

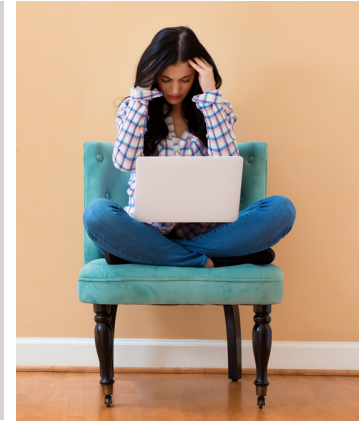
The impact of technostress on remote workers

Technostress: the inability to adapt to the rapid changes in, and use of, technology

Techno-overload: being compelled to work faster and harder to meet the demands of processing information

Techno-invasion: a perceived expectation to work longer hours, through constant connectivity with the use of mobile technologies

Techno-complexity: pressures to keep up to date with the latest technologies, the vastness of which can leave users feeling as though their skills are inadequate.¹



Research overview

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated major changes in the way we work, disrupting long-established practices and creating new norms. It created an opportune moment to examine the interruptive nature of virtual meetings in predicting work-family conflict, and job satisfaction and performance among remote workers.

To explore this, I conducted two studies using survey data from 425 office workers, mainly from the legal and construction sectors in the UK, between May 2020 and May 2021.²

Key findings

- The volume and immediacy of virtual meetings were a significant cause of technostress. They disrupted people's daily workflow and the "anytime/anywhere" nature of them added to stress levels.
- As virtual meetings increased and interrupted employees' daily work patterns, the increased technostress meant that some employees felt the boundaries between work and home became blurred, with stress spilling over into their home life, causing work-family conflict.
- Peer support was a significant moderator over time, buffering the impact of meeting interruptions on techno-invasion. This implies that support from colleagues can reduce stress and help manage workload.
- Boundaries between work and home were blurred for remote workers, particularly where space for a designated home office was lacking. Work being carried out in communal areas of the home heightened the feeling of constant connectivity, reinforcing working "around the clock" and feelings of technostress.
- The office was seen as a valuable resource for building relationships and feeling supported, and was an effective way of minimising technostress. Remote workers reported increased feelings of loneliness and isolation due to the lack of face-to-face interactions. Fostering supportive workplace cultures in remote environments is needed to help minimise feelings of technostress.

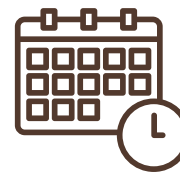
¹ Ragu-Nathan et al, 2008; Tarafdar et al, 2011; Molino et al, 2020

² Study 1 was a longitudinal study of workers from a variety of industries, job roles and experience (n = 202), measured at three time points (May 2020 – 2021). Study 2 consisted of 223 workers from the legal and construction sectors (June 2020).

What can employers do?

Remote jobs need to be designed appropriately through the application of work design theory.

- Ensure micro-breaks are included in meeting scheduling – allow at least five minutes in between meetings. This reduces the negative impact of employees attending back-to-back virtual meetings without leaving their desks for hours at a time. It also reduces the cognitive load and allows people to decompress from one meeting and mentally prepare to attend the next.
- Increase transparency and communication in diary/general workload management to ensure remote workers are empowered to adequately manage their work-life balance without feeling obliged to work extended hours to catch up with their work, especially making up for time lost due to meetings
- Encourage and support employees to take regular breaks throughout the working day. Remote workers involuntarily develop poorer habits such as not taking regular breaks, developing a more sedentary lifestyle, and working longer hours. This can be detrimental to their overall mental and physical well-being.
- Offer training and development to help remote workers manage digital interruptions, and to minimise technostress and work-family conflict.



What can employees do?

- Take regular breaks throughout the working day, including short walks outdoors. A short walk before and after the working day to ‘mimic’ the daily commute can be a positive way of mentally preparing for the day ahead, but also to decompress and create some physical distance from the home office.
- Plan other activities/make commitments after work to reinforce healthier working hours and create a change of scene after working from home for a prolonged period.
- Switch off all work-related devices (not just putting them into sleep mode) and place them out of sight. Not only does this prevent overworking, but also prevents thinking about work-related tasks and reduces the anxiety of receiving work-related queries that cannot realistically be addressed until the next working day.



Further information



Contact: [Afshan Iqbal, A.Iqbal1@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:A.Iqbal1@leeds.ac.uk)

Visit: <https://futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk/>



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Leeds University Business School