

# Investigation of Procrastination Prevalence among Employees in Small and Medium Enterprises in Slovakia

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**Abstract.** As in other developed countries, small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia are the most widespread type of business. In this context, leadership is key to the sustainable management and support of employees, and especially those employees who are more prone to negative work habits, such as procrastination in the performance of work tasks. The paper focuses on how work procrastination is a negative behavior linked to unpleasant cognitive experiences that causes significant losses in both individual and organizational growth. Those findings are then put in connection with the understanding the causes of employees' work procrastination helps to reduce the frequency with which it occurs. Our assumptions are supported by research which was carried out by CAWI – computer assisted web interviewing. Slovak office workers in SMEs were taken as sample and the questionnaire were administered to capture the data. This quantitative approach added to our understanding of work procrastination and provided practical suggestions for avoiding its negative impacts. The main findings presented in this article show a significant frequency of online procrastination in the areas of Instant messaging and social media surfing during working hours in terms of office workers in small and medium enterprises. According to the data online procrastination also appears to be frequent regarding the daily reading of online news during working hours.

**Keywords:** procrastination, cyberslacking, small and medium enterprises

**JEL classification:** *M12, M21, L20*

## 1 Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises are the driving force of the European economy, as they contribute to job creation and economic growth and ensure social stability. From a quantitative point of view, the term small and medium-sized enterprise covers all sectors if it does not exceed a certain size. Since words suggesting size are used to name small and medium businesses, economists choose to categorize them based on

quantitative measurable indicators. The number of employees is the most frequent criterion used to distinguish between businesses (Hatten, 2011). As in any other type of business, in SMEs the key to dynamism are people. It requires their engagement, activity and a specific leadership which is fueled by creative work, flexibility, and effective time management. However, according to various research data procrastination as the opposite of effective time management is dominant not only in the academic, but also in a professional field. Therefore, we can conclude that procrastination is specific in individual areas of life and should be approached in this way (Klingsieck, 2013). Procrastination is sometimes also referred to as the disease of the era, with a prevalence rate of 20–25 percent in the general population. Office workers postpone for roughly 1.3 hours each day, which is likely an underestimate (D'Abate and Eddy, 2007). Workplace procrastination refers to the deliberate postponing of work activities that must be completed, which has far-reaching consequences for employees' lives and organizational development. Exploring the causes of work procrastination behavior is critical since it provides theoretical insights and practical advice on how to effectively avoid these issues (Bolden and Fillauer, 2019).

Therefore, the main goal of this article is to provide an insight to the frequency of online procrastination regarding office workers in small and medium enterprises, which especially important for managers who should choose the most specific tools in the fight against pro-procrastination behavior, focusing on the specifics of procrastinators.

## 2 Literature review

Procrastination affects basically all professions and therefore the mentioned types of procrastinators can be found in all social groups. Based on the research data, we can conclude that there is no significant difference between the procrastination behavior of men and women, and the types of procrastinators apply to both genders. On the other hand, if we focus on age, older age groups are less prone to procrastination than younger age groups (Gupta, 2012). Chu and Choi (2005) introduced the terms “active and passive procrastination” from the following perspective.

- **Active procrastinators** postpone their responsibilities deliberately, thus applying the subsequent strong motivation under time pressure, when they can complete tasks just before the deadlines and achieve satisfactory results.
- **Passive procrastinators** are traditional procrastinators who postpone their tasks until the last minute with feelings of guilt and depression, making them more likely to fail to complete the tasks.

In this context, according to their theory, active procrastinators differ from passive procrastinators in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The suggestion of differences between them was supported by findings in several studies. Based on them, it was found that passive and active procrastinators differ from each other in:

- their relationship to the goal they are avoiding;

- in terms of time efficiency and perceived time control;
- self-efficacy rates;
- average overall benefit;
- levels of stress and depression;

The level of self-regulation skills, including - elaboration, organization, critical thinking, task value, testing anxiety, time management and effort control is very important (Chu and Choi, 2005).

