Implications of work in "protected environments"

Graciela Copello, Fernando J. Lage and Zulma Cataldi

Abstract

Web surfing, e-mail (electronic mail), chat and still the mere use of a computer, generate inside the interpersonal communication what we denominate a “protected environment”.

We have defined “protected environment” to be the type of communication in which the risk of personal exhibition does not exist. We base ourselves in that is a very frequent practice in the chat, for example, the use of an alias instead of the use of the name.

Key Words — About Network, Networks, Addiction, Protected Environments, Web.

Introduction

All through this work it will be shown that communication through the internet has a series of advantages and disadvantages. Among the disadvantages, it can be cite that there is a potential risk of becoming an addict without the use of drugs, which may be injurious to people with communication problems because it produces an increasing isolation and lack of sense of reality.

On the other hand, the advantages of internet can be easily seen, that is to say in the right time and place (e.g. school, business organizations, etc), controlled “protected environments” would allow to overcome communication barriers and bring people closer as a way of boosting the positive aspects related with human relationships.

Later the next step will be to show how can the advantages be applied to working environments. And finally an analysis about the danger involved in the use of “protected environment” without control within the formal education system.

In order to gather information for this project, a survey over a population sample of 532 Internet users. With these facts as a starting point, it was possible to define several groups of users according to different characteristics: age, occupation, Internet time connection per week, social activities performed, among others.

The investigation also revealed which may be the groups with people having a higher risk of addiction to “protected environments”.

“Internet addiction is real. Like alcoholism, drug addiction, or compulsive gambling, it has devastating effects on the lives of addicts and their families: divorce, job loss, falling productivity at work, failure in school, and, in extreme cases, criminal behaviour”. (Young, 1998)

Development

This project is intended to state in which ways can computers be used in communication, either boosting people’s positive aspects or the negative ones, according to the circumstances.

It can be said, that the use of computers, more specifically e-mail and chat considered to be accessible and well known nowadays, is what we call “protected environment”. Within it there is no risk of personal exposure, since it is regulated with an “alias” which may ease up people to get in touch with others, without showing their identity.

We say that anonymity would “protect” the speaker making him feel free to express his ideas, without factors such as fear, shame, shyness, etc. having a bearing on his decision whether to say or not what he thinks.

Now, when can we say that a “protected environment” is necessary and useful?, under which circumstances it may be “unprotected” and stop being healthy?. The answer to these questions, in our opinion, will depend on which is the objective for which the “protected environment” is used.

In order to find and explanation it is important that point out the “purpose” of computers “protected environments”. (Copello, Cataldi, Lage, 2001)

The purpose in business organizations.

The purpose in business organizations is based on that this technology may be used as a booster of the positive aspects of people that take part in this way of communication.

Through the use of that technology it is possible to enhance relationships or conditions in the organization, as it would ease connections encouraging ideas communication, suggestions, inconveniences, complaints; which without the aid of a “protected environment” may remain silent, or it will be limited to only some people which express
what they think or feel without communication problems.

Anonymity in this case, would allow computers to be used as a way of expressing ideas and consolidation of organizational bindings. In this way, the communication would not be affected by emotional factors, which sometimes act as obstacles, and gives way to the secondary processes of thinking.

One may even think in the possibility that a "protected environment" may be used as an area where "not pertinent" ideas can be expressed; or in a more psychological way, it may be used as a challenge that may lead to the growth of the organization, as the infringement of lined limits makes the organization grow, and the adequate reading of ideas may indicate if something is not working properly.

It is rather obvious that a mail administrator must supervise this kind of activity, with a centralized control over the reading materials, who would receive the information, and to process all the messages in order to shape an effective product.

Under certain circumstances it may be important to get expert advice from a "group analyst", in order to understand the groups relationships, and the possible potential intrapersonal, whether it is in stimulation o in risks, that can be detected through the analysis of the obtained facts.

**The effect of the use of “protected environments” in the labor area.**

In this section an important thing to be considered is that working takes up most of our lifetime, in organizations, as modern life coordinates several human actions in labor organizations which consume all types of resources, including human ones.

