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Major/Career Issue Investigation

Smart Phone Usage: Is this Device Dominating Lives?

The smart phone has taken the world by storm by providing wireless access to the internet, which allows people to get things done anytime and anywhere. Even President Barack Obama is fascinated with his smart phone. But with this device becoming more prevalent (especially in for business people), some people begin to wonder if it is playing too much of a role in the lives of people. Some think that this “always-on environment” can cause problems in your work and home life. Some worry that the smart phone gets in the way of spending time with family because people are still able to receive e-mails and such things work-related even after leaving work. Also, smart phones can even disrupt work motives, such as, not being able to pay attention during a meeting because these business people are constantly on their phone. Considering these problems, businesses need to make new rules of behavior for these new technologies. Business-oriented people should have a balance between home and work life, so therefore, after office hours business people should cut their smart phones off.

One side of the issue argues that smart phones disrupt the management of having a personal life set apart from one’s work life. It can affect one’s family life by interrupting valuable time that should be spent with loved ones, but instead they are still virtually connected to their work. Having personal time and spending time with family is vital in everyone’s life, but some think smart phones hinder these valuable relationships. Woman’s Day, a magazine that also provides online blogs, blogged about the effect that parents’ high demands for work can have on their children’s lives. “In a recent Wall Street Journal report, children have witnessed

parents checking their e-mail during dinner, on vacation, and even during their school recitals.” (Woman’s Day) Work overload can cause friction at home. Catherine Middleton, a teacher in the Faculty of Business at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, found through a study that this indeed is very true. One user said, “If I’ve misplaced my BlackBerry there’s an immediate understanding around the home that I’m definitely going to be on edge until it’s found.” This is an example of how important people’s mobile devices are to them and how big of an impact they have on people’s work lives, which can in turn, spill into family life.

Not only is family life being affected, but some say always being connected at all hours of the day could cause work overload, which would decrease the efficiency of one’s work efforts. Shaun Rein, the founder and managing director of the China Market Research Group (a strategic market intelligence firm), found through research that executives working harder and longer does not make them more productive. Furthermore, he found that once a person exceeds a certain number of hours worked in a day, they actually become less productive. They become tired and less focused, which will decrease their competence at work. To resolve this, he believes companies should implement a No BlackBerry Rule, which would shut off smart phone use after certain hours and on weekends. (Rein) One instance in which smart phone use has been “overused” during office hours is during meetings. Richard Laermer, CEO of RLM PR, has personally witnessed this conflict during the middle of meetings. During these instances he thinks, “Wow, you guys are missing the boat. You’re missing the task at hand. Don’t be distracted. Be here; it’s only 20 minutes.” (Sanders) To argue against this, some people may think that meetings are overrated and there should be a new way of doing things, but Rein somewhat has a solution to this problem. He thinks, “Every meeting should have a moderator who keeps the pace brisk and brings discussions back to the main point. If your meeting has a

hard stop-time rule and clear objective, it will most likely go much faster and more efficiently.” (Rein) This is just another instance where Rein believes the “No BlackBerry Rule” should be enforced. Like Rein, Middleton thinks that the more one makes themselves available the more this availability will be utilized. “Actions that appear as reasonable attempts to control a demanding job can encourage further engagement, resulting in increased, rather than decreased, workload.” (Middleton) This in turn goes back to what Rein says about overworking causing decreased efficiency.

Some people who argue against constant smart phone usage complain that business relationships cannot truly be formed when only communicating through a device. A study conducted through the UK magazine *Business Matters* found that 79% of workers haven’t met half of the people they do business with. James Caan, Star of BBC TV show *Dragon’s Den* and CEO of Hamilton Bradshaw, believes that although technology has widely evolved, “the key to making the most of technology in business is to ensure it’s used as an additional tool rather than the only form of contact with colleagues. Face-to-face meetings are essential to build a business – it’s important to remember that your clients and suppliers buy into the people as well as your product or service.” (Business Matters) Dr. Kris Kirschbaum, a interpersonal/health communication professor at East Carolina University, added to this point, “There are no nonverbal cues. By not communicating in person, emotion is lost; you cannot get the reflection of voice and eye contact on what is trying to be conveyed.” (Kirschbaum)

The opposite side of this issue claims that this device is practical and is just a reflection of the technology-centered world we live in today. Many think this device is convenient, accessible and not an interruption to home and personal life. Some go on to say that the problem

is not the device itself, but the demanding job they hold; smart phones just help them manage the stress and work overload.

Supporting the argument that smart phones are convenient and easily accessible, Jon Kamen, chairman-CEO of Radical Media, gives a lot of credit to his device. “It would be insanely unfair if I didn’t give my BlackBerry the appropriate credit for being the most productive tool in my arsenal.” He goes on to say, “It seems like I’m permanently stuck on planes or meetings ... but I’m thumbing my way through countless crises and deftly copying all victims with the click of a wheel.” (Sanders) Sal Ricciardi, the editor of PC magazine (a magazine that delivers reviews about computing and internet products to highly interested technology buyers), discusses a new advancement in technology, GoToMyPC Corporate 4.0, which allows people to transfer files from and to anywhere, and is similar to an actual PC computer. This advancement adds to the convenience and easiness of working while traveling, or even someone who has simply stepped out of the office but wants to get something done quickly.

These constant smart phone users support their argument by stating that other features on this device (besides e-mail) help them to stay on task and perform more efficiently at work. One example of another feature is the calendar. Through research carried out by information technology (IT) and Sage Research, these researchers found that surprisingly, calendar access is the most essential feature on their handheld devices, with corporate e-mail access trailing right behind. (Communication News) This goes to show that maybe these devices help keep people on track and on time during the day. Keeping track of appointments or knowing when meetings are is just a couple of events or important dates this device can help people remember.

For the users who argue that this is just part of the kind of world we function in today, JWT's Ms. Decourcy states, "TV was such a facilitator in the 1960s. It brought news; living-room furniture was organized around it. My life is similarly shaped around my BlackBerry." Dr Kirschbaum agreed by talking about how the TV replaced the radio, and now smart phones have started to replace the TV. She noted how the smart phone is a reflection of society and how when it comes to business especially, it is all about getting things done right away. (Kirschbaum) Colleen DeCourcy, chief experience officer at JWT New York basically sums up the whole side of this argument by stating, "My BlackBerry goes beside my pillow. It is my alarm clock. It is my source of news. It is my calendar and my way of knowing what's happening with the two people who run my world-my daughter and my assistant." (Sanders)

Like Rein, I believe that a way to find a balance between work and personal life for these workaholics is to have the companies regulate, or perhaps even shut off smart phone use after office hours. If the companies could set up a plan with the service provider which doesn't allow the device to be used after work, perhaps this could solve the issue of family time being interrupted. Yet, this would also still allow these business-oriented people to use their phone while they are on-the-go during the day. Middleton found that one organization explicitly freed people from their devices by enforcing a policy of 'no e-mail' after 6:00 p.m. or on the weekends. If more companies could follow the lead of this organization, maybe it would help people find a medium between their work life and home life. They would still be getting the job done during the day; after office hours, they can come home to their family and spend time with them, rather than thinking about who is trying to connect with them through their smart phone.

For those who are affected by these smart phone users, this issue is in urgent need of being solved. It challenges the boundaries between work and home life. Not only does it affect

loved ones, but it could also affect how well one is performing at work because these business people are constantly working around the clock. It is necessary to draw the line between work life and home life. For these “addicts,” sometimes they may just have to ask themselves if the benefits outweigh the costs.

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