However, procrastination is nowadays also caused by modern phenomena, such as the digital overload of employees, the so-called digital distraction or technostress. **Technostress** is a psychophysiological condition characterized by high levels of stress-sensitive hormones as well as cognitive symptoms such as poor concentration, irritability, and memory impairment. There is evidence that information overload from the use of mobile phones and other devices can increase negative emotions such as anger and anxiety (Torre et al., 2020).

**Digital distraction**, or disturbance is related to today's modern, digital age which is also influential at the workplace. Options such as home-office, i.e., work from home are gaining in popularity. Today, most organizations are transforming into an organization that has all the digital conveniences at its disposal. They are undergoing a massive digital transformation to catch up with the rapidly changing and technologically interconnected world. According to the Information Overload Research Group, a quarter of our business day will be lost due to online information overload. However, it takes up to 23 minutes and 15 seconds to return to the original task we are doing. Distraction, which occurs because of a single message on Facebook or reading a short blog article, is therefore not only the time spent on it, but also the time that is wasted after the act. These distractions derail the mind for a long time, which damages productivity. Every time you switch the focus from one thing to another, there are certain costs, called "change costs". According to neuroscientists from the University of California, the constant bombardment by electronic stimuli is forcing our brains to work extra. Digital overload causes the brain to remain in an unfocused hyper stage even when we are not near the device. It leads to stress and affects our lives (Priyanshi et al., 2017).

Procrastination as a prevalent behavior at work is influenced by the very characteristics of the job and the personality of the employee, and procrastination can also affect mood and performance. In addition, high levels of stress and boredom are associated with increased procrastination at work and are also associated with reduced work exposure. More than 95% of procrastinators want to get rid of this harmful behavior at work. Given the high costs and negative effects of procrastination, understanding this behavior will help us face it in the work environment (Metin, 2016). Available studies suggest that procrastination is the predominant behavior at work, influenced by personality factors such as high neuroticism and low conscientiousness, and situational factors such as limited role relevance, limited autonomy, and non-constructive feedback. In addition, it is associated with high levels of stress and boredom, reduced workload, and performance (Metin, 2018).

Procrastination in the workplace is characterized by two dimensions, namely soldiering and cyberslacking:

1. Soldiering is a type of procrastination in the workplace that hinders work-related activities by prioritizing non-work tasks without any harmful intent. Long coffee breaks, avoidance of planning and vigilant dreaming of employees during working hours are common examples of soldiering. However, with the advent of the use of mobile technologies, a new way of procrastination in the workplace has also emerged.
2. Cyberslacking is the use of the Internet or mobile devices for personal purposes during working hours. Although the Internet often allows employees to perform their work faster and more securely than before, it also makes it easier for them to use the Internet for personal purposes, leading to high financial costs associated with shorter time spent working. Cyberslacking is difficult to observe, and measure compared to soldiering, as employees may appear to be working (sitting in an office and looking at a computer screen), when they are actually busy with non-work activities (e.g., using instant messaging tools for personal communication), or checking social networks and websites (Vitak, 2011).

Workplace cyberslacking can be minor and only take a few minutes (e.g., checking and handling personal e-mails and shopping online), or it can involve much more time (e.g., playing games of chance, watching movies, and constantly chatting on social networking platforms), which can significantly reduce employee productivity. According to research, the rate of cyberslacking in the workplace is about 60-80%, which leads to about 30-40% decline in productivity. Previous research has examined the factors that cause cyberslacking in the workplace, including poor organization and information overload. Similarly, the negative effects of cyberslacking in the workplace, such as wasted time, lost productivity, distraction from work-related activities, breaches of organizational standards and culture, and threats to the security of e-mail systems and networks, were examined (Nusrat, 2021).

