

Press Release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.01am Friday 22nd April 2005



Abuse of technology can reduce UK workers' intelligence HP calls for more appropriate use of "always-on" technology to improve productivity

LONDON, 22 April, 2005 – The abuse of "always-on" technology has led to a nationwide state of "Info-Mania" where UK workers are literally addicted to checking email and text messages during meetings, in the evening and at weekends. Mobile technology offers massive productivity benefits when used responsibly, but inappropriate use can be negative.

New research¹, commissioned on behalf of technology experts Hewlett Packard, reveals that 62% of adults are addicted to checking messages out of office hours and whilst on holiday. Half of workers will respond to an email immediately or within 60 minutes, and one in five people are "happy" to interrupt a business or social meeting to respond to an email or telephone message.

Perhaps more worrying is the effect of Info-Mania on workers' IQ. Far from making workers more productive, the findings of a new scientific experiment reveal that those who "over juggle" and who constantly disrupt meetings and important tasks to read and respond to messages, significantly reduce their IQ. In a series of tests carried out by Dr Glenn Wilson, Reader in Personality at the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, an average worker's functioning IQ falls ten points when distracted by ringing telephones and incoming emails. This drop in IQ is more than double the four point drop seen following studies on the impact of smoking marijuana². Similarly, research on sleep deprivation suggests that an IQ drop of ten points is equal to missing an entire night of sleep³. This IQ drop was even more significant in men who took part in the tests.

"This is a very real and widespread phenomenon," explains psychologist Dr Glenn Wilson, "We have found that Info-Mania, if unchecked, will damage a worker's performance by reducing their mental sharpness. Companies should encourage a more balanced and appropriate way of working"

Companies who provide their employees with iPAQ's, notebooks and mobile phones to work remotely and on the move normally yield enormous benefits from greater productivity, better employee motivation and improved work-life balance. The problem occurs when workers use these tools 24/7 to be 'more productive', during meetings and in their private time when their IQ and output begin to fall. Introducing "best practice tips" is often the best solution. (see downloadable guide at www.hp.com/uk)

David Smith, Commercial Communications Manager, HP UK & Ireland commented, "The research suggests that we are in danger of being caught up in a 24 hour 'always on' society. This is more worrying when you consider the potential impairment on performance and concentration for workers, and the consequent impact on businesses. At HP we strongly advocate the deployment of technology to improve productivity, but we encourage people to respect and use it appropriately. For example, using "dead time" whilst travelling, or when going from one meeting to another is a very productive way to deal with messages."

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“Similarly, at HP we encourage people to temporarily turn off their iPAQs , notebooks and tablet pc’s during meetings. This removes the temptation to check messages. People need to understand that in some situations this is the most appropriate option. Although sports car manufacturers make fast cars, they expect people to drive them responsibly and not drive down the motorway at 150mph. Similarly, “always on” technology has proven productivity benefits but people need to use it responsibly. We know that technology makes us more effective, but we also know that misuse of technology can be counter productive. Employers and employees need to adopt a far more responsible, long term approach.”

In addition to the impact on workers’ performance, Info-Mania in meetings also has a negative effect on colleagues and the work environment, increasing stress and negative feelings. 89% of workers think that colleagues who answer emails or messages in a face to face meeting are extremely rude. This activity can also be extremely distracting. Yet, 30% of people believe it is not only acceptable but actually diligent and efficient to do so.

David Smith added that, “As part of its Smart Office initiative HP is committed to helping businesses understand and benefit from the full potential of technology, thereby helping to improve their employees’ productivity, work life balance and the morale of a company as a whole.”

To read more about how to spot an Info-Maniac and hints on how to improve your productivity please download the Guide to Info-Mania from www.hp.com/uk

To speak with David Smith of Hewlett-Packard and Dr Glenn Wilson, or to request photography please call Kerry Gaffney on 020 7853 2248 or Lucy Thomas 020 7853 2324. Out of hours please contact Kerry on 07720 277169.

¹ Research completed in March 2005 by TNS

² Study completed by Peter Fried, Barbara Watkinson, Deborah James and Robert Gray from the Department of Psychology, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario in 2002 - “*Current and former marijuana use: preliminary findings of a longitudinal study of effects on IQ in young adults*”.

³ Quoted from Dr Stanley Coren’s research in an interview in the Toronto Star. Dr Coren is a psychologist at the University of British Columbia. The research suggests that one hour’s lost sleep out of eight results in a drop of one IQ point. Further details in his book “*Sleep Thieves*.”

About HP

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About Dr Glenn Wilson

Dr Glenn Wilson is Reader in Personality at the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, and Adjunct Professor with the University of Nevada, Reno. He has published more than 100 articles and some 30 books, on topics ranging from personality and attitude measurement to sexual behaviour and psychology of performing arts. He is ranked within the 10 most cited British psychologists and appears regularly on TV and radio.

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