

Smartphones and their Implications for Work

Ever since Steve Jobs introduced the world to the iPhone back in 2007, smartphones gained mainstream popularity as the flagship mobile product of the decade. In comparison to traditional cell phones that solely functioned as devices for voice and text-based communication, smartphones were a new class of handheld devices that elegantly combined computing with cellular communications technology. The underlying reason that made smartphones so innovative is because they were cell phones embedded with an operating system capable of converging broadband cellular networks with internet data communication via Wi-Fi as well as nearby wireless communication using NFC or Bluetooth. They were also phones equipped with a camera and sensors like an accelerometer, barometer, and a gyroscope. As a result of this computerization, consumers could not only use their cell phones to make calls and send text-messages but also enjoy features such as web-browsing, GPS navigation, image capturing, audio recording and video games to name a few. Essentially, smartphones became personal portable devices that gave consumers computing power that could fit inside their pocket.

Today, the smartphone market has grown tremendously with over 2.1 billion smartphone users (Statista, 2017). By 2019, it is predicted that over a third of the world's population will own a smartphone (Statista, 2017). Given their increasing popularity and ubiquitous nature, smartphones present various implications for our society today. The subsequent paragraphs of this paper will discuss these societal implications in further detail, shedding light on both the benefits and drawbacks of smartphones and their usage for work. In addition, this paper will propose constructive suggestions as recommendations to address some of the shortcomings of smartphones affecting our workers and workplaces.

To begin, the mobile operating system designed for the smartphone serves as a platform for various software applications capable of implementing a myriad of unique functions. The two most common operating systems, Android and iOS, have a combined total of 4.5 million applications (Statista, 2018). Amongst these applications, social media applications like Messenger, Slack, Facebook and YouTube are the most popular with over 9.6 billion downloads worldwide (Statista, 2018). Collectively these applications have given employees multiple avenues for communication at their disposal. For instance, Messenger and Slack, are primarily used as channels for text-based communication while Facebook and YouTube give employees the option to also communicate via pictures, audio, and video. What's interesting here is that unlike a traditional cell phone user who is dependent on a cellular network to

render communication, a smartphone user only requires an internet connection to do the same. What's even more interesting is that by using the internet an employee with a smartphone can communicate with anyone around the world, whereas an employee using a cell phone is typically limited to the geographical boundaries of his/her cellular network. Given these advantages, smartphones have overall facilitated in increasing the range and frequency of communication. Approximately 51% of employees in corporations use mandated business communication apps on their smartphones, causing an average 27% increase in the volume of text-messages and video messages sent via smartphones (Turek, 2016).

Secondly, smartphones have assisted in reducing costs and enhancing productivity of businesses. With smartphones, employees can now communicate and collaborate with each other regardless of their location. Applications like Outlook, Google Hangouts and Skype empower employees to connect with each other without having to meet in-person at a physical location. For instance, an architect based in Toronto can have a live video call with an on-site engineer supervising the construction of a building in Dubai. Using a smartphone's camera, a dermatologist in an urban hospital can assist nurses working in remote clinics to diagnose their patients' skin condition. A lieutenant sitting in America can monitor the actions of his troops in Vietnam and deliver mission-critical commands in real-time. These examples illustrate the notion that as portable computers smartphones have numerous applications that yield remarkable business efficiencies. Moreover, by eliminating the need to meet physically, businesses save immensely on travel costs, especially if they are a multinational organization with numerous international offices. Hewlett-Packard reported a 24% decrease in costs related to business airfare after the company rolled-out smartphones to their employees (Lohr, 2008). Since employees are not tied to a physical location by using a smartphone, this suggests that employees also have greater autonomy in choosing their work location. In fact, for businesses, such as start-ups, who cannot afford a physical office space, equipping employees with smartphones to work remotely could be a viable option. Additionally, since there are many personal management apps created for the smartphone, established companies can offer their executives with exclusive smartphones in order to subsequently save on hiring costs for secretaries.