Quoting Etzioni (1965): "The modern0organization is more efficient than ancient or medieval. The changes within society have made that the social circles accept in a better mood labor organizations, and the art of planning, the coordination and the control have been developed with administration studies."(...)"but this increase in the range and rationality of the organizations have not been achieved without a cost in social and human terms. Many people that work for organizations feel deeply frustrated and deranged due to their work"(...) "the human resources are one of the most important means which organizations have to achieve their goals. Generally, the least that an organization deranges their working force the most efficient it is. Pleased workers work more and better than frustrated ones”

In other words, working conditions are extremely important in every organizational structure, and are tightly related with the satisfaction of its members. This includes: to receive equal and fair treatment, salary, job and personal realization in it, development possibilities, participation opportunities, comfort and salubriousness in working places.

Thinking about working conditions there must be a similar thing for the people who work in "protected environments” during most of their working time.

Their greater risk is the "psychic isolation”, produced after many hours at a computer, being that the only connection in order to perform the job.

In a similar way people which are placed in boxes, they can not look at each other, or talk, the interpersonal bindings are drastically reduced, maybe they only see each other at lunchtime, or light refreshments if there are any.

Quoting Marc and Picard (1992); in relation with interpersonal interactions: "When people find them in interaction situation, the communication between them is not only with words, other elements are at stake: gestures, body positions, facial sign language, voice tone; and also how a person introduces him to the other… ", and keep saying that: “Non verbal signs play an important role in the structuring of relationships and in the regulation of the exchanges.”

In this case a dilemma arises: how to contribute so that the groups work in a rational and efficient way, and at the same time to produce the least quantity of undesirable side effects with a high degree of satisfaction.

In several studies carried out in labor organization, it has been proven that what keeps the “psychologic satisfaction” of the employees and therefore their performance, is “the social factor”, that is to say, the social interaction produced between them. Communication, cooperation, affection and respect, are important factors among the employees, and those factors improve their skills achieving quality and efficiency.

It is known that employees react better when they act as “members of a groups” rather than individually, that is why, it is important to create the idea of membership to the group.

Besides, the relationships among peers, not only with authorities, are of fundamental importance for a smooth business organization running; and “autistic” attitudes may cause disturbance consequences.

Only the control and supervision for acting in the elaboration of subconscious conflicts would allow their overcoming, promoting elaboration, integration and group cohesion stages.
The purpose in the search of interpersonal and goal of the company. The proposal is the intervention of an organization and group analyst, whose work would be to it will be the discrimination of the intricate psyche in which are involved those who are exposed to working under difficult conditions, in order to prevent and to intervene where the strategies of the unconscious and psyche are at stake, working in an intersubjective field.

“\textit{The organization analyst has the possibility of establishing a correspondence between the logic of the internal states of the observed system, and the changes that he detects in the environment (...) it is the analyst the one that proposes the correspondence between the environment and the internal states’}. (Etkin y Schvarstein, 1989)

“\textit{Also strategies, special group dynamics techniques and psychoanalytic techniques should be applied. In most of the cases these are strategies and techniques which share, the central objective: collaborate with the development of the reflective capacity of individuals to meet the different signification levels of his own behavior (...) and help to better its possibilities of institutional integration with characteristics like: autonomy, communication possibilities, progressive participation, etc’’}.” (Fernández, 1994)

Examining and comparing them, to accomplish a working device that will maintain and/or establish, in a shared transition area, the interruptions and conjunctions, the continuity and breaks, regulating adjustments of a subjetivized space and at the same time operative, which objective is to be able to reveal the pathological defense mechanisms in which individuals may be dragged to, and transform them into mechanisms of growth helping the project and goal of the company.

**The purpose in the search of interpersonal relationships**

In these circumstances the “\textit{what for}” involves facilitating the people with personalities that show difficulties in communicating, to make effective and affective contacts, finding a “path” for communication, which for them may be affected or even closed. The “\textit{protected environment}” and anonymity may allow the first contact, and would make possible the growth of the relationship en “\textit{different spaces}” (each one in privacy, through a computer) as long as the contact is preserved.

In this cases, the problem would be to decide whether a face to face meeting to know each other should be set, this can cause different possible consequences, with little chance of success right away or after a time. Why? The answer is that when sharing the same place, their difficulties would appear and be an obstacle to communication, as the personal (and shared) conflict would not be over and with the contact discomfort and misunderstanding would be increased.

In case it develops through time, just the fact that the relationship started in a “\textit{protected environment}” it shows lack of emotional maturity, which would lead to failure, probably when facing the new situations that an affective relationship involves.

**Connections with evil purposes.**

In these cases the negative aspects of personality are boosted; as individuals with a deficiency in their “\textit{psychic structure}”, find joy in fulfilling their instinctive pathological impulses, without thinking or having moral conscience, which are both essential for mental health and safety of others.

