



**BRITISH ACADEMY
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BAM
CONFERENCE

3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER

ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

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Navigating technostressors mindfully: a conceptual understanding using psychological needs satisfaction

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Keywords: Mindfulness, Technostressors, Psychological need satisfaction, Techno-burnout, Work engagement

Extended Abstract

The increasing use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is a double-edged sword as it can create both advantages and challenges for employees in their work related use of it. ICT use for work has both advantages such as reduced communication costs and increased knowledge flows (Forman & Zeebroeck, 2012), and challenges such as blurred work-home boundaries (Berkowsky, 2013), learning pressures to stay updated (O'Driscoll, Brough, Timms, & Sawang, 2010), and emotional exhaustion (Xie, Ma, Zhou, & Tang, 2018). Therefore it is users' differential perceptions of ICT as empowering or constraining that determine their support for ICT use to further their career goals or limit its usage to reduce resultant technostress. Technostress has been defined as a problem of adaptation (Brod, 1984) with later conceptualizations referring to it as the inability to cope with the demands of organisational computer usage resulting in negative cognitions towards ICT (Tarafdar, Pullins, & Ragu-Nathan, 2015; Tarafdar, Tu, & Ragu-Nathan, 2010). Aspects of technology that create stress for ICT workers have been characterized as 'technostress creators' or 'technostressors' which are: techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-uncertainty and techno-insecurity (Ragu-Nathan, Tarafdar, Ragu-Nathan, & Tu, 2008).

While most existing studies view ICT characteristics and usage as leading to stress, we re-conceptualize these technostressors as 'demands' based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Demands are work factors that require individuals to expend some amount of effort in dealing with them (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Thus we put forth a balanced perspective towards employee ICT use by postulating that some ICT demands could lead to engagement while others could lead to techno-burnout. Also, current approaches to reduce technostress are myopic as they underestimate the role of the individual's agency in its amelioration and instead focus only on organisation-provided interventions. This paper postulates mindfulness, an individual disposition amenable to development as a personal resource in alleviating techno-burnout and fostering work engagement among employees with intensive ICT use. Further, we posit psychological need satisfaction as the psychological mechanism that contributes to differential perceptions of ICT use as stressful or not, thus differentiating them into challenge and hindrance demands.

The paper makes the following contributions. First, the study theoretically delineates technostressors as challenge or hindrance demands based on employees' psychological need satisfaction. Second, the paper introduces mindfulness as a personal resource in mitigating any negative impacts from technostressors. The research related contribution of introducing mindfulness lies in two domains – as an individual mitigation approach within the technostress domain and as an emerging personal resource within JD-R theory in the organisational behaviour domain. Our propositions are also proffered as a conceptual framework and we encourage future research to validate our contentions.

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