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# Cyberloafing Unplugged: Overcoming Online Distractions in the Workplace



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**Cyberloafing can be a response to job dissatisfaction associated with high workload, low self-efficacy and poor time management skills.**

Amid seemingly never-ending **layoffs** and a laser focus on **efficiency**, companies are expecting their employees to make productive and focused use of their time on the clock. Yet, research has shown that employees often spend a significant amount of time cyberloafing – using the internet for personal purposes during work hours – with one **study** putting this figure as high as 60 to 80 percent.

**Remote** and **hybrid work** arrangements and a significant uptick in social media use have likely exacerbated cyberloafing, making it an important workplace challenge for companies to overcome. Compared to slacking off entirely, cyberloafing can be perceived as a more harmful work behaviour, as employees can pretend to be working while actually spending time online engaging in personal tasks. Productivity, efficiency and focus invariably take

a hit, which can hurt firm performance.

To explore this further, my co-author ([Olga Protsiuk](#) of Kozminski University) and I conducted a [study](#) to investigate the underlying causes of cyberloafing. We also suggest some actions that organisations can take to mitigate the problem and help promote job satisfaction among their employees.

## **What leads to cyberloafing?**

Before we initiated our study, we made several real-life observations regarding the impact of workload and self-efficacy on cyberloafing. In one scenario, we observed a project manager being overwhelmed by tight deadlines and an increasing number of responsibilities. This employee often found solace in brief online distractions to alleviate stress, suggesting a direct link between high workload and increased cyberloafing.

Separately, we noticed a sales representative known for their high self-efficacy consistently meeting project milestones with confidence. Unlike their peers, they rarely resorted to online distractions during work hours, implying that strong self-efficacy might reduce the tendency to indulge in cyberloafing behaviours.

Based on these observations and informed by previous [research](#), we hypothesised that high workload would be positively associated with cyberloafing due to the need for [stress](#) relief, while high self-efficacy would be negatively associated with cyberloafing as it fosters a focus on work and effective task management.

Our participants consisted of 217 employees working in the retail jewellery industry in Ukraine. We distributed online questionnaires that asked participants to indicate the frequency with which they engaged in various cyberloafing behaviours. The survey also included questions designed to assess the intensity of their workload, as well as their sense of self-efficacy, time management skills and level of job satisfaction.

We found that time management skills were negatively associated with cyberloafing. But surprisingly, our hypotheses regarding workload and self-efficacy were not supported by our results. Despite our initial expectations that high workload and low self-efficacy would increase cyberloafing, we did not find a significant, direct relationship between these factors.

What we did discover was that job satisfaction greatly influenced the relationship between workload or self-efficacy and cyberloafing. Higher workload was associated with lower job satisfaction and higher cyberloafing, while higher self-efficacy was associated with higher job satisfaction and lower cyberloafing. Additionally, better time management skills were associated with higher job satisfaction and lower cyberloafing.

### **The effect of job (dis)satisfaction**

Our results suggest that job satisfaction is an essential part of managing workplace behaviours. When employees face excessive workload and feel a sense of low self-efficacy about their ability to manage workplace demands, they are likely to experience job dissatisfaction and subsequently search for coping mechanisms.

When this happens, employees could turn to cyberloafing as a counterproductive form of withdrawal behaviour. Seeking refuge in non-work-related online activities allows them to momentarily escape the pressures and demands of their work environment.

For example, consider an employee who has been assigned a project with an unrealistic deadline. They may feel overwhelmed (high workload) and doubt their ability to complete the assignment on time (low self-efficacy). This could lead to dissatisfaction with the job, as they feel unsupported and overburdened. The employee may subsequently start spending more time online during work hours, engaging in activities unrelated to work like browsing social media or online shopping. Not only does cyberloafing enable the employee to detach from their job, but it also allows them to align their efforts with what they perceive to be unfair demands from their employer.

On the flip side, employees with high job satisfaction may be less likely to engage in cyberloafing, even when their workload is high or their self-efficacy is low. In some cases, they could feel like their workload is negligible or complain less about it than those with low job satisfaction because they feel content with their salaries, the **psychological climate** in the workplace or the relationships they have with their colleagues.

### **How to reduce cyberloafing**

Companies looking to reduce cyberloafing behaviours should develop appropriate strategies to identify and address the various factors that

influence employees' job satisfaction. This can include using surveys to evaluate job satisfaction across different aspects of work and, more importantly, addressing any gaps. This could range from enhancing job security to improving work conditions, recognising individuals' contributions, offering autonomy in tasks and setting regular **meetings** between supervisors and their employees to discuss and solve potential problems.

When it comes to workload, organisations could make use of questionnaires or direct feedback to better understand employees' perceptions of their work volume and pace. Companies should aim to balance the workload, ensuring that it is challenging yet manageable, in order to prevent stress without inducing boredom.

According to psychologist Albert Bandura, **self-efficacy beliefs** are not considered to be a stable character trait. Rather, they are task- and situation-specific and can change depending on the context. To increase self-efficacy, firms could pay more attention to person-job fit issues, as ensuring that the demands of a specific position are aligned with an employee's abilities can help promote high self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Companies could also provide opportunities for skill development and success recognition, empowering individuals to tackle their responsibilities more effectively.

To improve employees' time management skills, firms could offer practical training in time management and the efficient use of technology. Both are key strategies for employees, especially those working within hybrid work models, and can help them prioritise tasks and use their time more effectively. Moreover, organisational time schedules and rules need to accommodate individual time management styles to prevent frustration, feelings of invasion and pressure to comply with rigid timetables. All of this can negatively impact job satisfaction and, by extension, increase cyberloafing.

For employees, setting clear goals, prioritising tasks and taking regular, scheduled breaks can help with maintaining focus and reducing the temptation to engage in non-work-related online activities while on the clock. Ensuring that the position and responsibilities are well aligned with one's interests and skills, along with seeking feedback and clarification on expectations, can enhance role alignment and job satisfaction, further reducing the likelihood of cyberloafing.

## Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/cyberloafing-unplugged-overcoming-online-distractions-workplace>

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## About the author(s)

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## About the research

**"What leads to cyberloafing: the empirical study of workload, self-efficacy, time management skills, and mediating effect of job satisfaction"** is published in *Behaviour & Information Technology*.