The typical pervert has an only way of finding sexual pleasure, and their sexual energy is focussed in an only “\textit{sexual impulse}”, when the impulse arises it causes an unbearable tension and he looks for an immediate release. The point is that, he does not obtain any “\textit{pleasure’’}, but just the release of the tension is what he experiences as satisfaction.

The needs are supposed to be urgent, causing tension to the person, who feels that the release of that tension is urgent, even though they might be against socialisation. There are several varieties, among which are: sadomasochism, homosexuality, fetishism, necrophilia, and others.

This are some of the many perversions that exist, which found an access way through the motley business offers presented in different ways in the Internet.

The “\textit{protected environment}” is an anonymous accessible space for consumption and realisation of act of that kind, which help the existing pathology to become deeply entrenched.

Under other circumstances, taking that Freud (1973) observed that “\textit{evil tendencies, and occasionally evil acts or at least evil fantasies}” are something universally human, which appear during a certain time of life, in puberty and in adolescence.

Easily, it can be deduced that as this is the population with a \textit{greater risk} when having communications at hand. As it would block the overcoming of something that is normally only a conflict, by interfering with interpersonal
relationship and by giving an easy access to the realisation of the fantasies. This would led the person who is structuring his psyche “astray”, and this would led to a perturbation in his healthy development.

Drug free addictions

The excitement produced by excessive participation, as computer games, Internet surf, e-mail sending, or any other activity which leads a person to be several hours in front of his computer, isolating himself from his affection circle. This is an expression without any of the conflict produced by the fear of losing re-insurances, which are necessary for him in relation with his feelings of guilt or distress. Generally, are conflicts centred in “ masturbation”, where the computer is the object, which allows it as a “mental” thing. In the case of a game, for example, it is a “provocation” to destiny by itself, which is forced to be for or against the player. This transforms the game into a one man “struggle”. A game of chance is a fair game, the winning probabilities are as big as the loosing ones, and in general they are public acts. On the other hand in computer games the player is in a supposed “protected environment” alone “against” the machine. The only one that would know whether he wins or losses is he, and he would try for hours and hours to “beat” her. In this way, the person obtains the “supplies of narcissism” that needs to insure himself that he is the “winner” and that he does not need any other person in order to achieve his feeling of welfare. This allows him to be protected from the distress caused by establishing relationships with others. Subjects of this kind, which are generally children, pubescents and adolescents, under the pressure of internal tensions, may forget that they are playing a “game” and loose control, being caught in a vicious circle with needs of re-insurance and distress caused by intensive violence, where the hobby starts being a “life or death” matter.

Internet compulsive surf, may be categorised, when it is an obsessive worry and when it is a protection against distress and depression. It is a false way of avoiding being alone, and its use gives the same re-assurance effect that the drug hide in his pocket gives to an addict. The computer is the instrument, which will provide a feeling of being safe, and not alone, in the same way that a child needs the protective presence of his mother by his bed to sleep. They need a protection that will always be there willing to “communicate”, but the danger that they are trying to avoid, or the “distress for being alone”, develops into a “real thing”, and the danger can not be controlled and finally overwhelm them.

Studies about cases of technological addictions

Goldberg (1998) shows in his studies on Internet addiction that is provokes psychiatric disorders, but says that it is no clear whether the problems that Internet gives rise to may be considered as a disorder or as a symptom. In his works he talks about studies of his colleagues with people that “consume” many hours on-line, which means the loss of their relationships, jobs and poor performance at school. Some of the cases are:

a. A 31 year old man, who spent about a hundred hours weekly, ignored his family and friends; and stopped only for sleeping.

b. A young man of 21, who had to quit university because he fell asleep during the classes, and when it was disappeared for a weak, the police found him in the lab of the university campus, where he had been “on-line” for several says.

In general, the people interviewed had some kind of social disorder or “social phobia” and other suffered from bulimia and other alimentary disorders. Many others stayed that they had uncontrollable shopping desires and that disturbed their lives. Others took too much alcohol or other substances.

Psychologist Kimberley Young form Pittsburgh University says that she has found similar psychiatric problems models in most of the people that “they are hung up” of Internet and that some of her patients declared that they use it in order to make up for alcohol or drugs. Griffiths (1998) says that nowadays many people speak about “technological addictions”, and that there is not many evidence that the use of computers and its branches (programming, hacking, Internet use, etc.) cause addictions. The existing evidence pictures a typical addict as an adolescent man, with little social life, but in order to establish criterion it would be necessary to study each specific case, as many of the cases were symptomatic and used Internet to counteract other deficiencies.

