The diametric opposite of such behaviour is considered deviant and referred to as *workplace deviance,* which is defined as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and, in doing so, threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995: 556). This research tradition, which primarily attracts researchers with a managerial perspective, focuses particularly on more serious deviant behaviour, such as theft, fraud, and sabotage. The early cyber-version of serious organisational misbehaviour focused on employees' visits to adult sites.

This subject also interests the media. An article in *Businessweek On Line* (Conlin, 2000) claimed that 1 in 5 white-collar male workers accessed pornography through the Internet while at work. Many would probably agree that surfing on adult sites, illegal music downloading, and online gambling are offensive and do not belong in a work setting. Still, the very definition of organisational misbehaviour includes anything employees might do besides the work they are paid to do.

This is where problems arise, leading to an absurd situation for workers. Employees not responding fast enough to a customer request, talking to a coworker, or taking a well-deserved break are considered deviant. Such behaviour should be actively fought (e.g., Franklin & Pagan, 2006; Kamp & Brooks, 1991; Slora, 1989). There are plenty of academics who advocate this tough attitude. Vardi and Weitz (2004: 244) are no exception, with a definition of organisational misbehaviour as "Any intentional action by members of organizations that defies and violates the shared organizational norms and expectations and/or core societal values, mores, and standards of proper conduct." If the right to define shared organisational norms, and even societal values, belongs to management, one can assume that quite a number of things people do in organisations are considered violations of proper behaviour.

Another concern among these management-friendly academics is calculating and describing the impact of mundane elements of everyday non-work-related

activities in terms of losses in dollars and productivity. Some are even showing concern for a declining morality in organisations. One such example is that of Stroh and Reilly (1997), who wonder whether organisational loyalty is dead. The loyalty issue is also noted in Proffice's (one of the leading agencies for temporary workers in Scandinavia) magazine, *Dagens Möjligheter* (Today's Opportunities). In the article, a manager at IKEA says: "My view is that employees have abused our trust if they engage in Internet activities such as Facebook and dating at work" (von Arndt, 2007: 4).

### Alleged Effects of Deviant Behaviour

Non-work-related activities at work are fairly widespread, not least due to the blurring of boundaries between work and private life. It is not easy to deal with life entirely outside of work, and it is not just parents with small children who are experiencing these problems. Most likely, everyone is forced sometimes to do things not having to do with work, and this need not be as harmful as some researchers believe.

According to Harris and Ogbonna (2006: 543), between 75% and 96% of employees "routinely behave in a manner that can be described as either deliberately deviant or intentionally dysfunctional." From such statements, several academics and journalists come to the conclusion that non-work-related activities must be extremely costly for employers. Calculations made by a consulting firm (Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc., 2012) indicate that American employers will end up paying distracted workers about $175 million over the first two days of the annual NCAA basketball tournament.

However, it is not only extraordinary events that attract interest among certain academics, consultants, employers, and journalists. Numerous studies (e.g., Ghiselli & Ismail, 1998; Hollinger, 1991) and media reports have dealt with the costs of non-work-related activities. The heavy focus on costs and the relentless pursuit of cost reduction leads to a situation in which even very ordinary things, such as workers talking to each other, are scrutinized. The interest in this is obviously based on the assumption that people are talking about things that have little or no connection to their work. The inclusion of all non-work-related conversations means it goes without saying that those who engage in simple calculations (time multiplied by salary) will end up with huge numbers. For a critical overview and an interesting calculation exercise, see Block (2001).

