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Reflectiveness in Digital Environments: The Missing Link between Digital Mindfulness and Productivity

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Reflectiveness in Digital Environments

The Missing Link between Digital Mindfulness and Productivity

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The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the nature and organization of work. As businesses have shifted their workforce to remote work overnight, technology continues driving productivity in the post-pandemic world. This unprecedented reliance on digital technology has its costs; while productivity overall is on the rise, so is digital fatigue. We define digital fatigue in a workplace as a result of overusing digital technologies that manifests itself by employees' burnout—feeling emotionally exhausted, mentally detached from work, harboring a negative attitude toward work, and suffering inefficacy overall. The unprecedented rates of digital fatigue affect businesses as their employees endure many personal and professional challenges caused by this phenomenon.

This study explores how digital mindfulness can help reduce digital fatigue and associated burnout without compromising productivity. In particular, this is an attempt to understand whether digital mindfulness can lead to a state of mind where employees intentionally optimize technology use through evaluating contextual factors and reflecting on their performance. Digital mindfulness in a digital work environment is characterized by an employee's alertness to distinction, awareness of multiple perspectives, openness to novelty, and orientation to the present. Prior studies documented that mindfulness in digital environments is crucial in maximizing technological potential and improving meaningful technology use. However, the link between digital mindfulness, as a state of mind, and mindful action in a digitally enabled workplace is not yet well explored. Prior research also fell short in examining how digital mindfulness can reduce digital fatigue without negatively affecting productivity.

This study introduces reflectiveness as a mediating variable between mindfulness and mindful action. Reflectiveness, the outcome of reflective thinking practices, involves a review of the experience and an analysis of the consequences of previous actions. We argue that digital mindfulness without reflectiveness does not necessarily reduce digital fatigue or enhance productivity. More specifically, mindfulness in the absence of reflectiveness only leads to a temporary state of mind (short-term alertness or awareness) without a maintainable effect on mindful actions—for example, due to the frequency, continuity, visibility, and variety of digital stimuli. Reflection at the state of self-awareness allows employees more effectively analyze their thoughts and feelings, as well as their environment. This analysis can result in knowledge integration and developing new perspectives that are essential for mindful action over time. Reflectiveness on feedback or experience is also an important factor driving implementation intention toward managing one's environment and self-regulation. Therefore, we postulate that mindfulness practices in digitally enabled workplaces can reduce digital fatigue only if these practices are linked to self-initiated reflection on different aspects of digitalization such as cognitive, relational, emotional, behavioral, and temporal consequences of the technology use.