

CYBER LOAFING: A TREND UN-NOTICED

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Are you involved in cyber loafing? Isn't that sounds like a wrongdoing? No doubt, the inventions of computer and Internet technologies have kicked out manual work and bring comforts with efficiency. On contrary, we can neither deny that it has also brought in new threats and problems.

The biggest threat considered to be associated with "Cyber Loafing" is reduction of productivity. It really deviate attention of the employees to wander about leaving their primary task unattended causing drop in productivity. It was found that cyber loafing is financially costing companies a \$54 Billion per annum (Collin, 2000). Apart from all financial and non-financial drawbacks, it causes degrading systems and blockage of bandwidth. Also, if employees are indulged in illegal activities via office network, it can expose organization to legal liabilities. Due to this, Viruses and intrusions may occur, which can cause reasonable damage to the assets of organization.

The seriousness of the problem was revealed by various researches, giving shocking facts and statistics. During a survey of 1000 US employees, it was revealed that 64% of those employees were involved in surfing internet for personal interest (The Straits Time, 2000a). Similarly, in another online survey, 84% employees sent non-job related emails and another 90% used it for recreational purposes (Vault.com, 1999). If the figures are that alarming in country like USA, which is considered as most advanced, highly qualified, and socially aware, what will be the statistics in countries like Pakistan and India?

The picture is not that bleak, it also provides employees enough reasons backed up by valid researches to do it to some extent. But there is need of proper boundaries to be defined. Many researches and studies suggest that "Cyber Loafing" created creativity (Block, 2001), as employee can have updated and latest knowledge of their relevant fields which they can use in their own domain. The positive aspects of Cyber Loafing are also highlighted by Vivien K.G. Lim and Don J.Q. Chen's study and Mrs. Andrea Polzer-Debruyne's, a PhD. Scholar at Massey University. It also provides mini-breaks and refreshment for the employees to restart resulting alleviating boredom.

Just Consider a nice message through instant messaging or e-mail from a loved one, can't it provide emotional boost? Definitely it can. You can feel more motivated and start your work with new enthusiasm and zeal.

On part of management, they must look at both positive as well as negative aspects of "Cyber Loafing" and must try to balance it. They must ensure that:

- **Job expectations and duties are to be clarified** so that employees have clear vision of what is expected from them. They can easily concentrate on their job.
- All possible steps are to be taken to **keep employees interested** in their job. If employees are not excited about what they are doing, they will try to hide behind their monitors and play in the infinite play ground in shape of "Cyber World".
- **Stress management programs are to be implemented** to help employees cope with stress at home or work place.
- There should be **training and seminars** to create awareness in employees about it.
- **Well-designed policy** is to be implemented.

- **Codes of conduct and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** are to be defined clearly.
- Any **monitoring system** may also be implemented.

It is a fact that we cannot restrict multifaceted uses of Internet at workplace. Also, personal and organizational lives are so much interconnected and blurred that it is very difficult to separate one from another. If we block or restrict employees' access to cyber world through office PC, there are numerous other ways to slack for an employee like staying at cooler for long, prolonged tea and lunch breaks.

We are living in an age, where everyone has access to Internet via cell phones and other cutting edge gadgets, organizations can't block them too. Moreover, implementing monitoring systems have potential of backfiring.

Don't you think spying is treating unethical behavior with another unethical one? Surely, it can create ethical and privacy issues and lower morale of the employees. It can also cause mistrust and resentments among employees and employer. And to me "trust" is the building block for any relation, as it helps maintaining long-term relations. On other hand, mistrust can leads to dissatisfaction of the employee and may be result in layoff, which can be another problem for organization. What we need to do is to foster a mutually acceptable culture of "Give and Take" based on trust and respect.

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