

## 5. Well-being at Work



## **Mobile services as tools for managing work related stress**

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years on how the nature of work has changed. More and more employees alone take charge of their work, and even planning is mostly their own responsibility. Another big change affecting the work tasks of many is the ever increasing amount of information. The Internet, in particular, has made it possible to access more information and real time information. Information acquisition has been made easier with various kinds of mobile services, used either in mobile phones or laptops. Working is no longer bound to a certain time or a place.

New mobile tools have made working more efficient in many ways. Since you can work on the train through e-mail, it is natural to assume that there will be less work waiting for you at the work place. In other words, the amount of work could be lessened with the new tools, but this is not what has happened.

### **It is still trendy to be busy**

According to various studies, people at most workplaces have been really busy during the last few years and they are experiencing more pressure. This pressure is caused by information overflow and because of insufficient personnel. Despite the actual pressure at work, being busy seems to have become a positive thing worth aiming at. Often people want to look busy to appear more important. Being available around the clock via a mobile phone or other devices is part of the image of a busy, but positive employee.

However, to ensure the productivity of an employee, it is essential to ensure sufficient leisure time. Rushing around rarely produces good

quality. We acknowledge the importance of breaks, but this is not always realized at the individual level.

In principle, mobile devices are nice tools for managing work. They enable working anywhere and receiving messages without having to interrupt whatever one is doing at the moment. It is also possible to group callers and, for instance, accept only certain calls.

It is easy to see how mobile devices can in so many ways add the workers' opportunities to organize their work and make them less busy. Obviously this is not the reality, at least not sufficiently so, as people are now talking about the 'busyness disease'. This happens when time increasingly controls a person's doings and feelings. One constantly feels that there is not enough time.

### **Limits for our working hours**

It is essential in most jobs for the employees to be excited about their work and for them to want to submerge themselves in the subject. Despite the excitement, it is important for every single worker, however independent, to pay attention to breaks when planning their workday. It may often be difficult to change the way things are done on your own, but it is even harder to carry out these changes without employees really being interested in the change.

However, with mobile devices this is easily done. You can always turn off the phone or set it at silent mode. Respectively, it is not necessary to check your email or text messages all the time. Despite the easiness, people do



*Stopping for a while is good for people. Little everyday matters have a great importance in a person's well-being.*

not find it easy to turn off their devices. Probably they are still so excited about these new devices that they want to be available all the time, as individuals, even if their work does not necessitate this. This could be a sign of a kind of dependency.

Changes might be easier to achieve if we tried to influence the use of mobile devices at the level of working communities. For instance, working communities could give a recommendation not to call people about business at nights or during weekends, much less at lunch breaks. It is easy to cross the limits and sooner or later you will not know whether you are working or spending your leisure time.

One way to approach the problem is to look at the work community rules. Kirsi Appelberg (1997)<sup>1</sup> claims that a work community has three kinds of rules: 1) human relations rules, 2) human relations rules of the management 3) the subordinates' human relations rules towards the management.

The human relations rules include, for instance, the following: polite behavior towards the others, receiving support in your daily work, respecting people's privacy, trust, and rules related to one's job, e.g. job related behavior. These rules could form the base for mobile phone use and help to find ways for dealing with mental pressure.

## **Stopping is a challenge**

One reason for not getting rid of the busy lifestyle is that, in a way, busyness at work has spread to one's leisure time as well. Hence, it is making one's entire life busier.

In his lecture at Heureka, called 'Busyness', Erkki Anttila (2002)<sup>2</sup> said, that 'the disease of time' in our society is a disability to live in the only time we are really able to control, i.e. the present. This change in the way we are experiencing time in our society is probably also reflected at individual levels and hence makes it very hard to fight this general admiration for efficiency.

Trying to stop the frenetic life may cause anxiety and fear in individuals because busyness may have been just a way to boost one's ego. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to be able to stop before other kinds of symptoms and perhaps even diseases emerge.

## **It is the little moments of joy that matter**

According to Erkki Antila, the entertainment industry, movies, and computer games feed peoples' minds with alerting stimuli that make their heart throb but at the same time numb the reality. These super stimuli can lead to a situation where one finds it difficult to cherish the little everyday things, like acts of affection, birds singing, or a sunset. That is why it is important to preserve a touch to your real life environment in spite of the large number of stimuli and the great amount of information.

With a mobile phone, you can send images and video clips in addition to text messages. This makes it even easier to send your friends messages, helping you to share the happy little moments with them. Mobile devices can contribute to our mental well-being in so many ways if only we remember to pay attention to this fact.