From a managerial point of view, however, it is important to perceive a certain paradox that has arisen. Digital tools in the workplace, such as e-mail, instant messaging, and collaboration software, have accelerated the pace of work communication, but they also pose significant barriers to work. A recent survey of 3,750 employees by Workfront, a work management software company, found that employees are interrupted by an average of almost 14 times a day by email, instant messaging, and other digital distractions. Another survey from Adobe found that the average employee in a U.S. office spends more than three hours each day trying to keep up with a work email. And an analysis of data from 50,000 employees collected by Rescue Time, a Seattle-based company that monitors digital activities, shows that the average employee checks their communication devices on average every six minutes (Maurer, 2019).

### **3 Methodology**

The presented study was conducted on employees, specifically office workers, in small and medium enterprises in Slovakia. As a survey method, we used an online method of questionnaire data collection CAWI - computer assisted web interviewing. The aim of the questionnaire was to find out the prevalence of cyberslacking (online procrastination) and soldiering (offline procrastination) among employees in small and medium enterprises during the working hours. An electronic questionnaire was sent to 112 employees. The sample of respondents included 68 women and 44 men between the age of 20 and 60. The freely available Google Forms application for the distribution and processing of questionnaire answers was used for the analysis of the results, the computer program and Excel was used to create graphic presentations.

The procrastination of respondents in the work environment was measured using a 12-item standardized work procrastination scale (PAWS; Metin et al., 2016). The original English version of the questionnaire was translated into Slovak language by the back translation method. This method is also called reverse translation and covers the process of re-translating content from the target language back to its source language in literal terms and compared with the original. The Procrastination at work scale (PAWS) consists of two dimensions, namely soldiering (deliberately slowing down the job so that the employee avoids all day work, e.g., longer coffee breaks) and cyberslacking (using the Internet or mobile devices for personal purposes during working hours). The dimension of soldiering is evaluated by 8 items in the scale of work procrastination as "I take a long coffee break at work". The cyberslacking dimension is measured by 3 items, such as "I do online shopping during business hours". Since the aim is to investigate the cyberslacking (online procrastination) we further present the data related to those items.

According to these methodologies the stated research question is – What is the prevalence of online procrastination regarding the office workers in small and medium enterprises in Slovakia and what kind of tools does the literature offer to managers to minimize the prevalence of online procrastination and procrastination at work in general.

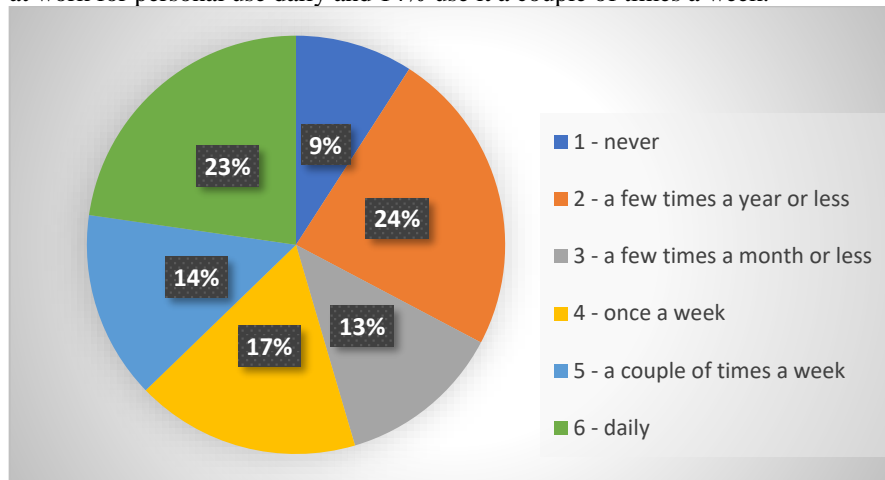
### **4 Results and discussion**

Cyberslacking is an online off-task behavior that includes things like reading blogs for personal enjoyment. It became popular as technology became more widely used at work. Because cyberslacking can appear to be work—employees need only sit in front of a computer and click a mouse—more it's difficult to quantify than soldiering. The Internet has improved corporate efficiency by enhancing employee productivity, reducing time and space constraints in doing business, and enabling better consumer interactions. However, there is a downside to using the Internet. In today's office, surfing the web during work hours, exchanging instant messaging, and spending time on non-job-related activities are all commonplace. Employees squander time and are

less engaged in their work because of cyberslacking, which reduces productivity (Malachowski, 2005).

