BOREDOM IN THE WORKPLACE AND CYBERLOAFING – AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Abstract. *The Internet and its expanding possibilities have brought about many benefits to organizations. However, despite the clear benefits of the Internet, its negative effects have also been taken into consideration. Some of the most important challenges that organizations have to face are mostly related with vulnerability to security weaknesses, violation of privacy, employee Internet abuse, and Internet addiction. Previous studies showed that access to the Internet has become more common for employees, and so has their propensity to use the Internet for entertainment and other non-work purposes on the job. Moreover, it is clear that nearly everyone experiences episodes of boredom at work from time to time, regardless of the nature of their job. Generally, boredom is regarded as a mental state resulting from a low challenge level as compared to individual skill level and the lack of intrinsic motivation. Individuals who score higher on boredom proneness - a specific and measurable personality trait, have higher rates of negative behaviors including substance abuse and pathological gambling. Boredom has also been linked to decreased academic achievement and increased the likelihood of dropping out of school. Cumulatively, previous studies suggest that boredom proneness has both social, and psychological repercussions, increasing the probability of a range of negative behaviors such as cyberloafing. This study aims at investigating the relationships between boredom proneness, boredom susceptibility, and cyberloafing. College students (N=78) responded to an anonymous questionnaire set containing the Boredom Proneness Scale, the Boredom Susceptibility Scale, and Cyberloafing Scale. The findings of the present study will consolidate the existing literature by providing new insights into the non-work-related Internet usage, coined here as cyberloafing, and its relation with boredom proneness and boredom susceptibility.*

Keywords: *boredom proneness; boredom susceptibility; cyberloafing; gender differences; workplace.*

Introduction

Urgin and colleagues (2008) coined cyber-slacking or cyberloafing as being any time that employees' waste on the Internet. This could include behaviors such as Online shopping, engaging in social media, leisure browsing, job searching, sending and receiving personal email, downloading non-work related material (Ugrin et al., 2008, p.77). We have to take into consideration the fact that some researchers use the term cyberloafing to refer to more serious behaviors as well (Blanchard & Henle, 2008), such as hacking and spreading viruses, but in this paper we use the term cyberloafing as time-wasting behaviors such as watching YouTube, going on Facebook, and browsing the web for different non job-related reasons.

According to some studies (Bloxx, 2008), human resource professionals estimated that employee's waste approximately one hour engaging in non-work related activities using the Internet. Knowing this, companies are using explicit policies regarding Internet usage and different Internet surveillance programs (Bequai, 1998). Moreover, organizations currently use different solutions to block URLs for pornography content, game sites, social networking sites, entertainment sites, shopping or auction sites, and sports sites (SurveilStar.com, 2008).

Despite multiple changes in the way organizations work nowadays, job boredom remains a part of the work experience. Job boredom is often described as an unpleasant state of low arousal and dissatisfaction caused by situations that do not offer adequate stimulation (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). Boredom is also considered a subjective state that results from attempts to allocate attentional resources to an environment that is no longer interesting (Todman, 2003).

Job boredom is usually characterized by a passive attitude, a lack of interest in tasks, and an inability to concentrate (Reijseger et al., 2013). Therefore, researchers (Loukidou, Loan-Clarke & Daniels, 2009) have found that job boredom is associated with a series of negative consequences, such as depressive symptoms, drug, and alcohol abuse, and decreased job satisfaction and job performance. Other authors (Fisher, 1993), indicates that boredom is associated mainly with negative individual and organizational outcomes such as absenteeism and poor retention.

Following the Job demands-resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001), Reijseger and colleagues (2013) found that job boredom was associated with low job demands and low job resources. More generally, job boredom is often thought to arise when employees feel that their tasks are not challenging (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). At the same time, there is also evidence that excessively demanding tasks fostering boredom, as they usually lack tangible goals (Barbalet, 1999). Van Tilburg and Igou (2012), has also pointed out that lack of meaning in work represents a fundamental element in the experience of boredom at work.

Although in the industrial and organizational psychology areas job boredom is usually defined similar to anxiety, through the state or trait components, in the current study we are focused mainly on the trait component, which refers to a relatively stable personality characteristic (Kass, Vodanovich & Callender, 2001). When boredom is considered the result of individual determinants it can be viewed as a personality characteristic that varies in degree across individuals (Todman, 2003).

