A Solution to Procrastination for the New 'Gen Y' Workforce

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Abstract — **As Generation Y enters the workforce replacing retiring baby boomers, companies face the challenge of minimizing loss due to online procrastination by these young techno-savvy employees. This paper explores and discusses the possibility of an online social media application that poses as both a motivation to work and as a self-restricting and disciplining device, which will ultimately improve employee productivity. It uses current and past literature and research to explain the theory behind motivation and procrastination to explain the plausibility of our suggested solution.**

Keywords—Procrastination, Social Media, Motivation, Productivity, Generation Y

I. Introduction

Reaching the highest level of productivity is one of many goals a company tries to obtain in order to maintain a competitive advantage. However, as technology advances, the amount of distractions available in a work environment increases. Especially with the current generation of techno-savvy multitaskers, it is difficult to ensure that employees are really working during working hours. In this paper, we will focus on Generation Y at the entry level of the workforce in Western based companies. This is mainly due to the limitation of literature and research coming from Western countries, namely Europe and America.

II. Generation Y

A. Why Generation Y

The workforce today is no longer solely filled with the baby boomers, the post WWII generation, or Generation X, the generation after the baby boom, instead, there is an increasing proportion of Generation Y. This generation of

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people has already started entering the workforce and replacing the currently retiring baby boomers [1]. Generation Y is expected to dominate 75% of the global workforce by the year 2025 [2].

B. Who is the Generation Y

The concise definition of Generation Y can vary from book to book, but the general understanding of this generation includes everyone born in the 1980s until the late 1990s or early 2000s. They are sometimes referred to as the Millennials, the baby boom echo and even the generation.com as they are the first generation to have internalized the Internet [3]. This is their biggest "advantage" compared to their older relatives, as they are better adapted to the fast growing technological world. They have a prominent and active presence in the virtual world. They are the techno-savvy and "better educated" multitaskers with a preference towards teamwork, good conduct and modesty [1]. In addition, they are believed to be a transformational generation, flexible to change.

C. Generation Y in the Workplace

Entering the workforce with their own characteristics and priorities, Generation Y has influenced their work environments to suit their own needs.

This generation is believed to have learnt from their parents and has grown up to prioritize the importance of a work-life balance [4]. They emphasize the importance of making their jobs accommodate their personal lives. They have a higher value on self-fulfillment as they believe that life is short [5]. In fact, studies have shown that these younger employees find having a balanced and flexible work life more important than the actual salary when finding jobs [6].

To accommodate this need, however presently unrealistic, 79% of Generation Y believes in having a more flexible work life [7]. This can be in terms of more flexible working hours or even ad hoc ways of working [7]. In fact, a study conducted by Cisco has shown that up to 25% of employees personally think that they would be more productive at home [8]. This flexibility is believed possible with the advanced telecommunication systems available in the world today.

III. Current Situation

A. Procrastination at a workplace:

One of the main obstacles that many corporations face today is procrastination. It is the issue of people going to the

workplace but not completing the tasks that should be done. According to career intelligence website Vault.com, an estimated value of US$54 billion is lost annually due to procrastinating [9].

Amongst the different procrastination methods, unproductive Internet use is seen as the number one way to waste time at work according to a survey conducted by a subdivision platform provided by IBM[10]. An estimation of up to US$1 billion is lost annually solely by employees surfing the web [11]. In a study done on Accident Advice Helpline (AAH) in the UK, the restriction of Internet access has managed to increase productivity by 50% [12]. This illustrates the growing and prominently pressing issue of Internet procrastination and its impact on today's workforce. However, unlike the AAH study, many, if not most, of today's jobs all have the need for Internet usage, where control or banning of the Internet use is increasingly difficult.

B. *The problematic Internet use amongst Generation Y*

It is suggested that procrastination is an increasingly problematic issue especially with Generation Y. Generation Y, having internalized Internet, having grown up along side technology, is the most online generation yet. Research by Cisco found that one in ten Gen Y members always have Facebook up, whilst 60% of Gen Y compulsively checks their smart phones for emails, texts or social media updates [8]. In fact, studies have shown that the more comfortable or familiar you are with the Internet, the more time you spend on it [13].

