Functions of control mechanisms in mitigating workplace loafing; evidence from an Islamic society

Fariborz Rahimnia, Ahmad Reza Karimi Mazidi *

Department of Management, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the functionality of control mechanisms in regards to workplace loafing. It is hypothesized that the organizational controls are negatively associated with non-cyber loafing but not with cyber-loafing, and also, self-control is negatively associated with both. Furthermore, non-cyber loafing was considered as the predictor of cyber-loafing, and self-control as the moderator of organizational controls/loafing relationship. As predicted, organizational controls were only associated with non-cyber loafing. In addition, self-control was associated with both the cyber- and non-cyber loafing, and non-cyber loafing associated with cyber-loafing. Contrary to the prediction, self-control did not ameliorate the effect of proximity on non-cyber loafing. Altogether, this study is the first to investigate the simultaneous and interactive effects of self-control and organizational controls in predicting the variance of both the cyber- and non-cyber loafing. The results provide insights to understand why and when the organizational controls should be implemented and/or self-control should be emphasized.

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1. Introduction

In our modern world, the Internet has brought many benefits to various businesses and it is going to become an attractive media in marketing and efficient investment. E-mail as a technology embedded in the Internet has widely improved internal communication and computation in most firms; and consequently, the information flow has become more flexible, and the customization of products and services has been accelerated with fewer costs (Lang, 2001). The Internet enables employees to be more productive than ever before, but it also offers them a new way to escape from work (Askew et al., 2014). Although the Internet may potentially boost productivity, it may also undermine efficiency if it gets to become a prevalent and pressing issue (Alder, Noel, & Ambrose, 2006). It is initially thought that the computers and the Internet are important tools to make laborious works easy and they assure to provide more freed and saved time at work, but they may sometimes work the opposite as extra burdens for organizations (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Curley (1989) stipulated that computerization has transformed the nature of jobs done by knowledge workers. Furthermore, instead of reducing anxiety, computers have been a source of anxiety for many people at work, especially older ones who do not have sufficient knowledge to use computers (Marquié, Thon, & Baracat, 1994; Whitty & Carr, 2006). While the

Internet and e-mail can be great assets to an organization (particularly to create new knowledge), workplace Internet has caused various problems (Whitty & Carr, 2006). For instance, employees may use workplace Internet for work- and non-work related activities (Jia, 2008). Considering these facts, recent studies have pointed out that the Internet is a double-edged sword that the organizations must be cautious about when using (Jia, 2008; Lim & Teo, 2005).

Employees' deviance at place of work appears to fall into four categories: production deviance, property deviance, political deviance, and personal aggression (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Loafing or slacking is a type of deviant behavior (Lim, 2002) including many examples such as socializing with coworkers, conducting personal businesses, making personal phone calls, and surfing the Internet. As some researchers do, our attention was exclusively focused on loafers' behavior under the two categories of cyber-loafing and non-cyber loafing.

The term "cyber-loafing" (also referred to as cyber-slacking, non-work-related computing, cyber deviance, personal use at work, Internet abuse, workplace Internet leisure browsing, and junk computing; Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011) was first introduced by Kamins (1995) in New York Daily News in an article entitled "Cyber-loafing: Does employee time online add up to net losses?" Since then, this concept has become more popular in scientific circles due to the research done by Lim (2002) from the National University of Singapore. This type of deviance refers to a practice, firstly based on computer and the Internet, and secondly,

* Corresponding author.
  E-mail address: alef.karimi@gmail.com (A.R. Karimi Mazidi).

it wastes the employees' useful time at work. In other words, instead of doing work-related activities the person performs his/her personal affairs using the space provided by the Internet. In this sense, the Internet has provided an opportunity for slacking and turned into an arena for cyber loafers' showing-off.

Cyber-loafing which is a type of production deviance can be considered as an innocuous deviance such as sending and receiving a personal email, or more of a problem such as online gambling (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Malachowski, 2005). As such, cyber-loafing is discussed in the literature as having mostly negative connotations (König & de la Guardia, 2014) and sometimes carry both the positive and negative connotations (Kim & Byrne, 2011). Cyber-loafing is important to study because it is a potential intervention point for increasing productivity (Naughton, Raymond, & Shulman, 1999), but the idea of human resource management is not to eliminate cyber-loafing, rather, is to strike a balance between productivity and cyber-loafing (De Lara, Tacoronte, & Ding, 2006). De Lara et al. (2006) have suggested that employee surveillance measures such as web browsing monitors and access blockers can extenuate job satisfaction and productivity. This is the reason that makes us to bring about the organizational and individual control theories, and to incorporate them in regards to cyber-loafing behaviors.