Literature review

The topic of boredom has been mainly studied in relation to academic performance (Goetz, et al., 2007; Ruthig, et al., 2008), different types of social interactions (Leary, Rogers, Canfield & Coe, 1986), and deviant behaviour (Newberry & Duncan, 2001). Several studies showed associations between boredom proneness a lot of negative behaviors including pathological gambling (Mercer & Eastwood, 2010), alcohol abuse (LePera, 2011) or even drugs consumption (Lee, Neighbors & Woods, 2007). Furthermore, other authors found that boredom proneness is also correlated with high level of impulsivity (Watt & Vodanovici, 1992), anxiety (LePera, 2011), procrastination

and a lack of autonomy (Vodanovici, 2003).

Regarding possible relations with cyberloafing, one has to take into consideration the fact that boredom proneness is directly associated with a more frequent need for sensation seeking (Kass & Vodanovich, 1990) for which computers, and in particular internet surfing, is often used as a source of stimulation (Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma & Raita, 2012). In addition, previous empirical researches have shown that boredom proneness is also associated with specific personality traits such as neuroticism (Gordon, Wilkinson, McGown & Jovanoska, 1997) and extraversion (Ahmed, 1990).

Recent research suggests that job boredom has a negative impact on organizations and might be both unproductive and counterproductive (Bruursema, Kessler & Spector, 2011). Furthermore, Kass and colleagues (2001), in a study on manufacturing workers, have found that job boredom was linked to higher job dissatisfaction and absenteeism. Similar results - a positive relationship between job boredom and turnover intentions - have been found in a more recent study on office workers (Reijseger et al., 2013).

Methods

Starting from those empirical findings, the current study aims at finding answers to the following research questions:
RQ1: what is the relation between boredom proneness and cyberloafing?
RQ2: what is the relation between boredom susceptibility and cyberloafing?
RQ3: are there any gender differences regarding cyberloafing or boredom?

Participants were employed master students from a Romanian public university, aged between 21 and 41 years (M = 23.94, SD = 3.49), 30 males and 48 females. They were invited to fill in a set of questionnaires compiling the following measures: Boredom Proneness Scale (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986), Boredom Susceptibility Scale (Zuckerman, 1979), and Cyberloafing Scale (Lim, 2002).

Boredom Proneness Scale - Trait boredom was measured using the BPS (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986), a 28-item scale with responses coded using the 7-point Likert-scale (1= Highly disagree, to 7= Highly agree). Eighteen items are scored to directly reflect high boredom proneness (e.g., I am often trapped in situations where I have to do meaningless things) and ten items are reverse scored (e.g., In any situation I can usually find something to do or see to keep me interested). Higher scores on the BPS reflect higher boredom proneness. The reported reliability for the 7-point Likert scale version of the BPS is adequate (α =.86) (Vodanovich, 2003).

Boredom Susceptibility Scale – dispositional susceptibility to boredom was measured using BSS (Zuckerman, 1979). The scale consists of ten pairs of sentences describing opposite attitudes to various behaviors (e.g., A. I get bored seeing the same old faces; B. I like the familiarity of everyday friends). Cronbach alpha coefficients are ranging from 0.83 to 0.94 (Zukerman, 1994).

Cyberloafing – cyberloafing was measured using an adapted version of Lim's (2002) cyberloafing scale. The scale has participants rate the frequency of 16 cyberloafing behaviors on a four-point scale (1 = hardly ever/once every few months or less to 4 =

frequently/at least once a day). An example of an item is "Shop online for personal goods". Askew (2012) reported an alpha coefficient of .92.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the measures are presented in Table 1 and the inter-correlations among the measures are displayed in Table 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for measures

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
cyberloafing	78	39.8148	6.72947	-.319	.325	-.038	.639
browsing	78	2.5030	.47138	-.292	.325	-.386	.639
email	78	2.8830	.55390	-.539	.325	.452	.639
interactive	78	2.3065	.55667	-.155	.325	-.327	.639
boredom susceptibility	78	3.0741	1.91175	.648	.325	-.085	.639
boredom proneness	78	4.0863	.57463	.004	.325	-.067	.639
Valid N (listwise)	78						

The distribution of scores on each of the measures appeared to be normal with skewness and kurtosis scores within accepted limits.
In order to be able to find the answers to the current study research questions, the Pearson correlations were calculated between the selected variables: boredom proneness, boredom susceptibility, and cyberloafing. Moreover, the same Pearson correlations were calculated for the cyberloafing scales, namely, browsing, email and interactive.