In recent years, workers' use of information technology has been included in these calculations. The most serious source of lost productivity is claimed to be employees' personal use of the Internet while at work, called *cyberslacking* (e.g., Garrett & Danziger, 2008) or *cyberloafing* (e.g., Lim, 2002). The reported percentage of people who use the Internet for personal reasons during paid work time varies between studies. Some studies indicate that virtually everyone who has access to the Internet at work also uses it for personal purposes

(Lim, 2002). The *Metro* newspaper (Göransson, 2008) stated that the amount of time Swedish employees spend on personal Internet surfing while at work is equivalent to time spent in 430,000 jobs. This represents approximately 10% of the Swedish workforce. These results are in line with a study by Greenfield and Davis (2002), in which the respondents spent an average of 3.24 hours per week on personal Internet usage while at work. This result is similar to that provided by the sample in Eddy, D'Abate, and Thurston's (2010) study of office staff.

However, some claim that cyberloafing is considerably more prevalent than this. Whitty and Carr (2006) claim that personal Internet usage accounts for 51% of an employee's total time online. This may be imprecise, as time and task distributions are unclear. Verton (2000) concludes that as much as 30% to 40% of employee productivity is lost due to personal Internet usage. He argues that two days of every workweek are spent on the Internet for personal purposes, which puts his figures in a class by themselves.

## Alleged Causes for Deviant Behaviour

Management-friendly academics try to prove the scope and extent of the damaging effects of what they perceive as deviant behaviour. The conviction that something actually is a deviant behaviour also has implications for how these researchers explain the presence of non-work-related activities in general and personal Internet usage in particular.

Some academics have focused on deviance in the form of harassment and cyberstalking, referring to the causes of personality disorders (Recupero, 2010). This article will leave aside the line of research that deals with the more severe phenomena in working life. More worrying are those academics who use personality disorder as an explanation for rather common, non-work-related activities (e.g., Boye & Slora, 1993; Coyne & Bartram, 2000). Explanations also suggesting personal, if not pathological, shortcomings among workers can be found in Greenfield and Davies (2002), who argue that lack of surveillance is an important explanation for increased personal use of the Internet at work. However, many researchers have abandoned personal causal explanations, in much the same way as criminologists who developed theories of white-collar crime were forced to abandon the idea of the "criminal gene" when they looked for explanations of deviant behaviour among individuals who were considered normal and well adjusted (Podgor, 1991).

White-collar crime is also explained in terms of availability and convenience, or in the expression "opportunity makes the thief." This is found in a number of studies of personal Internet usage at work (D'Abate, 2005; Eddy et al., 2010; Garrett & Danziger, 2008; Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011). These studies reason that employees who use the Internet in their daily work are more prone to using it for personal purposes.

Another classic white-collar crime explanation is that individuals rationalize their actions as "standard practice" and argue that "everyone else does it." Blanchard and Henle (2008) find support for such an explanation when it comes to what they call *minor cyberloafing*. Employees who see, think, or believe that colleagues and managers send and receive personal e-mail messages and visit news sites on the Internet become more prone to doing it themselves. Blanchard and Henle (2008) take no explicit position on whether or not this is damaging to the organisation, but there are plenty of others in this tradition who do. For example, Kamp and Brooks (1991) believe that even seemingly harmless activities such as procuring office supplies for personal use promotes a culture in which theft is tolerated. Although this hardly results in large economic losses, it is best to nip it in the bud.

Lim (2002) provides another rationalization that relates to white-collar crime. Employees justify their personal Internet usage either by claiming former exemplary behaviour (sometimes even declaring that they have done more than can be expected) or by a perception that they are underpaid and that they are simply evening out the imbalance. Slowly but surely, these explanations fall into the borderland between what can be considered criminal and what can be accounted for by traditional economic theory.

Within traditional economic theory, *rational choice theory* claims that people act from self-interest (Kramer & Tyler, 1996). This means that employees will engage in private activities if the conditions allow it and the virtues or benefits are greater than the perceived losses or discomfort. Similar explanations, based on human calculation, can be found in theories of *effort bargaining* (Baldamus, 1961; Behrend, 1957) and *equity* (Adams, 1963), which assume that employees engage in some kind of informal "negotiating" and try to balance effort and compensation. This is linked to perceptions of justice (Colquitt et al., 2006).

