



Full length article

## Cell phones during nonwork time: A source of job demands and resources

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### ABSTRACT

Technology (e.g., cell phones) is increasingly blurring the lines between the work and nonwork domains. Evidence suggests technology users experience both negative and positive outcomes associated with work-related technology use during nonwork hours. We extended the job demands-resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) to technology use by conceptualizing work-related cell phone (WRCP) use as a job demand and cell phone attachment –valuing and being physically attached to a cell phone– as a resource. We expected high cell phone attachment will buffer against the negative effects of WRCP use on emotional exhaustion, work engagement, and work-family conflict. Participants from various occupations ( $N = 313$ ) responded to two online surveys administered one week apart. Cell phone use and attachment were assessed at Time 1; criteria were assessed at Time 2. High cell phone attachment buffered against the negative effects of WRCP use on emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict, and it enhanced the beneficial effects of WRCP use on work engagement. Being more engaged and attached to cell phones may help employees deal with WRCP use during nonwork time more effectively. Practical implications include providing training for more effective cell phone use during nonwork time.

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### 1. Introduction

The accessibility of work through mobile technologies has blurred the line between the work and nonwork domains (e.g., Davis, 2002; Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005); increasingly, organizations expect employees to be accessible and responsive during off-work hours. Consequently, recent research introduced the concept of technology-assisted supplemental work (TASW), work that is performed during nonwork time with the aid of information and communication technologies (ICTs) like personal computers, mobile communication devices, and the internet (Nixon & Spector, 2014). Antecedents of TASW include individual (job involvement and segmentation preferences) and contextual factors (workplace norms) (Fenner & Renn, 2004). Of the studies that examined consequences of TASW, most found that technology users struggle to maintain balance between work and personal life as evidenced by the negative effects on recovery processes and work-nonwork conflict (e.g., Derks & Bakker, 2012). However, technology use is

also associated with increased flexibility, productivity, social connection (e.g., APA, 2013), and job satisfaction (Diaz, Chiaburu, Zimmerman, & Boswell, 2012).

Recent research on TASW has focused on ICT use more generally (a combination of various mobile technologies). However, cell phones (inclusive of both traditional cell phones and smartphones) warrant individual attention to better understand the role of technology in the interaction between work and nonwork domains. Cell phones are portable and flexible devices for staying connected to work, and people are very attached to them. In the U.S., cell phone ownership has now exceeded 90% of adults (Pew, 2014). Despite the widespread use, there are some negative consequences associated with general cell phone use. Twenty-four percent of Americans report that being constantly available is the worst thing about having a cell phone (Smith, 2012). It is presumed that the increased use in cell phones may result in people growing especially attached to them: 44% of Americans sleep with their phone to ensure they do not miss updates during the night; and 19% of Americans report that using their cell phone makes it harder to forget about work at home and during weekends (Smith, 2012).

Because cell phones are not homogenous in their use, we expect that using them for work compared to nonwork purposes will

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result in meaningfully different outcomes. However, recent research examining the intensity of cell phone use during nonwork time did not specify the type of use (work or general use) (e.g., Derks & Bakker, 2012; Derks, van Duin, Tims, & Bakker, 2014; Derks, van Mierlo, & Schmitz, 2014). The purpose of the present study is to use the job demands-resources model (JDR; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) as a framework to distinguish between different types of cell phone use: cell phone use as a job demand/stressor and as a resource. In addition to examining cell phones as a source of job demands, we consider cell phone attachment – the extent to which people value, use, and are physically attached to their cell phones – as a potential resource to help people deal with the job demands that spillover into the nonwork domain through their cell phones.

## 2. Cell phones and the job demands-resources model

The JDR model proposes that conditions of the job may act as demands/stressors or resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Technology can serve as a job demand/stressor itself or provide access to that job demand. On the other hand, technology can act as a resource for completing ones job tasks more efficiently and effectively (Day, Scott, & Kelloway, 2010). Because ICTs serve functions outside of the workplace, they may also act as valued resources more generally (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014). Day and colleagues (2012) have outlined job demand and resource characteristics of ICTs; we focused on the characteristics of accessibility and availability, access to information, and ICT control to frame work-related cell phone use as a job demand and cell phone attachment as a resource.