Our goal is to provide a more complete and balanced view of procrastination by including conceptualizations from extant literature that highlight negative aspects of online procrastination and data gain from quantitative research. Therefore, we present the data regarding questions which are related to the online procrastination.

During the data analysis a significant frequency of Instant messaging during working hours was noticed (Fig.1). 23% of employees in SMEs stated that use Instant Messaging at work for personal use daily and 14% use it a couple of times a week.



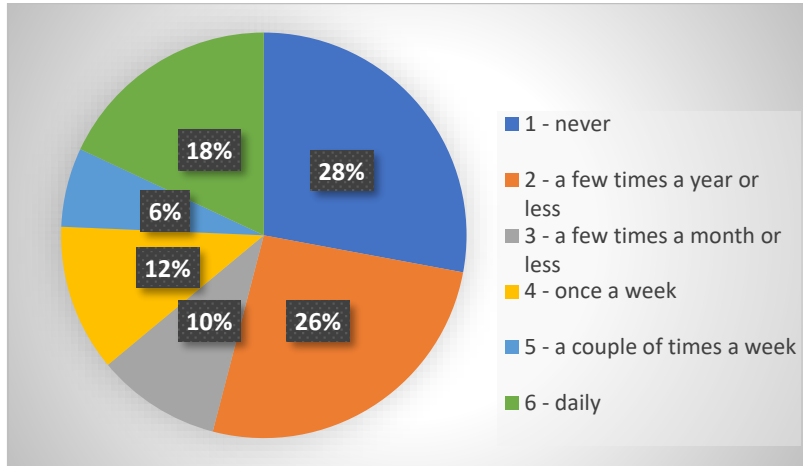
Source: (Own research, 2022).

**Fig. 1.** The prevalence of Instant Messaging at work

These results can be compared with One of the rare studies on cyberslacking where according to Garrett and Danziger (2008b), 80% of the employees in their sample admitted to engaging in at least one of the two cyberslacking activities (sending personal emails or texts and surfing the internet for purposes unrelated to work).

Moreover, a recent study on cellphones found that 85.04% more time was spent on non-work-related activities on phones than on work-related activities during all hours. The study employed log data gathered from 18 subjects over the course of 72 hours. Only during office hours, however, was the proportion of work-related activities 38.16% higher than that of non-work-related activities. Although they were utilized for work, most smartphone use during work hours was comparable to cyberslacking. Consequently, it was impossible to draw the conclusion that smartphone use was primarily for one reason (Youngchan, 2019).

Regarding the use of social network sites as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, 18% of respondents stated that they use them daily. Another 6% of employees in SMEs use it a couple of times a week (Fig. 2).

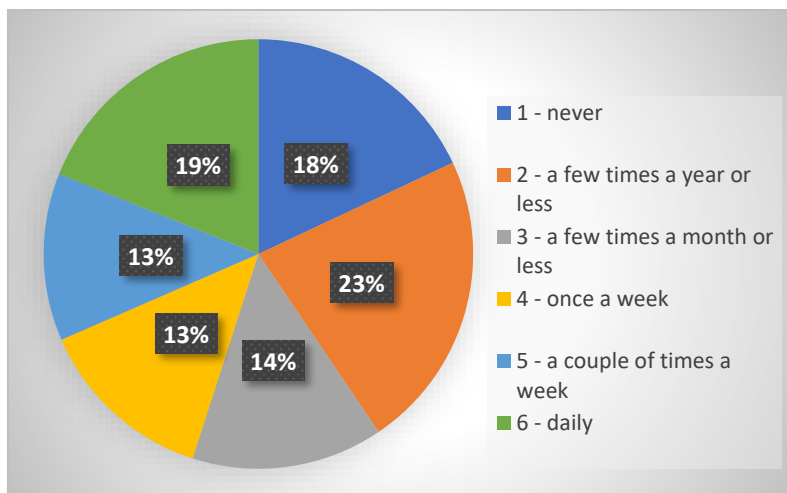


Source: (Own research, 2022).