In this research tradition, which to a greater or lesser extent considers personal Internet usage at work deviant behaviour, the solution to all managerial problems tends to be control, surveillance, and prohibition.

## SIMPLY NORMAL BEHAVIOUR

Thus far, this article has discussed the deviance perspective, whose outlook on humankind (at least when it comes to employees) is tainted with suspicion. Something that is deviant is, by definition, unusual, rare, bizarre, or different from normal and customary behaviours, opinions, and ideologies. Therefore, it is doubtful whether this concept can be applied to all the behaviours in which virtually all employees, as well as managers, engage. Of course, Internet usage can be considered deviant in some cases, for example, when it puts others in danger, involves harassment, or is perceived as offensive by others. Still, most employees' Internet activity at work must be considered normal and natural.

The next section discusses three perspectives, mainly for workers—*work-life balance, resistance*, and *recovery*—that address natural causes and positive effects of personal activities at work. These perspectives are appealing since they do not theoretically expect any explicit intent on the part of the employee to damage the organisation.

## Work-Life Balance: Causes and Effects

A work-life balance perspective would primarily consider non-work-related activities as being carried out in order to facilitate daily life. A key assumption is the increasingly blurred boundaries between work and private life, which is expressed as "receiving family-oriented phone calls at work or taking business calls at home" (D'Abate, 2005: 1011). Within the work-life balance perspective, deviance and resistance are not put forward. There is a struggle, but it is mainly between the desire to be a dedicated and successful worker and the desire to be a dedicated and successful parent or spouse (Frone, Russell, & Barnes, 1996). Work and private life are two greedy institutions (Coser, 1974), or gravitational fields (Hochschild, 2001), that battle for time, commitment, and loyalty, without regarding the other. On a rhetorical level, people may claim that non-work-related activities are carried out at work because there is not enough room to handle them in workers' spare time.

However, work-life balance theories have only a limited explanatory value for Internet use at work. Personal Internet activities engaged in for the purpose of managing daily life while at work can hardly be that extensive, since the Internet is a rather limited tool for combining work and family life. Eddy et al. (2010) deal with work-life balance in their study of personal activities on company time. They are rather surprised to find there are few personal activities on company time that are explicitly connected to the facilitation of everyday life. An explanation for this would be the fact that these researchers are looking only at activities carried out at the office. Much of what is done for facilitation purposes actually happens outside the workplace: going to a doctor's appointment; dropping off or picking up kids at daycare or school; letting a plumber into the house.

Even though a work-life balance perspective provides theories that are insightful and useful in understanding contemporary (working) life, it seems to have less to offer when it comes to what goes on at the office or at the factory, particularly when it comes to personal Internet usage. Work-life balance can be an explanation, but there seem to be concepts that are better in helping us to understand why people at work engage in private Internet usage. The Internet is definitely a source of leisure-oriented interests or amusement, more than a tool with which to combine work and family. When employees are watching video clips on YouTube, e-mailing jokes and funny pictures to colleagues, looking

up the result of yesterday's football game, or reading the news, few would argue that those kinds of Internet activities are carried out for work-life balancing reasons, at least not in the traditional way of looking at it.

## Resistance: Causes and Effects

From a resistance perspective, put forward by labour process theorists, non-work-related activities are a natural consequence of the structural antagonism between employers and workers (Beynon, 1980; Collinson & Ackroyd, 2005). Wherever there is subordination, there will be resistance. Since workers are at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy, in which managers distribute, supervise, and control work, it is only natural to find acts that violate the rules and regulations of management.

At the workplace, the conflict between capital and wage labour is concretised as the right, possibility, opportunity, and ability to take control of work, time, products, and identity (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999). In other words, there is a constant struggle between management's (sometimes obsessive) desire to organise and control all aspects of work, and workers' desire for autonomy.

