Critical Curation and Collaboration in Learning (Cur8)

Digital Wellbeing

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Project Information

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Module Introduction (The Rationale)

This module explores the relatively new concept of digital wellbeing. It has been known for a long time how the stressors of the workplace can endanger the educator's physical and mental health, but the switch to a digital environment opened a door to a whole new set of challenges. If unaddressed, these can also potentially impair the ability of the educator to assist their learners. That is why it is important to see how the digital environment affects one's own behaviour and habits, and to make conscious choices on what is important and what can be left unchanged. Knowing what supporting resources and strategies exist can make a difference in adopting a healthy digital lifestyle.

Module Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this module is to:

♦ Introduce the concept of digital wellbeing

♦ Foster an understanding of how one's ability to learn is affected by an online environment

♦ Encourage the adoption of healthy online behaviours

Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you will be able to:

♦ understand the concept of digital wellbeing

♦ gain an awareness of signs of early stages of burnout

♦ identify the professional and personal implications of my digital activity

♦ define potential areas for improvement

♦ re-establish the boundaries between the personal/professional digital sphere

♦ adopt strategies for organising one's digital activity

Further Reading

You will also find a range of supporting tools and resource materials available in the **Learning Experience Platform**

Topic: What is wellbeing?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

♦ *understand* the concept of digital wellbeing

♦ *understand* some of the effects of the digital environment on wellbeing

♦ *recognise* how the online space leads to blurred personal/professional boundaries

♦ *understand* the first phase of burnout – honeymoon (the excitement and taking on too many responsibilities)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, you should have:

♦ *explored* some definitions and benefits of wellbeing, along with its interplay with mental health

♦ *explored* the meaning of digital wellbeing, along with some of the effects of the digital environment on wellbeing

♦ *started to explore* the stages of burnout and *gained an awareness* of signs of its early stages

Learning Activities

This unit involves:

♦ reading information on the subject

♦ exploring background sources on the subject

♦ signposts to additional information, should you wish to delve into topics further

♦ completion of a number of independent activities and task

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Defining mental wellbeing

Mind (2020, 1) approaches the definition as follows:

"*Mental wellbeing doesn't have one set meaning. We might use it to talk about how we feel, how well we're coping with daily life or what feels possible at the moment. Good mental wellbeing doesn't mean you're always happy or unaffected by your experiences. But poor mental wellbeing can make it more difficult to cope with daily life.*"

Explore (optional): if you'd like to delve into this further, see Mental Health Foundation's:
♦ blog [What is wellbeing, how can we measure it and how can we support people to improve it?](#)
♦ 'How to' [Publications](#)

The domains and building blocks of wellbeing

The Chartered Management Institute (CIPD, 2) identifies **seven key domains** of employee wellbeing:

1. Health
2. Good work
3. Values/principles
4. Collective/social
5. Personal growth
6. Good lifestyle choices
7. Financial wellbeing

Explore (optional): if you'd like to delve into this further, see the CIPD's factsheet [Wellbeing at work](#)

When Dr Martin Seligman was president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, he was instrumental in building the field of Positive Psychology. Seligman established the PERMA™ theory of wellbeing in 2002, later revised, which describes **five building blocks which contribute to wellbeing** (University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Centre, 3; Seligman M 2011, 4):

1. **Positive** emotion – within limits, we can increase our positive emotion about our past (by gratitude and forgiveness), present (by savouring physical pleasures and mindfulness) and our future (by building hope and optimism).

2. **Engagement** – where we fully deploy our skills, strengths and attention for a challenging task

3. **Relationships** – fundamental to wellbeing, support from and connection to others can give life purpose, meaning, an antidote to low moods and ways to feel "up"

4. **Meaning** and purpose – can be derived from being part of something bigger… including societal institutions such as work, family, social causes and so on

5. **Accomplishment** – we seek achievement, competency and success in a variety of arenas… the workplace of course, but also sports, hobbies and so on.