This kind of development is most likely supported by the work and safety legislation, which considers mental stress one of the central risk factors to us. The goal is to better prevent mental overload by proportioning and planning our work better. ■

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### **References:**

<sup>1</sup>Appelberg, Kirsi. 1997. *Kognitiivisia keinoja vakavien ihmissuhdevaikeuksien hoitoon työterveyshuollossa. Työterveyslääkäri 2, pp. 207-213*

<sup>2</sup>Antila, Erkki. 2002. *Kiire, kiire. Terveysthuoltoja yksityisesti 1, pp. 16-17*  
*The article is based on Erkki Antila's lecture "Kiire" in Heureka 2.12.2001.*

## **Ergonomics of a mobile worker is a challenge**

The nature of work for a lot of people has changed in the last few years. We no more work just at our work places, but work often follows us wherever we go. It is assumed that we will take care of our work even when we are away - with the help of the mobile devices.

Ergonomics is already well taken care of in the regular office work. The staff gets a proper chairs and proper tables and there are recommendations concerning computer work. Even the employees themselves know a lot about this kind of ergonomics.

Because of the changes in the nature of work, people talk a lot on their mobile phone when on the go. The mobile phone has become a versatile tool. Especially the young use the mobile phone for sending text messages, seeking information and sending emails.

These ergonomics-related issues must be seen to with mobile phones as well as with other devices. If you use your mobile phone a lot, a hands-free device decreases the load on your neck and hand in the same way as with a traditional phone.

### **The repetitive motions of sending text messages can overstrain your hand**

The monotonous repetitive motion done when sending text messages, for instance the thumb's movement, can cause a strain in your hand. You can help the situation by taking the opportunity to send messages from your computer. You can also buy an additional keyboard for your phone.

Moreover, you can send messages in different ways and using your both hands, which distributes the strain more evenly. The size of the mobile phone battery also affects the motion you have to do while sending messages. There are myriad ways to write messages, so everyone

should test different ways to find one that suits them in order to prevent an extended monotonous repetitive movement if sending a lot of text messages.

### **The small size of an intelligent phone is an ergonomic challenge**

In Finland we use a lot mobile devices that we call intelligent phones (like communicators). Palmtops that are popular elsewhere in the world have not become that popular in Finland. As for ergonomics, the communicator resembles the traditional laptop in many ways. However, instead of a mouse, the communicator has a keyboard. The small size of the keyboard presupposes a different style of keying than what is used with a laptop or a desktop computer.

If you want to use the touch-type system for writing on a communicator, you must place fingers exactly on the keys, which easily causes static muscle tension in your hands and neck-shoulder area. You could, of course, use only one hand primarily for writing, which would leave more space for the movement of hands. With this device as well, it is wise to look for the best possible ways to use it for writing and, what is more, alternate the different ways to prevent one-sided muscle strain.

Compared with a traditional computer, a communicator is quite small and light and can be used elsewhere than just on a desktop. For example, you can have the communicator in your lap and write messages with one hand while sitting on a couch. In particular, if you have to use a communicator a lot while travelling, it is a good idea to employ varying working postures. For example, either lying on the hotel room bed or working at a table.



*When using portable devices, it is wise to change one's position and grip regularly.*

Palmtops also have pen control. Ergonomic rules that apply to writing with a pen also apply to these devices. You should always keep your arm supported, e.g. on a table, so that you do not have to hold up your hand. This is also true with a palmtop, especially if you write a lot.

### **Self-assessment of ergonomic factors is important**

All in all, as working includes more mobile devices it also changes the employee's relation to ergonomics. Since mobile devices allow working anywhere the employee must check the ergonomic factors for him/herself. There is a lot of information available and self-assessment is quite possible if only we remember to pay attention to these issues.

This article focused on how mobile devices affect physical strain factors, like repetitive movements and static positions.

In addition to this, we must pay attention to the same factors as with e.g. computer work. Lighting, for example, plays an essential role. The screens of mobile devices are quite small, and often it is best to read the text in a small size. The background light helps a little.

Mobile devices are quite popular among the young but they are gaining more popularity among all age groups. That is why we have to pay attention to how to use them with eyeglasses as well.

New mobile devices will emerge in the future. The more we use them the more important it is for the users to pay attention to ergonomics, e.g. in order to prevent musculoskeletal and connective tissue disorders. ■



## **It is up to yourself to conquer the hectic lifestyle - get support from peers**

*We live in the future, that is, if we even have time for that. Busyness is a phenomenon that not only affects directly us people but also the entire welfare of our society. The things that guarantee economic success and competitiveness are knowledge and well-being of employees. The latter also reverberates in productivity and quality. However, research shows that haste and burn-out are more and more usual.*

*In addition to busyness, weariness is due to a sense of inadequacy, particularly among women. Peer support has been found to be a good medicine for it.*

Professor Leena Korpinen has studied well-being at work and participated in projects promoting well-being at work. She thinks the symptoms of the disease are now visible.

