Technology and Life in the *Fast* Lane

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The amount of genuine leisure available in a society is generally in inverse proportion to the amount of labor-saving machinery it employs. ~E.F. Schumacher

1. INTRODUCTION

As we are writing this workshop proposal, numerous other tasks are piling up on our desks, in to-do lists scribbled on our office whiteboards, and in multiple tabs and applications open on our computers. We are working on these tasks and projects between meetings lined up in our calendars. We are looking forward to the upcoming weekend, expected to be filled with meeting friends, taking the kids to soccer practice, doing laundry and house cleaning, practicing our hobbies, and volunteering at a local club. We are busy. We live in the fast lane.

Busyness means being actively occupied by purposeful activities. Although busyness as a cultural phenomenon is nurtured by more and more technologies we use in our everyday life, not much work has been done in the CSCW and HCI community to explore this phenomenon and the role technology plays in it, and to offer alternatives to busyness. This workshop proposes to raise awareness of the culture of busyness, to establish it as a research topic in our community, and to stimulate and guide emerging research that examines or intervenes in the relationship between busyness and technology.

2. MOTIVATION

The ways people think about and use their time defines the texture and quality of their existence [14]. In the United States, for example, numerous studies are examining a growing sense of overwork, overload, rush, and stress [2][21], at the workplace [18], doing home chores and family care [13], and even in individuals' leisure time [15]. Similarly, overwork and stress and their consequences have been examined in Great Britain [1], Canada [17], and Japan [11]. This culture of busyness, where one feels a need to constantly be doing something productively and efficiently, stands in contrast to other cultural perceptions of time, such as Latin-American acceptance and expectation of being late, the Italian siesta time when many businesses are closed, and the Jewish Sabbath in which Orthodox Jews around the world avoid any production on Saturdays.

Theoretical and empirical work about time acceleration has considered the role of technology in supporting the speeding up of the pace of life and an increasing sense of rush and overload [20]. More specifically, information and communication technologies have been called "[t]he biggest single factor driving work intensification" since it "enables greater use to be made of time and fills up gaps that would otherwise be natural breaks in the pattern of work." [1] (p. 37). But even if technology in itself does not accelerate time, it provides affordances for new temporal experiences, such as multitasking and feeling control over time [6][24]. Through instant messaging, cell phones, email, online calendars, and the Internet, these new affordances may in turn be affecting experiences of busyness by facilitating fragmentation and micro-coordination of work units [10], by making accessible an overabundance of information, products, and services among which we feel obligated to choose properly [22], and by increasing workers' availability to their employees outside of work hours, anytime and anywhere [7][8].

These shifts in time perception are tied to a Western culture of Taylorism and Fordism, in which technology is thought of as a tool for driving increasing efficiency and productivity. From the washing machine to the iPhone, the design and development of technologies is often rooted in the assumption that they will free us from hard labor and help us be efficient and productive so we can either save time or get more things done. But, depending on the culture in which technology is used, people might use the time saved by information technologies to take time off [25] --- or to become even busier [1].

Technology can also be designed purposely against the cultural mainstream to encourage slowing down and promoting "moments of mental rest rather than efficiency in performance" [11]. This may evoke reflection about cultural perceptions of time and busyness and about opportunities against losses with slowness. Other technologies consider the space of using time inefficiently or opportunistically, rather than in a planned and productive manner [19][23]. Technologies such as Real Snail Mail (www.realsnailmail.net) and The Weekend (hookerandkitchen.com/theweekend) may also open up new forms of practices and time experiences, but to what degree are they relevant to task-centric workplaces or busy homes with multiple family members coordinating their activities?

Research is beginning to emerge in social and medical disciplines that examines, warns against, and suggests solutions for the effects of busyness, rush, stress, and overwork. If we realize that busyness culture is a human sustainability issue, then it may be time to underload, cut back, slow down, and, above all, restore the conditions that nurture resilient, secure individuals, families, friendships and communities. "We need not always be doing. In fact, we must all try to studiously do less, in order to be more." [9] (p. 8).