### 2.1. Cell phones as access to job demands

ICT demands include workplace processes or tasks that are performed using a device, which may be perceived as stressful (Day et al., 2010). We focus specifically on ICT use that occurs during nonwork hours using a cell phone – work-related cell phone (WRCP) use. This includes expectations about use, actual use, and thinking about use for work during nonwork time. Following the characteristics outlined by Day et al. (2010), WRCP use may be characterized as a job demand or stressor for three reasons. First, cell phones provide access to job demands themselves (availability of co-workers or documents), which facilitates spillover of work into the nonwork domain. Second, cell phones increase access to work-related information (number of phone calls, text messages, e-mails), which leads to more time spent working, thinking about the job, and sacrificing family and work. Third, some organizations have expectations or norms regarding availability during nonwork hours (Derks, van Mierlo, et al., 2014). Thus, employees may feel like they have little control over how often or when to respond, evidenced by feelings of technopressure (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). WRCP use can interrupt employees at any time (e.g., dinner) or any place (e.g., a child's piano recital) (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). By responding to WRCP notifications during nonwork hours, employees are less able to detach from work, thereby interrupting the recovery process, i.e., the restoration of diminished resources (Sonnetag, Niessen, & Neff, 2012) and experience more work-family conflict (Derks, ten Brummelhuis, Zecic, & Bakker, 2014).

### 2.2. Attachment to cell phones as a resource

Resources are conceptualized as anything valued by a person, perceived to facilitate goal attainment (Halbesleben et al., 2014) and buffer against the negative effects of stress (Hobfoll, 1989).

They can be categorized as internal resources (e.g., self-esteem, energy) or external resources (e.g., social support, job control) (e.g., Demerouti, et al., 2001). Cell phone attachment is an external resource based on the extent to which someone values their device, uses it, and keeps it physically close to them. This is distinct from compulsive or excessive use, whereby people experience dysfunction as related to their cell phone use (Buckner, Castille, & Sheets, 2012; Lee, Chang, & Cheng, 2014). In line with Day et al. (2010), cell phone attachment fits conceptualization of ICT use as a resource. Employees who are more attached to their phones, will have access to more information (by way of phone calls, internet searches, e-mail, or cloud storage) and people (family, friends, colleagues). We assume that employees who are more attached to their cell phones are more adept at using the technology to access information, communicate with others, and feel a greater sense of control over how and when to use it.

To better understand the effects of cell phone attachment (a resource) and WRCP use during nonwork time (a job demand) within the context of the JDR model, we focused on psychological outcomes commonly associated with the JDR model: burnout, work engagement (e.g., van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012), and work-family conflict (e.g., Bakker, ten Brummelhuis, Prins, & van der Heijden, 2011; Derks, ten Brummelhuis, et al., 2014).

#### 2.2.1. Emotional exhaustion

Job demands are frequently perceived to be work-related stressors that result in negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and fatigue (labeled strains) (e.g., Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). Emotional exhaustion is characterized by “feelings of being emotionally extended and exhausted by one's work” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 100) as a consequence of high job demands, which may be facilitated by WRCP use. Research examining the effects of smartphone use on recovery from occupational stress during nonwork time suggests that smartphone use is positively associated with emotional exhaustion (Derks, van Duin, et al., 2014), and thus interferes with the ability to recover from technology-related stress (Derks & Bakker, 2012). Research on the JDR model has shown that job resources buffer against the effects of job demands on burnout (see Schaufeli & Taris, 2014 for review). Extending the JDR model to cell phone use would suggest that employees with high cell phone attachment (a resource) may deal with their cell phone-based job demands more effectively, and thus be less exhausted by them. Employees who are more attached to their phones may perceive that the access to work and response expectations are less of a demand and are just a normal part of the general access to the world provided by their cell phone. Because of their attachment, employees may also perceive they have more control over how and when they work demands using their cell phones. Therefore, we expect that higher attachment to cell phones will buffer against the negative effects of WRCP use on emotional exhaustion.

**H1.** Cell phone attachment moderates the relationship between WRCP and emotional exhaustion such that the positive relationship between WRCP and emotional exhaustion will be weaker for employees who are highly attached to their cell phones.

#### 2.2.2. Work engagement

Work engagement is a positive work-related state that includes feelings of vigor, dedication, and absorption in work tasks (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker, 2002). A qualitative study on smartphones and work engagement demonstrated that employees view smartphones as mechanisms of work engagement, such that they feel more connected to their work, are able to be productive by being responsive to work issues and their coworkers.

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