**Fig. 2.** The prevalence of social network site using at work - (own research, 2022).

Another form of online procrastination at work is reading news online which also appears to be frequent. 19% of respondent stated that they read news online a daily basis. Another 13% stated that they read online news a couple of times a week.

This habit can be explained by the term “escapism”, which is explained by M. Griffiths (2000) as a behavior, which can occur when a person uses social media to escape from anxiety, despair, and other difficulties in real life. Such escape can occasionally be linked to procrastination. Some people tend to put off or postpone dealing with problems like money, loneliness, or anxiety by posing as an alternative, frequently fictitious, environment online (Warmelink, et. al., 2009).



Source: (Own research, 2022).

**Fig. 3.** The prevalence of reading news online at work - (own research, 2022).

The use of the Internet for personal purposes at work cannot be viewed as an a priori bad occurrence that results in financial losses for the employer, a loss of productivity, a security concern, or even legal ramifications. Another point of view suggests that minimizing anxiety when working on a computer is a type of stress relief, or that using a business phone for personal purposes is an advantage. Many firms, on the other hand, lack clear policies regarding internet access and e-mail usage. Employee views are thus used to determine what constitutes acceptable and undesirable use of the Internet for personal purposes, as well as realistic utilization rates.

By analyzing this prevalence, we agree, that as a prevention against online procrastination at work, recommendations stated by Breck (2000) should be followed. We assume, that those including for example - examining the things that need to be done, evaluating the rationality of the excuses, encouraging oneself, creating a to-do list, deciding on priorities, breaking the task into manageable pieces, managing time, displaying a positive attitude, organizing the work environment, coping with stress, starting work, rewarding oneself when small goals are achieved, reflecting on the completed work, and celebrating the task's completion can be used as tools for managers to minimize and eliminate the procrastination at work. Therefore, they should serve as main pillars in further research in this topic.

Employees and companies both benefit from understanding and improving procrastination at work. In reality, the current findings provide a tool and some evidence for the use of this metric in the Slovak context. Managers and employees may find it useful to measure the amount of procrastination at work for themselves. The findings of this study imply that two aspects of procrastination at work are distinct.

Managers can utilize Procrastination at work scale - PAWS to assess and understand their employees' procrastination at work, allowing them to more effectively target specific aspects of the employee's work design and task progress that need to be followed up on and improved (Prem et al., 2018).

Employees that use this assessment tool may be able to better manage their time at work and create a work schedule. Employees who are cyberslacking, for example, should consider shutting off their cell phones or disconnecting their desktops from the Internet during work hours. There were various limitations in this study. Because of the small sample size, future research will need to replicate these findings in bigger groups to ensure generalization of the results.

## **5 Conclusion**

According to the overall results it can be stated that leaders, managers, and executives should, in particular, pay comprehensive attention to the implementation of their own standards of conduct, provide employees with effective supervision and establish formal organizational platforms or reliable channels to mediate employee requests or complaints to increase their motivation. In addition, interpersonal care should be promoted in the workplace in exchange for the gratitude and trust of employees. This will increase their pro-organizational motivation, dedication, and



willingness to fulfill their responsibilities and eliminate undesirable pro-procrastination behavior.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the research sample may not be applicable to the majority of SME employees in Slovakia. Despite this, we believe that the respondents were able to answer the questions sufficiently and the information obtained from the presented survey should be used as a basis for further investigation of the online cyberslacking frequency and procrastination behavior of employees in small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia and abroad. Further research should focus on the stated recommendations how to eliminate this negative behavior at workplace and what kind of company policy works the best in terms of small and medium enterprises in Slovakia.

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