Many studies have concentrated on reducing cyber-loafing at workplace through organizational control mechanisms, but unfortunately the literature has only sufficed to offer the anecdotal advice in order to create these systems while these pieces of advice are not based on theory and their effectiveness has not been empirically evaluated (Henle, Kohut, & Booth, 2009). This may explain why only 40% of human resource managers perceive that existing policies are effective in deterring (not tracking down) cyber-loafing (Young & Case, 2004). Meanwhile, some researchers such as Ugrin and Pearson (2013) have tried to show that the deterrence model affects various types of cyber-loafing differently, but there exists no study on investigating the mechanisms through which organizational and individual control affect different types of loafing. To address this gap, the current study is aimed at finding the answers to the following questions: "What kind of control affects loafing and what is the nature of this impact on different types of loafing?" and "How can we combat cyber-loafing?"

To serve our purpose, in this study, organizational controls and self-control will be studied in association with cyber-loafing and non-cyber loafing, and the mechanism attenuating these types of deviant behaviors at workplace is investigated. The buffering role of self-control will also be highlighted by considering its possible moderating effects.

2. Literature

2.1. Control mechanisms

Managerial control, control systems, and coercive control are some of the phrases used to describe non-individual control – a concept called organizational control. Flamholtz (1996) defined managerial control as the organizational mechanisms designed to increase the probability of employees' behaving in a manner congruent with the organization's goals. This type of control depends on horrifying the employees – fear (French & Raven, 1959, as cited in De Lara et al., 2006), which refers to the act of compelling employees to perform in a desired manner by employing various forms of punishment (e.g., formal punishment) as an intimidator strategy (Bass, 1990). Self-control, on the other hand, is a stable and distinctive human attribute (a personality/dispositional variable) in order to arbitrarily regulate a certain number of urges in work-related activities. A paragraph from De Lara and Olivares-Mesa (2010)

adequately reflects the coercive nature of organizational control, and yet, implies the different functionality of self-control since it is spontaneous.

> Control systems and punishment acting separately are unable to increase the "expected cost" of engaging in cyber-loafing, because, on the one hand, punishment only leads employees to evaluate the "cost of detection" if they are caught. On the other hand, control systems can only increase the "probability of detection." Thus, to deter cyber loafers from decisions to "go or continue on the wrong track," proximity, monitoring, and punishment should act together in an interactive way. [...]

According to the general theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), individuals with low levels of self-control are more likely to respond to situational triggers with counterproductive behaviors (such as workplace loafing) when they are given the opportunity to do so. Another theory entitled the strength model of self-control (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000) discusses the extent to which different individuals exert self-control over impulses, which indicates that the various control mechanisms (organizational and individual) should be complementary. In the current study, Organizational control encompasses the supervisor's physical proximity (hereafter, proximity) and general perceptions of organizational control (monitoring). Proximity which is more concerned with organizational design characteristics refers to the extent to which employees perceive their supervisor moves around too closely (Murphy, Wayne, Liden, & Erdogan, 2003). For example, one of the control mechanisms can be open office design layout that makes the employees feel exposed to their supervisors (Liberman, Seidman, McKenna, & Buffardi, 2011). Engaging in cyber-loafing might be particularly relevant when working at home under the telework arrangements because it would be easier to avoid being caught by supervisors and co-workers (O'Neill, Hambley, & Bercovich, 2014). Furthermore, monitoring is comprised of controlling both the individuals (e.g., closed circuit televisions and physical security of facilities) and devices called electronic use policy (e.g., tracking software, security software, security cable, and Internet traffic restriction); the former is more concerned with non-cyber violations, while the latter pertains to cyber violations. Both of these controls can be only for-cause or periodic, which respectively implies the monitoring those who have violated the policy in the past and who are suspected of violating the policy, or monitoring all the employees on a random or periodic basis (Donati & Hardgrove, 2002). Despite the fact that over 80% of employers implement the electronic use policies (American Management Association, 2005); its success in deterring cyber loafers depends on the nature of work and social-organizational work environment (i.e., organizational context). However, self-control which is largely context-free is at the opposite extreme of prevention strategy spectrum.

In general, drawing on the existing body of research on organizational control mechanisms, neutralization theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957), general deterrence theory (Becker, 1968), Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime, and Muraven and Baumeister's (2000) strength model of self-control, we tried to establish a theoretical foundation to develop the hypotheses relating to control mechanisms/loafing.

2.2. Loafing; a brief review

There are various forms of deviant behavior at the workplace. Loafing is a phenomenon from which the organizations are suffering since their inception (Lim, 2002). Some common forms of loafing at the workplace along with their frequency percentage are provided in Malachowski's (2005) study as following: surfing the Internet (44.7%), socializing with coworkers (23.4%), conducting