

Digital Burnout: The Imperative for Workplace Balance and Boundaries

Recalling a time when technology wasn't an integral part of our lives has become increasingly challenging. From the moment our mobile phone alarms wake us in the morning to those final bedtime emails, technology accompanies us throughout the day.

Whether for better or worse, technology has profoundly shaped our modern existence. Continuous connectivity keeps us perpetually plugged in, be it to friends, news, or, notably, our work. However, this constant stimulation may be detrimental to our ability to concentrate, making it increasingly challenging to switch off.



Pic 1. Burning Out

Governments and businesses have acknowledged the importance of the "right to disconnect." In 2017, France passed a law granting employees at companies with over 50 staff the legal right to disregard work-related emails outside working hours. Similar laws were enacted in Italy and the Philippines that year. Although Germany lacks such legislation, numerous companies, such as Allianz, Volkswagen, and Daimler, have proactively taken measures to limit their employees' off-duty connectivity. Recognizing the significance of disconnecting is especially crucial as the highly connected Generation Z and Millennials dominate today's workforce, elevating the risk of burnout and stress-related issues.

The Erosion of Our Attention Spans

Technology, with its constant connectedness, is taking a toll on our well-being. Researchers at the University of Yonsei in Korea have observed that the heightened energy required to handle the perpetual influx of information is causing both physical and psychological strain. Professor Chris Lee, in his book 'How Tech is Making Us Tired,' emphasizes the need for awareness about the diverse impacts of technology, which aren't always positive or indicative of progress. It is becoming increasingly evident that the physical and psychological stress associated with tech fatigue affects not only our personal lives but also our productivity, leaving us less motivated, alert, and engaged.

Another significant consequence of tech fatigue is the diminishing of our attention spans. A study by researchers at the Technical University of Denmark reveals that the collective global attention span is narrowing due to the overwhelming volume of information presented to the public. With technology continually bombarding us with new data, our ability to concentrate is waning. This has ramifications in various aspects of our lives, affecting how we learn, interact with others, and perform in our work.

The Challenge of Productivity

Technology's efficiency benefits individuals and organizations but also presents productivity challenges, notably involving smartphone distractions. Dr. Glenn Wilson's research shows that workplace interruptions and distractions can reduce IQ by 10 points.

One solution is creating "tech-free" spaces in workplaces to enhance focus, already implemented by innovative employers like the Last Word café. Tech addiction is being recognized as a productivity threat, although phone confiscation can be unsettling. A voluntary approach is more effective. The best workspaces offer areas for face-to-face interactions.

Physical spaces for separation address the difficulty of disengaging from work. Flexible workspaces help separate work from home for freelancers and remote workers. Deloitte's report highlights the need to combat technology overload for business and personal growth.

Establishing Boundaries with Technology

While technology has undeniably delivered substantial benefits to companies and their workforce, there is a pressing need to strike the right balance. Remaining on call around the clock can diminish productivity, and the erosion of our attention spans has the potential to impact various aspects of our lives, not solely within the workplace.

Solutions to this contemporary challenge include flexible workspaces and designated tech-free zones, which assist in separating working hours from personal time while reducing distractions during work.

As our dependency on technology continues to grow in the coming years, employers will need to consider implementing further boundaries to optimize their employees' cognitive abilities. This is essential for both the well-being of the workforce and the success of the businesses they operate.