Source Seligman, 2002
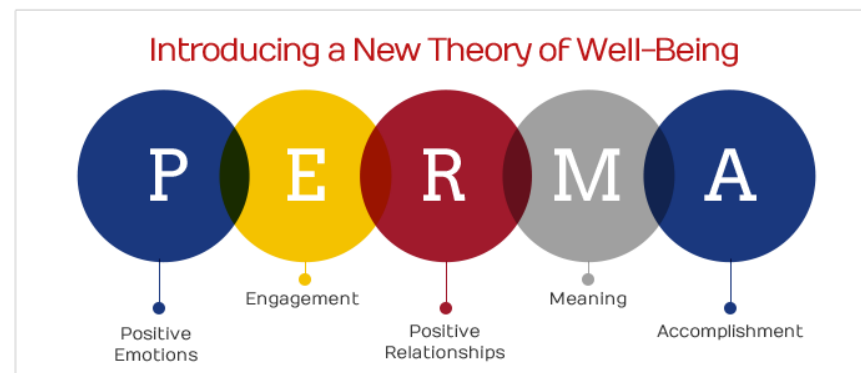
Explore (Optional): If you'd like to delve into this further, see the University of Pennsylvania's PERMA™ theory of well-being and PERMA™ workshops

Activity (optional): you might like to take this **Well-being survey** to gain a "picture of your own personal well-being and how it compares to others"

♦ Access is from the Questionnaire Centre of the Authentic Happiness website (5) set up by University of Pennsylvania's Psychology Centre to provide free resources to learn about Positive Psychology. To take survey – requires (simple) registration with the Authentic Happiness Questionnaire Centre

♦ Questionnaire format: 25 questions, Likert scale (0-10)

♦ output:
   o scores on 18 measures, across – a personal wellbeing index; life satisfaction; specific questions relating to the PERMA building blocks
   o comparative demographic groups – web users, gender, age, occupation, education level

Mental health and wellbeing

The World Health Organisation (WHO 2018, 6) defines Mental Health [good] as "*a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community*".

Everymind, an Australian national institute, defines "*having good mental health, or being mentally healthy,* [as] *more than just the absence of illness, rather* [as] *a state of overall wellbeing*" (7.)

In a New York Times article (2021, 8), couched in the throes of the global pandemic, the spectre of the '*neglected middle child of* [the] *mental health* [spectrum]' is raised. Not depression at one end, or flourishing at the other… but rather the "*absence of wellbeing*", or '*languishing*' – a term first coined by Keyes (2011, 8).

The benefits of wellbeing

University of Pennsylvania (3) goes on to outline the beneficial effects of higher levels of wellbeing as:

- Better work performance
- More satisfying relationships
- More cooperation
- Stronger immune systems
- Better physical health
- Longer life
- Reduced cardiovascular mortality
- Fewer sleep problems
- Lower levels of burnout (we explore this later in this unit)
- Greater self-control
- Better self-regulation and coping ability
- Prosocial behaviours – those which benefit others, such as helping, sharing, volunteering, donating

Needless to say, these benefits do not fall within a framework of factors desirable for specific endeavours, whether they be professional or otherwise, but add to an overall wellbeing that can be advantageous in any scenario.

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Wellbeing in the digital world

Defining digital wellbeing

Jisc is the UK higher, further education and skills sector's not-for profit organisation for digital services and solutions.

Within its digital capability framework (2019, [10]), Jisc defines the *digital wellbeing* element as

"*the capacity to:*

♦ *look after personal health, safety, relationships and work-life balance in digital settings*

♦ *use digital tools in pursuit of personal goals (eg health and fitness) and to participate in social and community activities*

♦ *act safely and responsibly in digital environments*

♦ *negotiate and resolve conflict*

♦ *manage digital workload, overload and distraction*

♦ *act with concern for the human and natural environment when using digital tools*"

Effects of the digital environment on wellbeing

Digital technologies can have positive effects on our wellbeing and our health – both mental and physical. They give us access to, arguably, limitless information and numberless ways to collaborate and stay in touch. There are such technologies used in mental health promotion, treatment and to encourage us in adopting active and healthy lives. Installations of health and fitness apps were 14% higher in 2021 compared with 2019 (Business of Apps, 2022, [11]).

adapted from: Jisc (10)

The Jisc digital wellbeing definition above, however, is indicative of the fact that this same digital environment can present us with negative effects. Not least from cognitive overload, as we find ourselves:

♦ bombarded with a huge amount of information, all at the same time
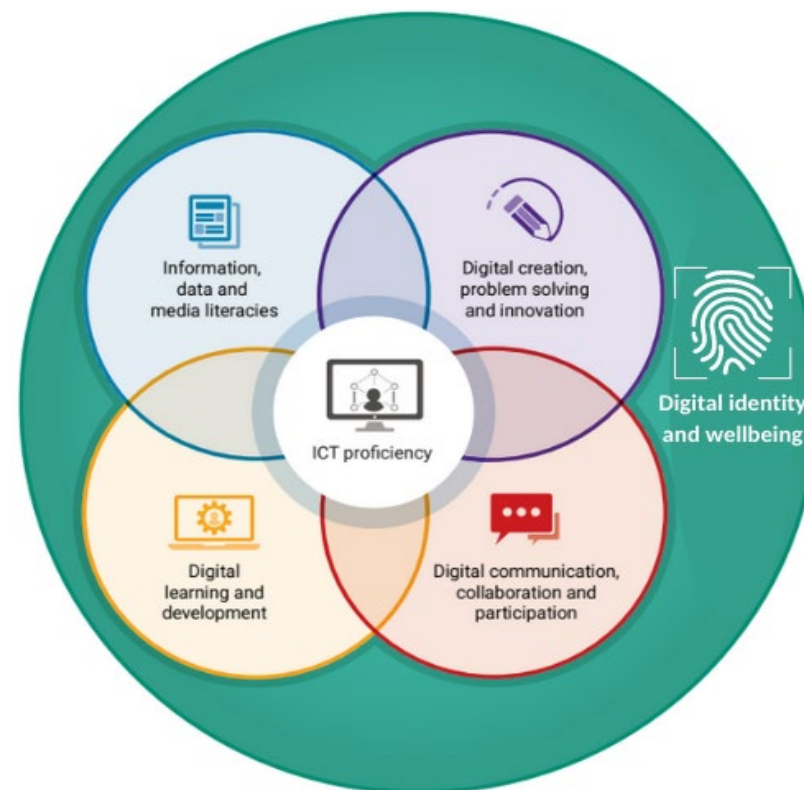
- switching between tasks
- faced with workload increases as a result of organisational change

The switch to homeworking, which many of us experienced as a result of the global pandemic, is a perfect example of the latter. Even with some return to the office, there is a danger that newly adopted ways of working and expectations will remain. Even the CEO of Zoom has admitted he is struggling with 'Zoom fatigue' (Independent, 2021, 12)!

Whilst, in its 2021 evidence review 'Mental wellbeing and digital work' (13), the CIPD found the research evidence linking digital work and mental wellbeing "weak and inconclusive", it recognised that there were "conflicting findings – for example, that digital communication technology can cause stress or can help people achieve better work–life balance". It goes on to say that

"*We do have evidence that digital working relates to mental wellbeing risk factors... For example:*

- *an excessive volume of emails is evidently a sign of excessive work demands, and we have evidence that it creates **anxiety by reducing workers' sense of control**, as they fear they will fall behind in their work or miss important information…*
- *evidence that **expectations or demands to respond swiftly via digital communication tools is bad for workers' mental health**…*
- *ICT work contributes to the **tendency to be 'always on' and work longer hours than is healthy***

In the following sections, we explore a couple of aspects in greater detail.

Boundaries

Do you feel the pressure to be 'always on', constantly 'work available'? Particularly, perhaps, with the increase in home working – most recently brought about in response to the global pandemic.

Such pressure is, to a great extent, dependent upon organisational culture. However, digital technology (remote/mobile) means that work <u>can</u> always be available – so there's the potential for us to always be there! The changes in technology also mean that working digitally brings with it greater intensity. Particularly as we engage in collaborative technology, which brings with it even greater visibility, there's the potential for us to feel a need to be seen online and productive, along with a trend towards loss of control over 'one's own work'.

In 2020, the CIPD (14) reported that 29% of employees said that use of portable devices blurs the boundaries between work and home life – the professional and the personal. 30% of employees said that their use of portable devices made it difficult to switch off from work. It is worth noting that the survey was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic!