Social pathologies have started to appear in cyberspace, giving a place for “technological addictions”, which are defined as chemical free addictions and that involve humans interacting with a machine. Some of them are passive, like television, and some are active, like computer games, which contribute to the promotion of addictive tendencies by means of induction and reinforcement of certain habits. The writer says that technological addictions are a subset of behavior addictions. In most of the cases the use was asymptomatic, and was caused by a deficiency such as lack of relationships, friend, appearance, etc.
On the other hand, on-line relationships can be very healthy, psychologically as they go beyond prejudices, as they are not based on appearance. Griffiths (1995) in some of her works, gives a look to the characteristics of the software, as it can promote addictive tendencies and in the promotion of interactivity.

**Result of the survey**

We have taken randomly 532 Internet users into consideration for our survey, to all of them we have asked a set of open and closed questions about:
- Age, Sex, Marital Status
- Weekly connection time
- Use of an alias in Internet
- Activities in Internet
- Reaction when faced to the lack of connection
- Other activities performed
- Favourite holiday place, between others, and
- Additional comments.

From a preliminary study of the survey we can establish some observed tendencies in a qualitative manner. (Cataldi, Copello, Lage, 1998)

A small amount of people of both sexes older than 50 years used Internet periodically, and when they used it was less than 10 hours weekly, visiting sites of interest or sending mails. Between the additional comments, it was revealed that many of them did not have any knowledge of computer and they did just for curiosity.

Between 40 and 50 years, used Internet for working and to keep "up to date". They made Web searches, send e-mails but they did not care about the use of chat.

Subjects between 30 and 40 years used Internet less than 10 hours weekly in most of the cases, due to their obligations. Web search and mostly e-mail is what they used it for. Few expressed that they used the chat. Most of them did not matter about lack of connection. As an additional comment some of them said that they used Internet at work.

The people who spent more time connected where men between 20 and 30 years, who were single in most of the cases. They used e-mail, web, for 10 hours weekly approximated. The ones who were connected between 10 and 20 hours also declared the use of the chat. Only a few said that were connected between 20 and 30 hours weekly and felt depressed when they were not able to interact.

Adolescents between 10 and 20 years of both sexes preferred that chat and used an alias. Many of the answers of this group agreed that they felt irritated when they could not communicate through that way. Besides the average connection time was about 20 hours weekly. About half of the men polled in this group, was connected between 30 and 40 hours weekly and felt desperate when they could not be connected. They said that only sometimes they used the Web as help for their homework, and what they wanted was to make new virtual friends. These groups did not “go out” frequently unless it was necessary, they would rather stay “connected”. Among the additional comments, some of them said that they thought it was “stimulating” to connect with their friends after coming home from school. Others recommended each other new web sites, and kept up to date with the changes in their favourite sites.

Children fewer than 10 years, of both sexes, preferred to visit school and learning related web sites. In most of the cases they used Internet in company of their parents or at school.

**Conclusions**

Maybe, after this analysis made from a psychoanalytic perspective, there is a need of thinking and designing children and adolescents daily activities again, as they are the groups running a greater risk.

It is necessary to restrict the amount of time that these groups spent in front of a computer, whether it is a game or Internet.

We have had several answers to the question Why is Internet stimulating?, but they were all focused on that:
- You can share it with people with similar interests
- You meet people that you might never meet by any other mean.
- It is a cheap and fast communication method
- It is like a giant puzzle or labyrinth, which makes it stimulating.

This addiction without drugs has very harmful consequences for people with communication problems, as it produces an incremental isolation and lack of adequacy to reality.

This work tries to be a reminder to adults about the possible harmful effects that adolescents under their custody might be exposed to, through technological addictions.

On the other hand, we think that for the right time and in the right place (school, institution, or business company), controlled “protected environments” would allow to overcome barriers and to boost positive aspects of human relationships.

It is intended, in further studies, to obtain quantitative results about how much time do adolescents spend in games or Internet, and to track down those activities to establish the possible deviances and/or problems caused by this addiction.
without drugs, or so called “transparent” addiction, as it is hard to detect. And it is planned, in further studies, to study the appreciation of the “text based relationships”: yesterday’s letters, today e-mail and chat.

References