Amongst the different kinds of problematic Internet use, the most prominent amongst Generation Y would be the use of social media to pass time. Blogging, tweeting or even just browsing through social media websites is become one of the most regular activities. In a study of 18 year old students, 67% access Facebook through their mobile phones and 59% of students would be accessing it during class [14]. This reinforces the idea of constantly being on social media even when they supposedly are not meant to.

Since the Generation Y has entered the workforce, there has been a 70% increase of mobile traffic in 2012 mainly due to the mobile social media apps [8]. According to Palo Alto Networks, social media use on work computers jumped 300% in a single year [15].

Social media is a major factor for the Generation Y workforce. Studies have shown that 64% ask about social media during an interview and up to a third of Generation Y would also prioritize social media freedom, device flexibility and work mobility over salary [15]. This shows the importance of being able to use social media at work. It is even shown in Cisco's survey that up to 56% of Generation Y would even reject jobs in companies who have a permanent ban on social media.

With this attachment to social media, where in some studies was even described as an addiction to social media [16], and the unwillingness to compromise the availability to social media at a workplace, it is hard to imagine a truly effective and productive Generation Y workforce with such distractions available

C. *What companies are doing now*

The most common company practice used in hope to control or minimize the abuse of Internet is Internet monitoring. This refers to having supervision or monitoring of Internet usage, usually inclusive of email screening. GFI's research showed that up to 66% of companies use Internet monitoring [11].

Internet monitoring is usually coupled with Internet blocking as well, which, according to GFI, 65% of companies use [11]. In the past, this may have consisted of complete blocking of Internet access, but as today's world is closely linked with the virtual online world, Internet blocking now refers more to the blocking of inappropriate sites.

However, alongside these existing practices, a few newer and innovative practices such as maintaining smaller goals and increasing goal alarm frequency have been introduced. Having understood Generation Y's tendency to procrastinate on big projects, studies have shown that small goals with tight deadlines are more effective for maintaining productivity [17]. Another study also showed that the use of alarms for reminders of goals increases the amount of goals achieved as well as decreasing the level of procrastination [18].

IV. **Our innovative solution**

Having understood the current situation, the characteristics of Generation Y and their working habits, in the following section we will describe and explain our solution to this probing procrastination problem.

We suggest an application that would be on social media or social networking sites. This application would provide users to begin a time-specific work session, where during this period, all social media will be blocked along with other entertainment sites, e.g. YouTube, Reddit, Tumblr, etc. All access to possible online procrastination channels will be restricted, therefore ideally resulting in accomplishing more tasks. During this period, Facebook, Twitter or other social media pages will present a "working session" status, allowing friends and colleagues to see that he/she is "working". This will be prominently stated on the profile so that browsing friends will be able to know exactly who is currently in a working session, causing a "peer pressure" effect. This will create the feeling of needing to work because your friends and colleagues around you are currently working. Ultimately, it may become a type of work culture to see and know that your colleagues are working, therefore so should you.

This suggestion of an application as a procrastination solution is based of three main factors: working in time periods, Internet restriction and motivation. These factors are the reasons on why we believe this solution would work. Below, we will discuss the relevance and the workings of each of these factors and how it relates to our suggested solution.

A. *Working in time periods*

This generation likes the freedom of being able to control their schedules, adding to the ad hoc or flexibility characteristic of their work style. By allowing them to control their own work cycles, it would give the employee a strong impression of control and flexibility, therefore more likely to create a more satisfied employee.

Schwarz has shown that in the aviation industry, taking short breaks between longer working hours showed a 16% improvement in awareness and focus [19]. In fact, a recent study by Ariga and Lleras showed that brief diversions from the task every once in a while will in fact dramatically improve their focus and performance on the original given task [20]. These studies help suggest that by working in cycles of work and breaks can actually be more productive for the individual.

Generation Y is also a generation that believes in the maximization of time. They believe that every minute can be more efficiently used when doing a spectrum of things all at once. They have adapted to be able to answer phones, whilst chatting online, whilst browsing the Internet, all whilst actually also attempting to work on the current project [21]. The question raised, however, is how productive this conduct actually is.