From a later study carried out Nov/Dec 2020 (during global pandemic), the CIPD (2021, 15), found that:

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- technology had proved to be a vital lifeline – allowing us to stay connected to loved ones and colleagues
- but that it was a 'double-edged sword' – with blurred lines between work and home, switching off at the end of the day could be even harder
- presenteeism and leaveism were widespread, with many employees feeling like they could not switch off
  - 84% had observed 'presenteeism' (working when unwell) over the previous 12 months – this was common wherever people worked (in the workplace (75%); while working at home (77%))
  - 70% respondents had observed some form of 'leaveism'– working outside contracted hours or using holiday entitlement to catch up on work"

Do you consider that you need to be more careful about protecting your work/life, professional/personal boundaries?

Task: Digital technology has the potential to enable 'always on' presenteeism/leaveism.

Ask yourself the following questions (reflective of those in the CIPD survey):

- Over the last 12 months, are you aware of colleagues/contacts working when ill (presenteeism)? Have you done so?
- Over the last 12 months, have you observed colleagues/contacts working outside contracted hours or using holiday entitlement to catch up (leaveism)? Have you done so?

In units 2 and 3 of this module, you will review, analyse and reflect on your own digital habits, and then consider some enabling tactics and strategies.

Ideas: Here are a few things to get you thinking in terms of how you do/might establish your boundaries:

- a 15 minute rule: when you finish work, for the first 15 mins, do something you enjoy which will take your mind off it

- make a note: if you think of something, when not working, note it down rather than do it

- if working from home, when finished
  - put/shut work resources away
  - switch from work to personal device (eg work laptop/computer to personal laptop/tablet/etc)
  - do a 'fake commute'… for example, 5 minutes looking around the garden and/or a ½ hour read in the conservatory before work; 30-minute walk around the village after work

Video (optional): you might like to watch the University of York's video Switch off or burn out (YouTube, 2:20 min)

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Burnout

Having explored above the potential of the digital environment to create an 'always on' scenario and significant changes in working practices, it's worth looking at one of the possible implications of these aspects… Burnout!

In its online 'Stress Management' resource (16), Winona State University notes that "*teachers face a higher burnout risk than people in other professions*". So, perhaps it's worth suggesting 'educator beware'?! It's certainly worth briefly considering the stages of burnout and having an idea of what to look for in terms of early signs.

The 5 stages of burnout

In 1981, Veninga and Spradley (17) developed a model to describe 5 stages of work burnout. What follows is a simplified representation of these stages.

The early signs

Here we will outline characteristics and signs of the first 2 stages.

Stage	Characteristics
1 HONEYMOON PHASE	High job satisfaction, commitment, energy, creativity
2 ONSET OF STRESS	Job dissatisfaction, work inefficiency, fatigue, sleep disturbances, escapist activities
3 CHRONIC STRESS	Negative, chronic exhaustion, physical illness, anger, depression
4 BURNOUT	Physical symptoms intensify, obsess about work frustrations, pessimism and self-doubt dominate thinking, escapist mentality, neglect of personal needs
5 CHRONIC BURNOUT	Embedded symptoms, chronic sadness, depression, mental and physical fatigue

1. The honeymoon phase:

When we take on something new, a new job or a change such as working from home and embracing the new digital technologies and ways of working for example, we typically begin by experiencing high job satisfaction. In this honeymoon phase, we embrace the changes and experience associated stresses.

Signs that we are in this stage include (adapted from Calmer, 2020, 18):

