Working with connective flow: Smartphone use as a stabilizing business platform

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technology

mobile

new

devices

available

smartphones

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“Moving physically while keeping the networking connection to everything we do is a new realm of the human adventure, one about which we know little” Castells, 2005, p54
Is there a problem?

- If our senior and middle management work across their non-work time, is this really a problem? How is work ‘space’ defined in an age of increased connectivity?
- Why concern ourselves with hypo- and hyper-connectivity? Perhaps it is just an adaptive stage as we adjust to new ways of working?
- Do organisations have a responsibility to create the environment to support "disconnecting"? Or are we reaching the nirvana of self-management with executives empowered to manage their own work environment?

Our intent in this paper was to explore the intersection of choice (agency) and connectivity in the context of mobile work. We discovered that managers work with connective flow and that mobile may be considered a platform/place of work.
In search of the good life...

“The essential idea is simple: to lead happy, productive lives in a connected world, we need to master the art of disconnecting.”

-Hamlet’s BlackBerry, Powers, 2010, p. 6
Connective flow (not too little, not too much) leads to higher performance.

Figure 1. Framework for Understanding How Workers Can Manage Their Mobile Connectivity

- **Hyper-connectivity**: Sufficient technological capabilities to potentially exert controls over connectivity but insufficient organizational tools to enable these to be enacted. Thus workers experience the negative effects of too much connectivity.

- **Hypo-connectivity**: Insufficient technological capabilities to control levels of connectivity and low levels of organizational support resulting in levels of that are too low for individual requirements.

- **Optimal Connectivity**: Connective flow achieved through a dynamic process to meet individual and professional requirements.

- **Requisite Connectivity**: Low technological capabilities to control connectivity but organizational instruments in place to enable a level of connectivity that is sufficient for the job but does not necessarily deliver the individual controls to manage connectivity to meet personal and professional requirements.

Research Questions

• How do smartphone users enact choice (exercise agency) to connect and disconnect in a mobile-enabled world?
• How smartphone user behaviour had changed over time?
Smartphone use

• Technology-in-use (Orlikowski, 1992) suggests that smartphones shape, and are shaped by, the world around them through practice.

• Organisational norms and pressures influence usage but are not determinants of smartphone use (Matuski & Mickel, 2011).

• Paradoxical behaviours suggest both autonomy and controlling effects (Mazmanian et al., 2013).

• Need to understand more about agency (choice, free will) in smartphone use.
The study: URBIS
Methodology

› 2 phase study (2006/2012)
› 2012 study revisited 2006 sample, compared findings
› Semi-structured interviews with senior management, senior and junior analysts, CIO, HR and consultants
› Broad environment observations
› Document analysis, including public documents, organisational policies, etc.
› Coded according to broad themes: Connectivity, Technology in Use, Expectations, Controls, Organisational Support
General Observations comparing Phase 1 to Phase 2 of Urbis study

- More volatile (banking) markets, increasing user need for timely, accurate data
- Increased pressure from customers, management and market
- Technology security had become more important with increased mobility
- All interviewees carried multiple mobile devices: Blackberry (Urbis issued), iPhone (or similar), iPad, laptop. All used for organisational purposes, but only the BB issued and funded by Urbis
- Several rounds of redundancies had been completed and constant downsizing/upsizing had become the norm
- Anticipated flexibility of physical work space (2006) not realised and use of the physical office space had become more pronounced
Our Findings......
1. More time spent in the office (12-14 hours), however, increased intensification of work and blending of boundaries.

2. Work space and work time extended beyond the office, into traditionally private space such as weekends and annual leave.

3. New ways of working (positive) created through technological capabilities and organisational support.

4. Workers empowered to increase technological capabilities (BYOD) but required organisational support to enable the management of connectivity.

5. Disconnecting associated with increased stress, therefore,

6. Need to manage the connectivity “tap” to enact individual choice.
Discussion

• In the early adoption ‘CrackBerry,’ phase ‘switching off’ (disconnecting) seemed to be the only ‘defence’ against the ubiquitous connectivity.
• Over time the smartphone moved to the background and became a platform for work.
  – Choices less about connecting and disconnecting and more about the management of connective flow (the tap).
  – More concern over the right amount of connectivity to manage work and non-work and the tools to manage that connectivity.
  – Choices around the technology itself no longer constrained and practices being constantly negotiated to move from requisite connectivity to optimal connectivity.
  – Work/life balance discussions becoming less relevant as user focus on optimizing connectivity to meet individual and professional requirements. The term ‘work-life integration’ emerges.

• Ironically, for our sample, this new platform was enacted even as our participants were somewhat more office-based (which provides support for our argument).
More than just ‘mobile’
More like a ‘platform’

Connective ‘Flow’
(On-going, Integrated)

Connectivity

Home  Work
Papers published in this area....

- Dery K and MacCormick J 2012 'Managing Mobile Technology: The Shift from Mobility to Connectivity', *MIS Quarterly Executive*, vol.11:4, pp. 1-16
- MacCormick J, Dery K and Kolb D 2012 'Engaged or just Connected? Smartphones and employee engagement', *Organizational Dynamics*, vol.41:3, pp. 194-201
- Working with Connective Flow: How Smartphone use is evolving in practice, under 2nd R&R with EJIS
- Conferences papers at EGOS, AoM, CWF, ICIS (Shanghai) and AMCIS
Agency

• Users enact the technology in response to local experiences and needs and thus social and organisational change occurs over time (Leonardi & Barley, 2010).

• The smartphone technology itself (implicitly and explicitly) is designed to enhance human choice or freedom but choice is not always liberating: evidence suggests that we can both embrace increased connectivity and still find it to be constraining (even destructive (Sonnentag & Zilstra, 2013, Mazmanian et al, 2013).

• Connective choice (when and how much to connect) situated within the antinomy of free-will argument (agency) vs social normative pressures (structures) (Giddens, 1979, 1984).