Paulsen (2010) develops the resistance perspective in an interesting way by noting how enormous postwar increases in productivity have led to the fact that many jobs are no longer filled with a decent amount of important, adequate, or even meaningful tasks. This development has not been initiated or promoted by employees. However, in order to keep one's job, one has to take part and create an illusion of being busy at work.

At all workplaces, there is what Paulsen labels "empty labour." He defines this as "the part of our working hours that we spend on other things than work" (Paulsen, 2010: 12). By bringing together the dimensions of *labour intensity* and (*work*) commitment, which can be low or high, Paulsen develops a typology of so-called empty labour and comes to the conclusion that there are four ideal types: *slacking* occurs when the individual's work commitment is high but the intensity is low, often due to a lack of work tasks. Employees with little to do and weak work commitment engage in *playing. Coping* is a way for an employee with high work commitment to handle an intense work situation. Finally there is *soldiering*, which appears when employees with low work commitment withdraw from massive amounts of work.

With numerous reports of increased intensification of work, with employees at the breaking point (e.g., Hochchild, 2001), it may seem strange that there would be a large proportion of employees with little to do at work. However, various empirical investigations give some support to Paulsen's statement. Recent studies based on Karasek's (1979) control/demand model show that 53% of Swedish employees experience high work intensity (Eriksson & Larsson, 2009), which leaves 47% who experience either moderate or low work intensity. Thus, large

groups of employees have a job that might place them in situations encouraging what Paulsen labels slacking and playing. Another closely related term is *boreout*, which describes those who are suffering from understimulation and an uninterested supervisor. This term was first used by Rothlin and Werder (2008). Those who endure boreout have (or at least had) ambitions, but poor working conditions have slowly worn them down.

If we follow Paulsen's reasoning, these employees are forced to find something with which to occupy themselves, in order to put up with their work. Informing management of their unwanted situation may lead to potentially serious consequences. Obviously, workers will not help the organisation to rationalize if it leads to an imminent risk of losing their job, so they cannot be categorized as either deviant or resistant. Paulsen's concepts of playing and slacking easily lead to the notion that these people are players and slackers, a notion with which we do not agree. An appropriate label for these groups of employees might be *hapless* or *victims of circumstances*, since they are more or less stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Even within the category of employees whose work is characterized by high intensity, non-work activities go on. However, these employees are in a diametrically opposite position from those mentioned above. They must find some time for respite. High work intensity combined with low work commitment inevitably leads to a classic act of resistance known as *soldiering*. This phenomenon has interested academics and managers ever since the days of Frederick W. Taylor.

Finally, there is a group that has not received much attention from academics within the resistance field but that nevertheless is very interesting, namely, the group composed of those with high work intensity combined with high work commitment. When these individuals spend some time on personal Internet usage, one important reason is recovery. This argument is developed below.

## Recovery:  Causes and Effects

High work intensity, which is widespread (Parent-Thirion et al., 2007), brings the need for recovery. Since most employees have high work commitment (Eriksson, 1998; Furåker, 2012), spending a brief moment on non-work-related activities, such as personal Internet usage, should have positive effects, since the employee will likely return to work with renewed vigour.

Many people experience mentally and emotionally demanding work, and a growing number of employees report working at high speed most of the time (Eriksson & Larsson, 2009; Geurts et al., 2003). Since humans are not machines, they need a break to recharge their batteries. Hamermesh (1990: 121) states that "Time spent on the job relaxing (loafing?) can increase workers' productivity by enabling them to rest when they are physically or mentally fatigued." The

necessary respite all workers require, whether on the assembly line, in the emergency room, or at the university, can be captured by the concept of *recovery*. This is expressed in terms of "a person's desire to be temporarily relieved from demands in order to restore his or her resources" (Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006: 330). The opportunity to recover has many documented positive effects, primarily on the individual. Recovery increases well-being by reducing stress (Westman & Etzion, 2001) and increasing work engagement (Sonnentag, 2003).