The role technologies currently play in contributing to a culture of busyness and the responsibility designers should take in responding to it are topics that need to be addressed. In the past few months we have been informally discussing this topic with colleagues in the HCI and CSCW community. From these

conversations we conclude that this challenge that affects the quality of life of so many of us must be faced by the disciplines of HCI and CSCW. The goal of this workshop is to raise awareness of the issues and consequences of busyness culture and to start a conversation about the possibilities and responsibilities we, as a community, have to address them.

3. GOALS

The goal of this workshop is to bring together researchers, designers, and practitioners interested in conceptual, empirical, and technological issues of cultural busyness—and idleness—to reflect on and engage in discussions around the following questions:

- How do cultural perceptions of time shape our experiences of work, home life, and leisure?

- How is busyness culture embedded in the design of information technologies?

- What roles do information technologies play in shaping various perceptions of time and practices of busyness?

- How might the design of information technologies take into consideration other cultural perceptions of time and support practices other than busyness, efficiency, and productivity?

The primary outcome of this workshop will be to begin forming a research agenda in the CSCW and HCI community in order to raise awareness of and interest in this topic. Although the specific issues to be addressed in research on busyness will be identified through participants' submissions and during the workshop day, we will attempt to classify them into the following three primary categories:

1. Conceptual--

- Identify the theoretical bases underlying busyness and its relationship with technology, including, for example, theories and concepts from economics, history, cultural studies, sociology, and cognitive psychology.

- Identify conceptual connections and distinctions between this area and other fields of research in CSCW and HCI, including, for example, awareness and interruption management and reflective HCI.

2. Empirical--

- Identify potential methodologies for gathering knowledge about busyness and technology.

- Discuss ways of interpreting this knowledge and verifying its validity.

3. Technological--

- Identify directions that technical work might take to address busyness. Traditionally, CSCW and HCI research and design have been offering more and more time saving and data crunching solutions. Other designs might be able to raise questions about the nature of these solutions and perhaps offer alternative solutions in domains such as office work, domestic environments, mobile technologies, and the social web.

Based on the research agenda developed in this workshop, we hope that this workshop will seed specific collaborative research projects in this area, crossing disciplines between social scientists, humanities scholars, designers, and tool builders.

In addition, we plan to write an article for submission to interactions, which will describe the research agenda for cultural busyness in HCI and CSCW developed at the workshop. As awareness of this area and the research associated with it begin to grow, we plan to organize a second workshop next year at a larger conference in order to group together researchers already working in this area, to inform each other of progress and channel and guide the research being done.

4. INVITED PARTICIPANTS

We invite researchers and practitioners interested in and addressing issues related to cultural perceptions of time and the relationship between technology and the intensification and acceleration of life in the workplace, at home, and elsewhere. These issues could be undertaken from a theoretical perspective, an empirical approach -- both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are invited, and through the design of technologies that take these issues into consideration in participatory design [16], value-sensitive design [5], critical design [3][4], or other methodological approaches.

Ideas for sample topics include but are not limited to:

- Interruption management and the increasing demand on cognitive resources

- Awareness technologies and the need to stay connected

- Information overload in social media (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), and other web and internet technologies

- Issues of anytime, anywhere access with mobile technologies

- Technologies for time management, activity and task management, and personal information management

- Technologies in domestic environments and the acceleration of home life and leisure

- Designing for slowness, reflection, and pause

To recruit participants, a call for participation will be sent out to relevant mailing lists (e.g., CHI-announcements), and to specific researchers and practitioners we know are already doing work in this area. The call will invite submissions that would address the following questions:

1. What work have you done in this area? How is it related to the theme of this workshop? (approximately 1-2 page response length)

2. Identify one or two key issues, challenges, or opportunities you are interested in discussing in this workshop. Why are they important? How do you envision making progress in addressing them? (approximately 1-2 page)

3. What one piece of research or writing is most inspirational to you in thinking about the issues of this workshop? Why? (approximately 1-2 paragraphs)

Total length of the submission will be limited to 4 pages maximum, using the ACM paper format.

