

Stefana Broadbent, **Intimacy at Work: How Digital Media Bring Private Life to the Workplace**, Walnut Creek, CA: Routledge, 2016, 117 pp., \$26.44 (paperback).

Reviewed by

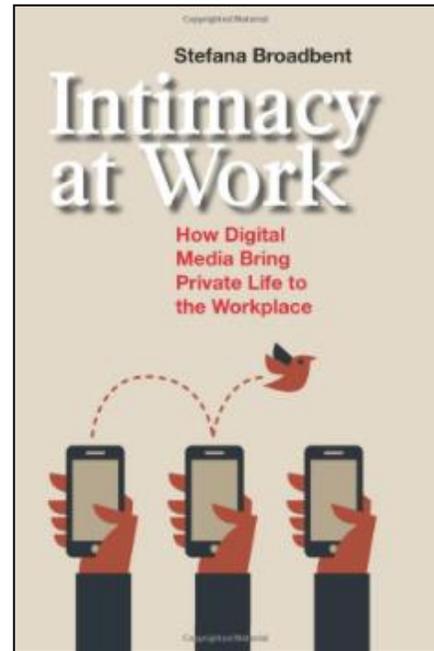
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In her book, **Intimacy at Work: How Digital Media Bring Private Life to the Workplace**, Stefana Broadbent explains a paradox that working individuals face each day with the influx of technology: The separation of one's personal life and professional life is not always possible. Digital communication technologies have, in some ways, allowed individuals to keep up with their personal lives while at work and also to take their work home. While this paradox is not recent, Broadbent presents these tensions in new and thought-provoking ways that scholars who study computer-mediated communication, organizational communication, and work-life balance will find important and timely.

The main objective of the book is to present two processes that are tightly linked together: the notion of attention (who and what does the receiver of a message place emphasis on) and how that interaction is controlled within a workplace context through communication. Throughout the book, Broadbent explains how communication and attention are intertwined, through an organizational lens. She describes how we, as human beings, are consistently bombarded with interactions through technologically mediated channels on a daily basis. At work, individuals often have trouble discerning where to place their attention, especially when the frequency of personal messages increases and when organizations create rules about the use of personal communication during working hours. When organizations create stringent rules, Broadbent states, the likelihood of an "accident" (or, as Broadbent describes them, "negative repercussions") is bound to increase. As Broadbent describes, "Every time we receive a message and attend to it, we are being drawn into the attention of another" (p. 93). Could our ever-shifting attention span and high volume of communication create problems for the workplace setting? Broadbent attempts to answer this question in unique and descriptive ways.

Using both quantitative and qualitative ethnographic data, Broadbent uses her personal research to guide the book's six chapters. A strength of the book is that Broadbent's data come from many sources, including large samples from Europe and the United States. International audiences will find her nonethnocentric approach to be relevant across diversely located workplaces. Although she does not provide specific information about the full sources of her quantitative data, all of her ethnographic work was done in Europe, including France, Italy, Switzerland, and the UK. Her holistic and worldly approach makes this book stand out from other related books on the topics of organizational communication and



technology. While recent scholarship and other works have taken a U.S.-centric approach, Broadbent presents her research in ways that can be applied to wide audiences, including nonacademic readers.

Broadbent, who earned a PhD in cognitive science from the University of Edinburgh, divides the book in three distinct ways. First, she examines how technologically mediated communication channels influence how we maintain intimate relationships. By examining variables like text versus face-to-face channels, asynchronicity versus synchronicity, and the number of people involved in a communication interaction (in particular, a shift to mediated small-group communication), Broadbent claims that digital channels of communication support and maintain intimate relationships. The second section of the book explains how a social transformation has occurred in the workplace: The personal, intimate social spheres of one's life have the potential to be brought into the workplace environment. By addressing issues of privacy management, regulations and rules of personal communication in the workplace, and accidents of mobile phone use, one can understand how this transformation has come to fruition. While some workplaces do not have explicit rules if personal communication is allowed, the challenge is even greater when organizations want to control devices. For example, in France, labor laws are in place for the use and abuse of an employee's company-owned equipment by an employer, but no such regulations exist about an individual's personal computer or mobile phone being used at work.

Finally, Broadbent ties together the notion of attention and relates it to theories of joint attention and joint intentionality in the final chapter. Drawing from work by Michael Tomasello, Broadbent argues that it is human nature to join others' attention. According to Tomasello (2008), language is about how we share and direct our attentions, especially when communication is collaborative. Broadbent attempts to frame her ideas through Tomasello's theories of attention in the last chapter, but the theoretical argument could have been strengthened if she had presented it while she discussed her data.

The discussion of the ethnographic data, however, is well done and illustrates Broadbent's claims vividly. The narratives presented are unique and exemplify each topic with strong, descriptive language. One such example is a story by Maria Ramirez Angel (that Broadbent discussed in chapter 4), whose London-based employer attempted to take disciplinary action against her on the grounds that video surveillance footage revealed she spent excessive amounts of time using her mobile phone. This narrative brings into question multiple issues that modern-day workforces are grappling with: privacy and workplace surveillance, as well as the topics Broadbent previously discusses in her book.

One question still lingers: Is personal communication during work time dangerous? Broadbent attempts to answer this question with another question, placing emphasis on "one's time management of these personal [mobile phone] activities and whether they engage users for spells of time that are incompatible with their monitoring/working activities" (pp. 87–88). For Broadbent, it depends on context. For organizations in which high stress or situations of risk are more likely to occur, personal devices place the receiver of the communication at potential risk. I appreciate Broadbent's explanation of contextual workplace factors, but I do not believe Broadbent should make such sweeping claims about how people use their communication devices without a greater examination of the literature about multicomunication and sequential/simultaneous messages.

Broadbent does not suggest that the overall ban of personal communication at work is necessary or even effective (and most organizational communication and technology scholars echo these sentiments). It is simply impossible to regulate people's use of mobile devices, and therefore, organizations should address the issue of placing attention on one's personal messages while at work. Handled in a structured and socially sophisticated way, "when environments carry their security in the processes and culture, individual lapses of focus can always be recovered" (p. 89). This sound advice will leave readers, both academic and nonacademic alike, with the thought that technology will continue to penetrate the workplace in unique and challenging ways for both employees and employers.

Reference

Tomasello, M. (2008). *Origins of human communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.