As presented in Table 2, the data showed significant correlations between boredom proneness and cyberloafing ($r=.404$, $p<0.01$). Thus, the more employees are prone to be easily bored, the more they are likely to engage in cyberloafing behaviors. The analysis showed that not all types of cyberloafing behaviors are related with boredom proneness, the only significant correlations were found between boredom proneness and browsing subscale ($r=.419$, $p<0.01$), respectively between boredom proneness and interactive subscale ($r=.298$, $p<0.05$).

Table 2. Correlation matrix between cyberloafing and boredom

		cyberloafing	browsing	email	interactive
boredom susceptibility	Pearson Correl.	.049	-.005	.048	.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.722	.973	.729	.627
	N	78	78	78	78
boredom proneness	Pearson Correl.	.404**	.419**	.228	.298*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.002	.098	.029
	N	78	78	78	78

As for the second research question, no significant correlations were found between boredom susceptibility and cyberloafing (Table 2), neither at a general level (r=.049, p>0.05), nor at subscale level. Therefore, no relations have been found between boredom susceptibility and cyberloafing.

The answer to the third research question can be extracted from the following tables (Table 3 and 4), containing the results of the T test for independent samples. Previous research (Lim & Chen, 2009), showed that gender has an influence on the use of Internet applications with a clear gender difference in the frequency, intensity and nature of Internet use (Colley & Maltby, 2008; Garrett & Danziger, 2008). Mirroring previous findings, as showed below, there are significant differences between males and females in the general cyberloafing score (t(76)=4.69, p<0.01), male employees being involved in a larger degree in cyberloafing activities compared to female employees. The same significant differences (males doing those behaviors more than females) were observed also for the browsing (t(76)=4.82, p<0.01), and interactive cyberloafing subscales (t(76)=4.70, p<0.01). Those results can be explained by the different purposes Internet is used for by men and women (Garrett & Danziger, 2008; Ono & Zavodny, 2003). Colley and Maltby (2008), have found that women usually consider the Internet as an opportunity to expand their social network, while men use the web mainly for relaxation.

As for gender differences regarding boredom, the only significant difference was found for boredom proneness (t(76)=3.78, p<0.01), here also males having higher sores than females. The results are in line with the findings of Vodanovich and Kass (1990), who stated that males possessed a greater need of varied external stimulation than females.

Table 3. Group Statistics gender

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
cyberloafing	1	30	43.3667	6.53628	1.19336
	2	48	36.9167	5.47269	.78992
browsing	1	30	2.7830	.42955	.07842
	2	48	2.3298	.38729	.05590
interactive	1	30	2.5763	.46615	.08511
	2	48	2.0529	.48544	.07007
boredom proneness	1	30	4.3713	.58143	.10615
	2	48	3.9027	.49868	.07198

Table 4. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
cyberloafing	Equal variances assumed	.189	.665	4.696	76	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			4.507	53.628	.000
browsing	Equal variances assumed	.168	.683	4.821	76	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			4.706	56.893	.000
interactive	Equal variances assumed	.132	.717	4.703	76	.000

	Equal variances not assumed			4.748	63.606	.000
boredom proneness	Equal variances assumed	3.375	.070	3.786	76	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			3.654	54.666	.001

Conclusions

Despite a series of limitations, the current study supports previous research illustrating the negative effects of boredom proneness on organizational life. Specifically, these results provide evidence regarding the relationship between cyberloafing and boredom proneness (trait boredom). As mentioned, present research possesses some shortcomings that have to be taken into consideration. For instance, the study measured cyberloafing, boredom proneness and susceptibility using self-report measures within a college-student sample. Also, the design was cross-sectional and correlational; therefore, no inference about the direction of the observed relationship can be made.

Also, future research might benefit from the inclusion of other variables in the research design, such as a broader measure of sensation seeking, time perspective, Type A behavior etc., variables that may moderate the relationship between boredom proneness and cyberloafing (Kass & Vodanovich, 1990; Rupp & Vodanovich, 1997).

Nevertheless, the results of this study indicate that it may be beneficial for future researchers to pay attention to boredom, as it may enable a better understanding of the relationship between boredom and other work-related constructs such as counterproductive work behavior, organizational commitment, work locus of control and could be really useful for practitioners.

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