The responses to these questions will be used both to review the quality and originality of the submissions, and to identify in advance a list of important discussion topics and key readings in this area. Submissions will each be reviewed by at least one expert reviewer. Up to 20 participants will be accepted, representing a spectrum of viewpoints.

5. WORKSHOP PLAN

5.1 Before The Conference

Prior to the workshop, based on the accepted submissions we will construct the following lists: (1) key issues to be discussed in the workshop, (2) potential work to be done, and (3) a suggested reading list (which can be a way to communicate to others relevant papers in this area). These lists will be distributed prior to the workshop to participants and will be posted on a website we will put together and maintain for the workshop.

Participants will be requested to prepare their responses to the discussion topics and potential work ideas and will be encouraged to review the reading list. Because the primary goal of this workshop is to develop a research agenda for cultural busyness in CSCW and HCI and to seed work in this area, rather than to exchange already-existing research, we will avoid the mini-conference format. Instead of preparing full slideshow presentations, participants will be requested to prepare a 1-paragraph description of their work, which will be posted on the website. In addition, they will have the option of preparing a single slide for the workshop day. We will assemble the slides from all participants into a single slide deck for the workshop "madness" morning session.

5.2 Workshop Day Schedule

We plan a full day workshop with the following tentative schedule:

9:00-9:30   *Introduction*
           9:00-9:10 Welcome
           9:10-9:30 Workshop madness: 1-minute presentations of each participant, including: name and affiliation, topic of work, disciplinary background/methodological approach to the topic.

9:30-10:30   *Overview of workshop*
           9:30-10:15 Introduction of lists of issues for discussion and potential work
           10:15-10:30 Preparation for small group discussions on issues

10:30-11:00   Break

11:00-12:30   *Issues*
           11:00-12:00 Small group discussions: identify common concepts, themes, methodologies, and relationship among them
           12:00-12:30 Report to larger group

12:30-14:00   Lunch

14:00-15:30   *Potential work*
           14:00-14:15 Preparation: split to small groups, choose one potential work
           14:15-15:00 Small group discussions: develop one potential work to a research or design proposal. Research proposals would choose a research question, a plan to empirically address it, and success criteria. Design proposals would choose a technical proposal in a specific domain and propose a way of evaluating its potential. Given time constraints, we expect proposals to remain at the more high level and not be too detailed.
           15:00-15:30 Report to larger group

15:30-16:00   Break

16:00-17:00   *Discussion*
- Synthesize identified issues and proposals
- Develop an outline agenda for work in this area in the CSCW and HCI community
- Identify resources for continued communication and community-building

The materials needed for the workshop are a projector and 3 large easel pads.

5.3 After The Workshop

As earlier discussed, one outcome of the workshop will be to develop and publish an overview article describing the developed research agenda and potential work to be done in the area of cultural busyness in CSCW and HCI. Further, a second workshop will be planned to follow up on work being done in the area.

6. ORGANIZERS

Gilly Leshed is a postdoctoral research associate in Information Science at Cornell University. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as technology design, her research highlights social and cultural issues within technical systems that are designed to support individual and group task completion. Her current research explores the culture of busyness in American society through field studies of busyness experiences and the role time management tools play in coping with or promoting a busy lifestyle.

Phoebe Sengers is an associate professor at Cornell University in Information Science and Science & Technology Studies. Her research focuses on identifying and altering cultural values and assumptions embedded in IT. In her current project, a design-ethnographic and -historical study of technology adoption in the remote, traditional fishing village of Change Islands, Newfoundland, she is exploring the implications of non-industrial orientations to time for IT design.

Carman Neustaedter is an assistant professor in the School of Interactive Arts + Technology at Simon Fraser University, Canada. His research is primarily in the areas of computer-supported cooperative work and domestic computing. Currently his research focuses on studying and designing technologies that connect families over distance and allow them to share their everyday experiences in real time.

7. REFERENCES

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