So, How Do People Really Use Their Handheld Wireless Devices?
An Interactive Study Of Wireless Technology Use.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

We have entered a new era of workplace connectivity through the advent of portable wireless technologies. These tools will provide needed flexibility to juggle work and family aspects of our self-identities, and provide the needed control to preserve this sense of self. However, in this fast-forward age, they may also blur traditional boundaries to such a degree, that the lines delineating our sense of self will become shadowy and inconsequential. Just as our greatest strength is often our greatest weakness, we may find that the challenges involved in harnessing technology within our own personal and organizational context will create a much stronger sense of self. How then, do normal people who find themselves on the frontline perceive wireless handheld devices and how has use affected their sense of self?

This research investigates the meaning that each individual gives to wireless handheld technology within an organizational context. It examines this question from a multi-faceted perspective including aspects surrounding relational, imaged, integrated and isolated selves.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Francine Schlosser from the Odette School of Business at the University of Windsor or University of Waterloo (?) used symbolic interactionist methodology to analyze the meanings assigned by employees to wireless handheld technology.

The researcher first reviewed past literature on symbolic interactionism, and related social theory. From these, she was able to develop a framework of relevant themes which increase the understanding of how the introduction of pervasive forms of technology (such as these wireless technology devices actually worn by an individual) might influence employee attitudes.

The researcher then conducted one-hour interviews with 11 individuals representing three organizations in the public and private sector. These interviews had the goal of enhancing the understanding of technology use within an organizational context by focusing on “how” questions. Wireless technology practices were examined as they relate to aspects of self-identity, that is, the imaged self, the relational self, the integrated self and the isolated self. The researcher was able to document results of the interviews supported by key quotes from study participants.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The current research contributes insights into the actual uses of technology in organizational behavior, in particular, by providing a closer look at the way that individuals in organizations perceive and use handheld wireless devices. The following findings were made:

• Participants saw the need to self-regulate their use of the handheld and to ‘redraw’ the lines between work and family time, sometimes more definitively; other times with a blended stroke.
• The aspect of self is continually in transition, changing as users experiment and fit the new
wireless technology into their lives. This reflects a trend toward innovation through use.

• Continued use encouraged users to adapt their message contexts, social etiquette, self-impressions, and ways of doing business.
• Certain influences shape wireless technology-practice and innovation in use. These influencers include different backgrounds and needs.
• Participants engaged in technology practices promoting an imaged self. These practices often coincided with organizational citizenship behaviors.
• Adapting to an integrated self posed interesting time challenges for participants. The overlap of handheld use from work to home life encouraged participants to try to regulate their responses. Handhelds have now created a situation where ‘on call’ has become a pervasive and instantaneous demand.

In summary, individuals were able to fit the technology into their work and personal roles, and at the same time, adjusted these roles to fit new expectations arising from the technology. Innovative ways of using the technology were shaped by individual needs as users adapted their message contexts, social etiquette, self-impressions, and ways of doing business. A need to self-regulate emerged with high expectations of availability and the blurring of multiple work and personal roles.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research can be used from an academic viewpoint to develop future research into pervasive and personalized types of technology as well as from a practical organizational viewpoint, to develop better ways to promote effective technology usage.

CITATION


KEYWORDS

Organizational Behaviour, Handheld Devices, Wireless Technology Use, Self-Identity

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Using a symbolic interactionist methodology, the diverse meanings assigned by employees to wireless handheld technology are investigated in this research to find that wireless communication technologies are increasingly pervasive and central to the new world of work.