Studies have shown that instead of getting more tasks completed at a higher quality, multitasking results in the opposite effect. Research by Stanford researcher, Clifford Nass, has shown that multitasking actually results in performing worse in filtering information, task switching and maintaining work memory [22]. Instead, the only positive outcome of multitasking is having a higher emotional satisfaction [23]. In a recent study, it was even suggested that multitaskers multitask not only because it makes them more satisfied, but also because they are unable to not be distracted by the simplest of things [24].

So our solution to this would be working in cycles, similar to professional violinists. Violinists practice 90 minutes then having a 15-20 minute break before continuing to practice another session of 90 minutes. However, since the "work" of a violinist is very different from those who "work" in an office, this session may vary according to each company's need. This may range from 40-minute sessions up to an hour. The break period can be seen as a reward or an incentive to work towards.

This work cycle of work and break periods is also said to line up with our energy cycles similar to ultradium rhythms [25]. This is believed to keep up focus and energy levels throughout the workday. This idea of a work cycle is also described in the "pomodoro technique", a time management method introduced in the late 1980s. This technique was created by Francesco Cirillo and is based on the idea of having 25-minute work sessions and then a break [26].

B. *Internet Restriction*

Similar to how multitasking occurs due to the availability of distractions, procrastination is also said to occur due to the availability to the medium of procrastination [17]. This means, that people procrastinate because they have access to mediums in which they can procrastinate on. At the common office, research show that 30 to 40% of Internet usage is often unrelated to the business [11]. To solve this, the current method of Internet restriction provides exactly the results sought after. However, although productive, it has also limited access to potentially necessary content. For example, social media is now a large part of online marketing, if it was to be completely restricted from the office, it would create obstacles to the marketing department.

Knowing that up to 68% [8] of Generation Y believes that work computers should also be allowed for social media use and that social media usage on work computers has increased by three times as much in just one year [15], a limitation to the access of social media would seem logical. However, coupled with the understanding that the majority of Generation Y would decline a job offer due to a social media ban, or that social media access would be discussed during a job interview, it is hard to completely prohibit it without compromising potential employees. In fact, a study at Harvard Business School suggested that social media should not be completely prohibited at work, but instead be limited to a certain amount of time to keep employees both motivated and content [10]. Therefore, in our solution, we suggest that with each work session, there will be a restriction of Internet usage to all social media and other procrastination sites, but only for this time period. This will create the same effect of the ban during working periods, whilst satisfying Generation Y's wants and needs.

C. *Sources of Motivation*

To achieve a goal in sports, motivation is one of the most important factors [27]. This is the same for achieving work goals. Motivation, as defined in the Oxford dictionary, is "a reason or reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way". There are three sources of motivation: extrinsic-, intrinsic-, and a-motivation. In our case, we will mainly focus on the first two sources.

At first glance, our promoted solution may sound like a source of purely extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation refers to an external source of motivation, often regarding a reward or obtaining a certain outcome [27]. In our case, the extrinsic motivation could stem from two places. The first form of extrinsic motivation begins with becoming aware that those around the user are all participating in work sessions and therefore motivates him/her as they are likely to not want to be the only non-worker or lazy one.

Understanding that supportive peer culture of procrastination at the office can result in promoting internet abuse during office hours [28], we believe that the opposite effect of being productive and working can result in the same method as well. Peer pressure influences the motivation of participants in several ways, including collaborative and competitive behaviour and through their social relationships [29]. Therefore, this form of peer pressure can be seen as an extrinsic motivation to start a work session. Using social networking sites as a medium for this is plausible as they are

no longer just for personal use, but often used for professional networking as well. On average, an employee adds 16 friends per job [15], suggesting that our use of social media to create office-based motivation is highly plausible.

Once a work session has begun, the next form of extrinsic motivation comes from the reward of having access to social media during the break at the end of the work session. It gives the user something to look forward to.