- It is hard to fight the general efficiency admiration, especially if one looks at it from an economical viewpoint or from the viewpoint of productivity. The hasty lifestyle can also be a way to boost one's self-confidence and slowing down would cause stress and might be even be scary to some, Korpinen explains.

People are so busy that they are in a constant state of alert, which makes it impossible to notice your innermost signals. We are constantly accomplishing something, not only at work but also in our leisure time. Body and mind get weary from constant accomplishing and makes it easier to fall ill either mentally or physically.

- The pressure to accomplish something even in our leisure time is exemplified by the growing popularity of the so called extreme sports. Constant hyper-excitement, almost like if getting ready for a fight, leads to a state when normal is no more enough. Instead, signals have to be

very strong for the person to even feel them. This might lead to physical diseases.

To Korpinen, one of the most insensible things in this constant need for accomplishment is that even things like taking care of one's health and being ill are made into accomplishments. Exercising is taken to its limits; results are monitored, followed, measured and compared.

### **Constant time crunch – efficiency or waste?**

The importance of human resources will be even greater for the success and development of a company in the future. Collaborative, motivated, skilful, and mentally and physically well staff is needed to maintain the competitive edge, Well-being at work is an essential factor not only for the employee but also for the employer, because it has a direct effect on the quality of work.

- Various studies in Finland and in Europe show that the intensity of work is on the rise, working pace is going up and schedules are getting tighter. Independence at work increases but not enough to make up for the pressure from the ever tightening schedules, Korpinen says.

- The negative effects of haste on one's well-being realize themselves in increasing absences from work and decreasing creativity. Creativity suffers from haste.

### **We need the little guerillas at the workplace**

Korpinen thinks it is up to each individual to fight the haste and busyness. The reason for burn-out is not necessarily work, but the entire life. The hussle and buzzle in your private life might be a major reason but somehow it is easier to blame work than your private life.



*Mobile technology loses the dividing line of work and leisure. One can, of course, turn off the phone.*

- Work sets high goals but goals are set by the person her/himself as well. Personal worth is measured in material things. Constant competition has its advantages and brings in healthy innovations but taken too far, it will lose its positive effects.

- Legislation can help in this and working conditions can be improved by changing the working policies and the ways of management but the individual is still the most important thing in the change. It is easier to make changes in yourself even if it takes a lot of effort. You have to be ready to make choices, even difficult ones. Making your own choices requires you to stop and think. You must often build your own identity, it seems, on nothing. This takes a lot of courage in this society where we are not normally used to, or able to say out loud the more difficult issues, and where criticism starts right from school.

Korpinen thinks that one of the greatest obstacles for building a strong identity is the lack of the right kind of encouragement.

- The value of a person is always measured based on something. We get feedback on our learning results and hobbies but not on how good we are as people.

Furthermore, Korpinen wants to underline the importance of the role of every single individual in changing a work community. It is always worth going on – as opposed to giving up.

- Free-rider mentality abounds at work places; the good-hearted people work and get tired. Nevertheless, it is not always the best, much less the most sustainable, solution to the problem to leave. Working life will never get better if all the smart ones leave. We really need the little guerillas at our work places, Korpinen laughs.

## **Peer support as a source of power**

A sense of inadequacy adds to the busyness of the working women. Will I make it? Will I be able to do it? Am I good enough?

Peer support is a good medicine for this. Peer support works at its best when people who are in the same situation and face the same challenges can interact and talk about their experiences. These encounters increase knowledge, and create new standpoints.

Research shows that peer support is of great importance in people's

life management. Community is power. It is essential to base action on experiential things: people are not objects of care but active doers themselves.

Korpinen heads an action plan which is based on peer support groups and which was developed at the Laboratory of Electrical Engineering and Health at Tampere University of Technology. It aims at improving women's mental well-being at work. This plan of action was developed as part of WomEqual –project and the best action plans are to be made part of the basic operation of TUT, while also spreading them to other universities if possible.

- We first made a preliminary report about the needs of group work and policies. The needs analysis showed a positive attitude to the use of peer groups, Korpinen tells us.

After this analysis, different groups were formed, i.e. female managers, women working on their doctoral thesis, and female teaching and research staff. In addition to this, we arranged various occasions, so called WE-parties, on themes like how to combine career and family life.

We experimented with different procedures for the meetings. The procedure where someone first presented an interesting theme and then people discussed it, turned out to be the most functional one.

- According to the feedback, participants considered the themes important and the atmosphere there was good. I think this kind of activity is worth doing in the future as well. Particularly the women working on their doctoral thesis benefit from these meetings. ■

*Women's mental well-being at work seems to improve with the help of peer groups. Sharing experiences is empowering.*

