Editorial

Introduction to the special issue on ‘dark side of information technology use’ – part two

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INTRODUCTION

We introduce the second (consecutive) issue of the Special Issue on the ‘Dark Side of Information Technology (IT) Use’. In the short time period between these issues, we have continued to read of unintended and un-anticipated negative impacts of IT at the level of the individual, organization and society. This issue thus continues the exploration of ‘dark side’ phenomena. Referring to the organizing framework developed in the introduction to the first volume of this Special Issue (Tarafdar et al., 2015) we recall the four salient themes of (Figure 1) – context of occurrence, negative outcomes, mitigation mechanisms and level of analysis – for characterizing dark side phenomenon. Briefly, ‘context of occurrence’ refers to the specific situation or setting of IT design/use in which dark side phenomena are observed and studied, ‘negative outcomes’ describe undesired consequences of dark side phenomena, ‘mitigation mechanisms’ describe conditions or actions for their alleviation and ‘level of analysis’ refers to whether dark side phenomenon are investigated at the level of the individual, team, organization or society.

CONTRIBUTION OF PAPERS

In this second issue, we present a collection of three papers that focus on a range of dark side phenomena, extending and building on the scope of topics we covered in the first issue. We characterize them using the above framework. As with the first issue, we note again that most of these studies address the individual level of analysis and do not address mitigation mechanisms. We call for future research regarding these ‘missing’ themes which we see as important for advancing our understanding of how to cope with and address dark side phenomena.
The paper, ‘The Dark side of IT-Mediated Control under Loose Coupling: Lessons from an Ethnographic Study’, by Veira da Cunha, Lequerqe and Carugati explores the dark side of computer-mediated control in a context where work and its electronic representation are loosely coupled because it is the employees who report their work in IT systems. The study’s findings provide a nice extension to existing research on the dark side of computer-mediated control when work is tightly coupled with its electronic representation wherein information systems record work automatically. Based on an ethnographic study of the appropriation of a customer relationship management system in the sales department of a large organization, the paper finds that loosely versus tightly coupled computer-mediated control produce key differences. Negative consequences, flowing from employees to the organization include biased information entry, invisible deviance and corruptive autonomy on part of employees. Given the current and expected to continue trends in Bring-Your-Own-Technology and decentralized application use, this paper makes a highly topical contribution to the potential dark side of such trends.

The paper, ‘Technostress Creators and Job Outcomes: Theorizing the Moderating Influence of Personality Traits’ Srivastava, S., Chandra, S. and Shirish, A., applies the big five personality traits and the Transaction Theory of Stress and Coping to understand the moderating influence of personality traits on the relationships between technostress creators and two job outcomes,
namely, job burnout and job engagement. It theorizes mechanisms through which each of the specific personality traits openness-to-experience, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion interacts with technostress creators to differently influence job burnout and job engagement. Research hypotheses are tested using survey data from senior organizational managers who regularly use IT for executing professional tasks. The context of study is organizational use of IS by employees, and the level of analysis is that of the individual. The results indicate that technostress creators can be associated with negative consequences such as high job burnout and low job engagement, depending on personality. The study takes the technostress literature further by incorporating the role of individual (personality) differences in explaining how technostress creators could increase job burnout and reduce job engagement. The paper ‘Good Habits Gone Bad: Explaining Negative Consequences Associated with the Use of Mobile Phones from a Dual-Systems Perspective’ Soror, A., Hammer, B., Steelman, Z., Davis, F. and Limayem, M., studies habit and self-regulation simultaneously in the context of mobile phone usage and at the level of the individual. Given the prevalence of smartphone use and the growing problems associated with the dark-side issues stemming from it, this study contributes to the growing body of work on dual-systems in IS use. It extends our understanding of the negative consequences of technology addiction by focusing on the role of self-regulation and control behaviours. The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey-based approach. Negative outcomes relate to the difficulties with managing one’s personal life, missed social engagements or activities, and general problems in one’s life stemming from cell phone use patterns.

CONCLUSION

The two parts of the Special Issue on the ‘Dark Side of IT Use’ collectively address an important, emerging and rich topic for IS research. We suggest that the framework for characterizing dark-side phenomena described in the editorial introduction to the first volume can serve as a
guide for further research. We also note that given the absence of studies that investigate mitigating mechanisms (in both issues), future research ought to focus on identifying theoretically grounded and practically implementable mitigation mechanisms for dark side phenomenon. While technology is useful and important for individuals, organizations and societies, understanding potential negative consequences of its use is necessary in order to focus on positive outcomes or at least minimize negative outcomes from it.

REFERENCE