The notion of recovery is closely connected to the concept of *coping*. In a work context, research on coping has primarily included members of occupational groups that are highly exposed to traumatic events, such as nurses in palliative care (e.g., Healy & McKay, 2000), military personnel on submarines (e.g., Sandal et al., 1999), and firefighters (e.g., Brown, Mulhern, & Joseph, 2002). However, the need to recuperate is not just reserved for those who experience such extremely stressful situations. Other groups, such as those in customer-intense work, also need recovery time. This concept comes both from work sociologists and from management researchers (e.g., Gustavsson, 1997; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009).

Common strategies are withdrawal, venting, and using opportunities to go "backstage." Obviously, some management literature deals with these strategies, so the notion and effects of recovery should not be totally unfamiliar among managers. Such an awareness is expressed by those supervisors who encourage their employees to "take some time." The commonality, prevalence, and effects of these encouragements have, however, scarcely been investigated. There is likely a tendency toward rhetorical statements or lip service. In a setting marked by a high pace, the time for recovery is seldom available when the work appears: take the examples of a shop assistant in a busy store, a physician whose patients are queuing up in the waiting room, or a copywriter facing continual deadlines.

Some researchers place recovery outside work hours (Korpela & Kinnunen, 2010). The times for recovery are often seen as evenings, weekends, and summer vacations. Implicitly as well as explicitly, recovery seems to belong in the private sphere. Although people do engage in recovery activities and practices in their spare time, the positive effects of weekends and vacations quickly fade. Therefore, "individuals may need additional opportunities for recovery" (Sonnentag, 2003: 518). The time for recovery outside work is not sufficient. In addition, there is a need to create space for recovery through micro-pauses during the course of the workday. Hamermesh (1990: 122) claims that "Among workers engaged in physical tasks there is clear physiological evidence of reductions in work capacity occurring at lower levels of rest and break time." Even those with sedentary jobs experience fatigue. Hamermesh (1990: 122) argues that "Rest periods provide psychological benefits that may enhance the well-being of these workers and hence their productivity." So how do busy individuals manage to squeeze in recovery time?

## WHEN SHOULD EMPLOYEES' PERSONAL INTERNET USAGE BE ALLOWED?

First of all, we argue with the support of Furåker (2012) that the vast majority of employees have the ambition to do a good day's work. Important work tasks likely have priority over recovery for most employees. As stated earlier, recovery is about "a person's desire to be temporarily relieved from demands in order to restore his or her resources" (Sonnentag & Zijlstra, 2006: 330). The demands involved in today's working life are excessive. They can be analytically differentiated, although they might coexist in various occupations. *Physical demands* include those related to muscle strength and repetitive strain injuries (e.g., among craftsmen and traditional factory workers, and also among large groups within health and social care whose work is characterized by heavy lifting in poorly adapted settings). *Intellectual demands* are seen in jobs where employees are expected to be creative, innovative, and analytical (e.g., engineers and researchers).

There is a range of other demands connected to human interaction. *Social demands* are rather vague, as Callaghan and Thompson (2002) note in their discussion of employers' search for workers with "social skills." Social demands emerge in the relationship with management, colleagues, and customers in the so-called service encounter (Ivarsson & Larsson, 2009). Hochschild (1983) discusses the demands on employees in service encounters. She captures the *emotional demands* and argues that employees are required to suppress and/or evoke emotions that, in various degrees, deviate from their true feelings. The purpose is to create a certain atmosphere for customers (this involves, e.g., tour representatives and others in the experience-based economy). Another set of emotional demands appears in the literature on human service organisations (Hasenfeld, 1983), and can be labeled as *psychic demands.* These demands affect those (e.g., social workers and health care professionals) who interact with people in need of some kind of consolation. Finally, there are *aesthetic demands*, captured by the phrase "looking good, sounding right" (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001). These involve frontline employees who are required to represent the company in a certain way (e.g., flight attendants and waitresses).