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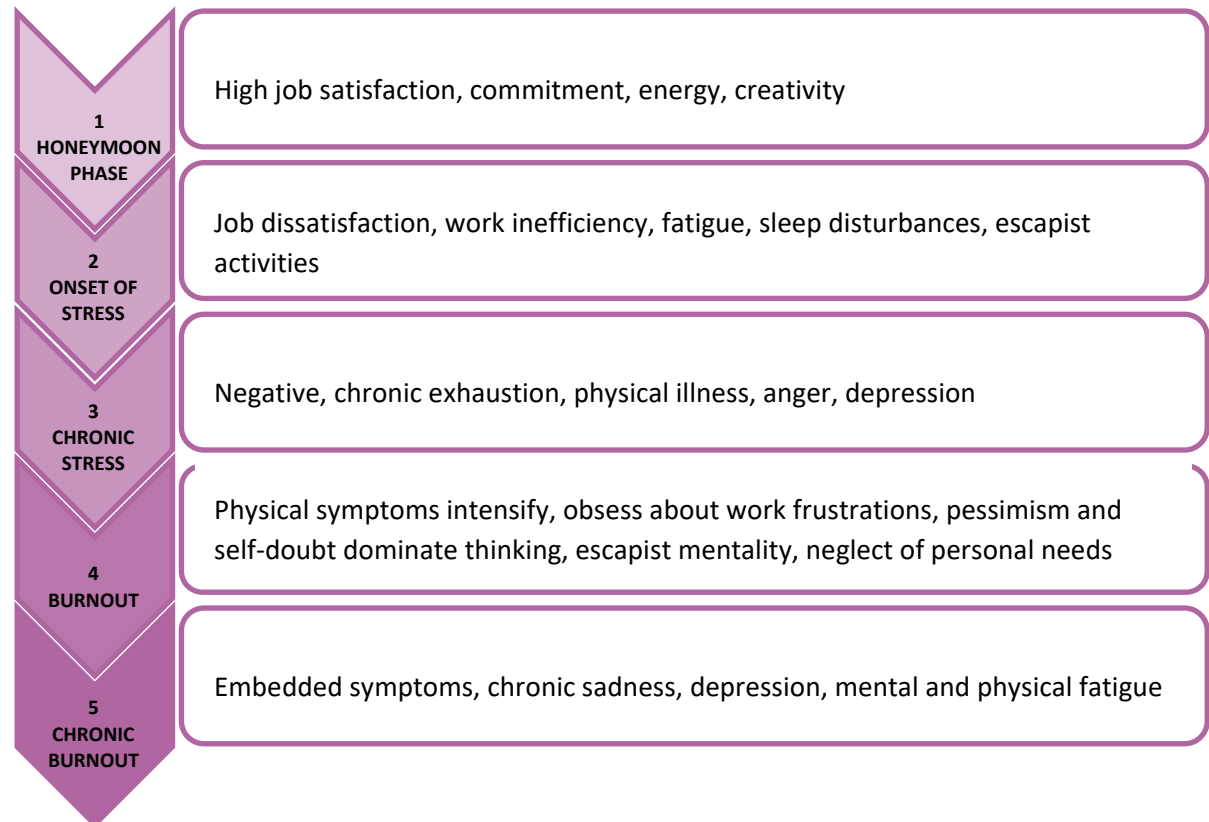
- commitment to the job

- free-flowing creativity, sustained energy levels and high productivity

- job satisfaction and endless optimism

- a compulsion to prove oneself

In this phase, it's important to implement positive coping strategies to mitigate the associated stresses, and so to support our wellbeing. If we do this, we may be able to remain in this stage indefinitely – though few people do.

2. **Onset of stress:**

Moving into the second stage may be heralded by us noticing that some days are not as good as others.

Signs that we are in this stage include (adapted from 18):

- avoidance of decision making, job dissatisfaction, lower productivity

- lack of sleep or reduced quality

- anxiety, fatigue, forgetfulness, inability to focus

- headaches, heart palpitations, high blood pressure

- neglect of personal needs, lack of social interaction

Explore (optional): should you wish to delve into this further, you might take a look at

- Winona University's adaptation of the 5 Stages of burnout

- Calmer's What are the 5 stages of burnout

Self-care

The aim is that we operate self-care and, if we find we have moved through the stages, we take action to move back towards stage 1.

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In the early stages of burnout, where symptoms are minor and slight, measures to provide relief from stressors are indicated. Actions to, for example: address work-life balance (and boundaries); recuperate via relaxation, sports, hobbies and so on.

Explore (optional): should you wish to delve into this further, you might take a look at HelpGuide's [Burnout prevention and treatment](#)

You can explore some strategies as you work through the Topics of '**Digital Activity Analysis'** and '**Digital Wellbeing: Strategies for Change'**.