However, according to Kjerufl, extrinsic motivation is not enough. After reaching the goal, the participant often does not gain knowledge and the focus was only on the reward [30]. This is echoed in B'Enabou and Tirole's research showing that "rewards, as an extrinsic motivation, have limited impact on the current performance and reduce the motivation to undertake similar tasks in the future"[31]. Instead, intrinsic motivation is believed to be a better alternative.

Intrinsic motivation comes from an internal source, driven by satisfaction and interest [27]. It is proven that people, who are dealing with intrinsic motivation, reach their goal easier and quicker than those who are aiming solely for the reward [32]. This is where the characteristic of Generation Y integrates into our theory. Generation Y is described to have the tendency to "job hop", meaning to stay at one job or another for no longer than 1 to 2 years. It has been suggested that this is due to their need for growth and that many members of this generation usually lack the incentive to stay due to the lack of career path visible to them [33]. Knowing that they have their ultimate intrinsic aspirations to strive in their work environments, the only issue left to attend to is joining this with an intrinsic motivation to simply start work in a work environment.

We believe that our solution may start off as an external push to start work; however the ultimate goal of this application is not to provide a method of competition between colleagues on who works the most, but a tool in which the users can push and discipline themselves into becoming more efficient and motivated workers. This is best illustrated with the example of spinning in a gym. Spinning in a group provides extrinsic motivation, because you want to reach the goal of keeping up and not giving up before other participants. The reward is the feeling of doing as good as the others. The intrinsic part of spinning includes two elements. First, the level of gravity of the bicycle can only be seen by you. You can never directly compare with the other participants as you do not know who is on which level. This relates to our solution, you can see friends and colleagues working but you can't compare on how much work you really have done. The second element of the intrinsic part is self motivation. As only you know how hard you are pushing yourself with the level of gravity, if you cheat, you are only lying to yourself. In order to overcome this, intrinsic motivation comes from preparation and self training. A good preparation will result in better training. For example, the right equipment such as a heart-rate monitor or dryfit clothing will aid to improving your results during spinning. A better result will create satisfaction and higher motivation for next time as you can see the improvement. This relates to our solution, where you will motivate yourself by seeing the improvements in your work

and the amount you have achieved, whilst also being motivated to want to be better.

Though the application has its extrinsic motivational functions through peer pressure and awards, the core function of this tool is to reach self-disciplining long-term goals. Users will internalize what the application forces them to do and learn not to submit to the social media temptation. Procrastination is not a long-term problem, but something we can overcome with the help of age and time. Studies have shown that people will adapt, losing the need to procrastinate with the Internet [34]. Therefore, the older people become, the less likely people are to still have problematic Internet use [35]. Long-term goals of overcoming distractions can be achieved with these work sessions until ultimately the system may not be needed for the particular user anymore. This would also correspond with their career path as it is expected to have more responsibility and workload as the employee climbs higher. With more work, comes less time and the need to be able to manage their time will be vital.

v. Conclusion

In this paper, we have identified the problem of procrastination and problematic internet usage in companies and then suggested and discussed the possible promotion of an Internet restriction application, which works as both an intrinsic and extrinsic motivator for the increasing amount of Generation Y in the workforce. We have discussed how this application also works as a method in which the user will learn to adapt and stop procrastinating, ultimately working towards being able to work even with distractions available to them. We have used previous literature to help provide insight of the plausibility of this application's functions and the possible improvement to the effectiveness and efficiency of the workforce, ultimately aiming for higher productivity.

This paper has been mainly based on Generation Y entering the labour force at entry-level, targeting slightly more task based jobs than managerial jobs. A limitation to the study would include the referencing of mainly American and European literature, limiting the plausibility of our theory to American and European companies. Though we do not exclude the possibility of our suggestion for an Asian based company, due to the lack of access to related literature, it is outside our abilities to suggest it.

Further development to this paper should be in the direction of implementing this application on a sample to test the theory. A further study to understand the optimal working session time and the necessary websites that should be restricted should also be done to improve and complete on our suggested solution.

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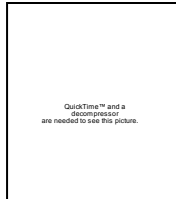
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