Various types of demands may coexist. Since many employees experience a great deal of stress and pressure from an intensive work setting and workload, a number of situations occur in which the employee should have the right to recover without being subjected to disciplinary action by management. This does not mean that employees should have an unfettered right to use the Internet at all times, for all purposes. Rather, this article outlines eight propositions for situations in which employees should be allowed to devote some time to personal use of the Internet.

**Proposition 1:** *Employees should be allowed to use the Internet for personal purposes when their workload is so excessive that it might affect their health.* A situation of excessive workload depicts the very essence of when recovery is

needed. The insatiable rationalization movement (Edwards, 1979; Sennett, 1998), which has also permeated the public sector (du Gay, 2006), has led to a tradition of stress research providing a comprehensive knowledge of negative health effects due to heavy workloads (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Even though a short break or a micro-pause does not solve the overriding problem for the vast majority of workers, it does provide temporary relief.

**Proposition 2:** *Employees should be allowed to use the Internet for personal purposes during unproductive time or downtime*. In most work situations, there are pockets of time that are unproductive or dead. This occurs when there are no obvious tasks or activities to be carried out that will result in any apparent, measurable productivity. Since breaks from work are necessary (e.g., Hamermesh, 1990), and recovery has many positive effects (see, e.g., Sonnentag, 2003; Westman & Etzion, 2001), unproductive time represents an excellent opportunity for recovery.

**Proposition 3:** *Employees should be allowed to use the Internet for personal purposes so long as their daily output is sufficient.* There is a technical-economic system embedded in companies and organisations that is insatiable in its pursuit of increased productivity. In daily operations, this is expressed by management's aggravation at employees' personal conversations and private Internet usage. By engaging in such activities, employees are assumed to be stealing productive time, and are therefore unable to meet either current or potential productivity levels. Regardless of this, there should be some kind of productivity level, or amount of work, that can be seen as "good enough" at a fixed time: in other words, "a good day's work." As Block (2001) notes, such a discussion is missing from today's working life. Block argues that, by focusing on end results (e.g., the number of units produced) rather than on work hours, management would allow employees to catch up and/or work ahead to create space for recovery. Such an approach is fully consistent with the research that shows the importance of influence and autonomy (Karasek, 1979) and shows that good jobs are created when the expected results are clear, transparent, and do not constantly change (Waldenström & Härenstam, 2008).

**Proposition 4:** *Employees should be allowed to use the Internet for personal purposes in order to stimulate and initiate creativity.* It is easy to jump to the conclusion that the results of work depend on timing and tempo. However, there are jobs or situations in which demands for creativity, problem-solving, and analytical skills provoke a need for a temporary respite, in order to enable the worker to return to the effort to solve the problem with renewed vigour. When people such as copywriters, computer programmers, and R&D staff cannot come up with creative ideas, a moment of personal Internet usage might prevent them from getting stuck in a situation of "writer's block." The positive effects of a break after continuously working on a difficult problem (which is followed by the experience of a flash of illumination) are described in terms of "incubation" (see, for instance, Amabile, 1996). Private Internet usage plays an important

recovery function for groups engaged in problem-solving tasks. This is consistent with Vitak et al. (2011), who found that employees with creative jobs cyberslack to a greater extent than others.

**Proposition 5:** Employees should be allowed to use *the Internet for personal purposes if the work allows multitasking.* This is connected to the second proposition, but differs from it in one important sense. The employee engages in non-work-related activities while carrying out work tasks. Doubtless, there are tasks that do not require the employee's full attention in order to be carried out in a satisfactory way. One obvious example is that of the office employee who surfs the Internet while stuck in a telephone queue or while on hold.

