Chapter 20

Psychosocial Life Environment and Life Roles in Interaction with Daily Use of Information Communication Technology: Boundaries between Work and Leisure

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ABSTRACT

The presence of ICT (Information Communication Technology) in our psychosocial work environment and in our personal lives, has increased rapidly during the past 40 years. This way of interacting with ICT is often characterized in terms of access to information and social networks with the possibility of being independent of time and place. Every person’s psychosocial health is influenced by their life environment; a combination of their work and home environments, their life roles and of their social networks. People who work professionally in the field of ICT or use ICT in their work experience a blurring between their professional and private roles. However, when people’s experience of work and leisure becomes blurred, this may impact on their psychosocial health. They need to develop strategies to create ways of allowing time for recovery. In this chapter we present a review of the literature that identifies the effects that cause a blurring of the line between work and leisure. Moreover, we present some examples of strategies for managing the blurring of contexts facilitated by ICT. Presented research combines theories from the fields of psychology, informatics and work science.

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USE OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The presence of ICT (Information Communication Technology) in the psychosocial work environment has increased rapidly during the past 40 years. A development which has provided workers in different organizations with the ability to work even when they are away from the office and on the move. Lately, the presence of ICT has also increased in our personal lives during leisure activities. Therefore, we are not only able to work on the move, but also able to attend to personal needs, such as dental appointments and family matters. This way of interacting with ICT is often characterized in terms of access to information and social networks with the possibility of being independent of time and place; that is, anytime or anywhere (Perry et al., 2001).

When we entered the industrial age, the primary workplace was outside the home; maybe in a factory or an office building. After the workday, the workers would return home or go to another place where they spent their leisure time. Work time and work place were dictated by the employer. With this separation, that is, performing a specific activity at a specific place, the physical and psychological boundaries between home and workplace became easy to define. People went to their place of employment to work and came home to do necessary household tasks and spend their leisure time (Dahlbom, 2003; Jarrick, 2005). However, due to ICT, this separation is less easy to define. One example of this is the use of leisure technologies such as television. At the beginning of the television revolution, programs started at a specific time and ended at a specific time with a limited number of channels. By contrast, today we can watch television whenever we want, regardless of where we are, as long as we have an Internet connection through our mobile phones or computers. The requirement of being at a specific place for a specific length of time has changed. Work and leisure are defined by most as completely different activities, but they are, in reality, bound together, and work could not exist without leisure, and vice versa. Even if leisure provides humans time for recovery, work appears more frequently to squeeze out leisure. Work might be seen as an alienation activity, often referred to as “responsibility”, while leisure is defined as a time of freedom, where the activity is chosen by the individual as a means of self-expression and creativity.

Today, being physically away from the workplace does not mean that we are necessarily leaving our work tasks behind in psychological terms. The focus is on completing the work before a deadline, so it does not matter where or during what timeframe the work is done. Today we can use ICT whenever we wish, and some of us may even feel bound to stay connected, not just with our colleagues, but with friends and family, as well. We can manage work, life and other concerns through our use of ICT (Sadler et al., 2006). Regarding of the possibilities of being able to work any time and from any place, the challenge is that one has to plan both work time and leisure time (Allvin et al., 1998). The young people of today have more evening and night-time activities than in the past (e.g., increased availability of television programs, channels, internet, and mobile phones). Moreover, the young people of today not only sleep less, compared to young people 100 years ago, but they are doing it by choice. One might