

The Psychological Pros and Cons of Connectivity

September 14, 2016



Although modern workers are moving toward a continually connected lifestyle via mobile technology, few psychological studies have examined the impact this has on employees' work and personal lives. But a recently published study from South Africa indicates that people generally view their experiences with smart phones, emails, and wireless networks with more positivity than negativity.

A team led by industrial psychology researcher Wihan de Wet of North-West University in the Johannesburg area created a qualitative research design using semistructured interviews. The sample included 25 adults, ages 24 to 60, employed in various industries including finance, law, education, health care, and mining.

More than 90% of the participants said they used at least three communication devices. The researchers asked them why and how they use their devices at work and in their personal lives and what role they believe the devices play in their professional and personal relationships.

The experimenters then analyzed the data collected from the interviews, coded it, and looked for themes. They found that most participants reported a positive impact on their productivity, efficiency, and availability to their employers, their clients, and their family members. Many reported saving time by

eliminating the need for travel to meet with clients, as they could connect with them using email or Skype.

Among the negative aspects cited: The participants reported feeling increased pressure to respond immediately to emails, texts, or instant messages; concerns about a decline in face-to-face communications; and distractions from ordinary conversations and interactions.

“One unique finding from this research was the overall positive experiences of [information and communication technology] outweighing the negative experiences,” the authors write.

De Wet and his colleagues cited some limitations to their research, including that it relied on self-reports; did not include interviews with partners or spouses; and lacked some specific information, such as the types of devices participants used. They concluded that their study suggested that employees should make a conscious decision to manage their use of information and communications devices to minimize the potential negative influence of that technology.

Reference

de Wet, W., Koekemoer, E., & Nel, J. A. (2016). Exploring the impact of information and communications technology on employees' work and personal lives. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 42: a1330. doi:10.4102/sajip.v42i1.1330.