**Proposition 6:** *Employees should be allowed to use the Internet for personal purposes if this does not jeopardise safety.* In most cases, a short break will not result in others coming to harm. However, there are some exceptions. Some occupations, or perhaps more accurately some situations, are associated with responsibility for other peoples' health and safety. In some situations it is obvious that private use of Internet is totally out of the question, such as the situation in which a surgeon is operating on a patient or a pilot is landing a plane. In other situations, the aspect of jeopardising safety is not as obvious. One such example could be that of the primary school teacher who updates his Facebook status during a school excursion, and hence loses sight of the children for a moment.

**Proposition 7:** *Employees should be allowed to use the Internet for personal purposes if it does not affect coworkers.* Proposition seven is slightly different from the others, because it is not primarily based on the relationship between management and employee. Instead it rests upon relationships between employees. It is rather well known in the working life literature that workers' collectives tolerate and encourage breaks during the day (Roy, 1959). But such breaks should not be used in such a way that the workload of colleagues increases, or that causes trouble in other ways (Karlsson, 2012). Due to this, workers' collectives have a regulatory mechanism that limits private use of the Internet during working hours.

**Proposition 8:** *Employees should be allowed to use the Internet for personal purposes if it does not affect customers, clients, or patients.* This argument has clear links with the previous proposition due to its connection with with the relationship between workers and the company's clients. Management must let employees decide on their breaks. Such a standpoint is supported by a recent study of employees with daily customer contacts, showing that 6 out of 10 employees are always trying to meet customer requirements, even at the expense of their own well-being (Ivarsson & Larsson, 2009). This is even more prevalent in health care, due to what Wærness (1984) labels the "rationality of caring," based on letting others' needs take precedence.

We argue that these eight propositions capture circumstances in which employees can devote a moment to personal Internet usage with a clear conscience. This can be related to a point made by Persson and Hansson (2003), who

argue that as long as employees' daily output is sufficient, they should not be monitored, controlled, or persecuted. A contract under which the worker puts his whole being at the employer's disposal is uncomfortably similar to slavery.

## CONCLUSION

This article emphasises that private Internet usage at work is engaged in for different purposes and consequently must be placed in context. This article's particular contribution is to point out the recovery function. Briefly checking a child's update on Facebook does not always fulfill a work-life balance function, and an ironic e-mail to a fellow worker is not always an expression of resistance. Above all, a moment of surfing during working hours is not an extremely costly and deviant behaviour. The last-mentioned claim is based on the fact that a significant portion of mainstream research on non-work-related activities in general, and on personal Internet usage in particular, is marred by fallacies.

First, the loss of productivity due to employees' personal use of the Internet is far from obvious. For many operations, there is no container full of potential productivity just waiting to be unleashed by employees. When the paper machines in the pulp and paper plant are running at full speed, the patients in a hospital ward are sleeping, and taxi drivers are waiting at an airport for an arriving flight, one may ask what exactly can these operators, nurses, and taxi drivers do to increase their productivity. Even more importantly, when everything is running smoothly and according to plan, how can some personal time on the Internet (whether via the company's computer or via a personal smartphone) result in any loss of productivity?

Another fallacy is that people who engage in non-work-related activities (e.g., personal Internet usage) are deviant. Such reasoning is based on an acceptance that management can decide every minute of the day what is and isn't deviant. This approach is particularly bothersome, since private activities during working hours are at least as prevalent among people in managerial positions as among other workers.

This article has put forward the positive effects of spending some personal time on the Internet. The individual is given a chance to recharge her or his batteries, which most likely will result in renewed vigour and better focus. It also provides autonomy, which is an important factor for employees. There is a need for much more nuanced research on private Internet use at work, perhaps including empirical testing of the eight propositions in different companies with varying managerial approaches.

In summary, research should be broadened to include employers' different approaches to recovery, as well as to include industries and occupations besides office work. This is partly due to rapid technological development, especially the development of smartphones. The issue of what people do at work besides working must be related to productivity, intensity, content, satisfaction, creativity, meaning, commitment, and recovery in a balanced and open-minded way.

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