As devices that are small, light-weight, and thereby travel-friendly, smartphones also improve the convenience of performing menial tasks for the average employee on-the-go. Whether is it responding to emails, reviewing past meeting notes, scheduling new meetings, or simply setting reminders for impending activities, smartphones are great personal assistants. If an employee is looking to destress after a long day at work, they can also rely on their smartphone to be their source of entertainment. They can

listen to music, play video games, and even watch the latest episode of their favourite show on their smartphone. For employees who are constantly travelling for work, such as consultants, the smartphone is an essential companion. Whether the employee needs directions from the hotel to the client's office or recommendations for a nearby restaurant, the smartphone serves as a reliable travel guide throughout the business trip. Likewise, for journalists who are always on the look-out for the "next viral story", smartphones are handy tools enabling them to capture and disseminate information. Using the in-built camera and microphone of their smartphones, journalists can practically report live news from anywhere around the globe as long they are connected to the internet. For facility managers, smartphones are a paperless alternative to record and share the details of a site inspection with the rest of their team. In general, smartphones are portable and effective multi-purpose gadgets that streamline and ease the process of working for employees.

Despite their evident benefits, smartphones also have several drawbacks for employers and employees. Foremost, there is an imminent threat to the privacy and security of information stored in the smartphones. From an employer's standpoint, smartphones are essentially roaming footprints of the firm's confidential information that cannot be confined to the physical premises of the firm. In case a smartphone is stolen or misplaced, a company can experience detrimental consequences, especially if the device is inadequately secured. In a recent study done by Kensington research, they found that 4.3% of company-issued smartphones are lost or stolen every year, out of which 42% had their security compromised (Hom, 2017). Furthermore, since many employers are lenient nowadays and trust their employees with using smartphones, there is always a chance that certain employees abuse this trust. Employees may begin to extensively use smartphones to indulge in personal tasks at the cost of work. Hence, it is plausible for smartphones to introduce avoidable sources of distraction for workers. What's worse is that frequent distractions can hamper with an employee's ability to refocus on the task at hand. According to a study from Carnegie Mellon University, researchers found that the average worker takes about 25 minutes to return to completing the original task after an interruption (Fitzsimons, 2015).

From an employee's standpoint, the introduction of smartphones for work purposes instills a false expectation that employees should respond to emails immediately, even if it is outside of regular business hours. In fact, many employees have felt compelled to monitor their inboxes compulsively to the extent that it became a chronic habit which ultimately led to higher stress levels. According to a survey conducted by the European Journal of Scientific Research, 33% of workers admitted to checking their smartphones

for emails and messages throughout the night (Sarwar, 2013). Furthermore, after waking up in the morning, 35% checked their email before anything else, including getting dressed or eating breakfast (Sarwar, 2013). Examining these statistics, one can infer the potential for smartphones to develop serious addictions in employees that result in irreversible psychological effects. Besides psychological effects, there are also effects on an employee's domestic relationships. As smartphones permit employees to bring work home, there are consequences to the dynamic between the employee and their family. The same survey reported that approximately 29% of workers using smartphones experienced friction in their personal relationships, specifically with their significant other or spouse (Sarwar, 2013).

Both employers and employees can take certain measures to address the shortcomings of using smartphones for the purposes of work. In order to ensure that the privacy and security of the firm's information is upheld at the highest standards, employers should offer mandatory training to all employees regarding the best practices for securing their smartphones and keeping information private. Moreover, employers can leverage modern mobile management tools like MobileIron to centrally manage the security of all smartphones within their enterprise. These tools also allow employers to deploy the latest security patches and enforce policies such as multifactor authentication in order to ensure safety of all enterprise devices. In the case that a device is stolen or misplaced, these tools allow firms to remotely wipe the contents of the stolen or misplaced device at the click of a button. Similarly, employees can install app blockers on their smartphones to prevent distractions or reduce the need to compulsively check their phones outside of work. Alternatively, employees are recommended to proactively engage in conversation with their employers, being completely transparent about any issues or concerns that they may have surrounding the expectations of smartphone use during and after work hours. This will consequently help identify and resolve problems before they become too big and costly for both employee and employer.

In conclusion, the smartphone is like any other tool with its own advantages and disadvantages. In the workplace, these devices offer significant productivity benefits and cost reductions. They serve as convenient omnipresent aides that are skilled in executing multiple functions on demand. However, it is their very omnipresence and convenience that can create a distraction or manifest an unhealthy dependence overtime. Hence, it is up to both the employers and employees to be prudent with their administration and use of smartphones. Ultimately, these smartphones represent a remarkable piece of technology that can tremendously elevate the level of society due to their limitless potential.

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