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Topic: Digital Activity Analysis

Learning objectives:

- ♦ gaining awareness of my current on- and offline digital activity

- ♦ identifying the professional and personal implications (positive and negative) of my digital activity

- ♦ considering how my current digital activity compares to that of pre-pandemic digital activity

- ♦ defining potential areas for improvement

Gaining awareness of my on/offline activity

In the Topic: 'What is Wellbeing' we covered the concept of digital wellbeing as being mindful of our health and safety, relationships and excessive engagement online; as well as utilising digital activity itself to foster the pursuit of personal goals and being conscious of our responsibility to act with concern for others and our environment.
Furthermore, we looked at the five building blocks contributing to our wellbeing in general.
Needless to say, these same factors apply to both our digital and our real-life activities in terms of their relationship to our wellbeing.

However, we need to remember that **our digital engagement is incapable of facilitating positive or negative experiences in itself**, that is - without a connection to that which stands beyond it (*and enables it*) in the first place.

In other words - while the virtual world is a **digitally controlled modality**, **replacing the real world with a network of dependencies within which a standpoint is designated for us**, it is only through our engagement with the *real* that our wellbeing is affected. Therefore, digital wellbeing still refers to the dynamic of our **relationship with ourselves**, **others and the natural world**.

This distinction is of great importance, highlighting that the term **digital** does not separate **wellbeing** in any way from its connotations with physiological and psychological health in general.

To put this to the test, we invite you to **do a recap of your online and real world activity** in terms of the five contributors to wellbeing:

- Please, write down a few online *professional/personal* activities that **positively** affect your: **emotions**; **engagement**; **relationships**; **meaning**; **purpose** and **accomplishments**.

- Then, write down **at least one** online *professional/personal* activity that **negatively** affects **each of the same factors**.

- When you are finished, we invite you to try and find one activity amongst them that is unrelated to your relationship to yourself, others, or the natural world.

Regardless of our environment (i.e., any space or facility; fictitious or otherwise), **the factors that contribute to our wellbeing will always be connected to the principal characteristics that influence our mental and physical health**. The fact that we have changed the way we interact, have fun, study and complete duties by using digital devices does not alter the requirements that must be met for the health of our psyche and physiology, even though we might get used to different means of satisfying our needs.

- Now, please complete the **same** reflective challenge but with regards to your **real-world daily activities**. Think of - or write down - at least one *positive* and *negative* under each section – **emotions; engagement; relationships; meaning and purpose; accomplishments**.

What you will find here is that although both our online and real-world activities are related to the same phenomena, the difference lies precisely in our mode of interaction. This perspective can empower us with a more conscious responsibility of what we get ourselves into by spending numerous hours online. Indeed, due to the way we often perceive it - **a simple means to an end, a time and effort saver, a leisure, learning or networking opportunity** - **the digital is often taken lightly** with regards to how it can affect us - we are merely sitting, seeing, listening, and pressing keys. However, by shutting down more than half of our senses - **smell, taste** and **touch** - not only do we increase the burden on our hearing and seeing to process information and inform our actions, but we **transform the way we relate to ourselves and Other(s)**.

Identifying the professional and personal implications (positive and negative) of digital activity

Having acknowledged our physical and psychological needs do not necessarily change with our digital engagement, the nature of it is something we must look into.

For this purpose, we will ask you to break down the **implications of your digital activity**, again, in terms of your personal and professional life. But first, let's think more about this together. We have covered the topic of **attention in the digital context: how our brains are affected by our technological**

interactions, and **what we can do to mitigate that in Module 2.** There you can find a more scientific rationale for the effects on our brains in terms of our concentration/interpretation ability and our memory capacity.

Now we will delve into the psychoanalytic/cultural side of digital wellbeing. Prepare for a short history lesson!

It took television over a century to achieve its current global state. Computer technology developed far more rapidly. Personal computers became a 'mass-marketed device' with the invention of _microprocessors_ in 1977, making them accessible to individual consumers. Ten years later, the new networks of machines offered a way to construct a real alternate reality - not a passive one like that of television and cinema - but an interactive space that actually existed in parallel to the real world. The **interactive-communication-information potential** of Internet technology gave further ground for the explosive development of electronic media, bringing new interactive platforms that have revolutionised our personal and professional life. However, in addition to the varying uses we have for our digital devices, there are a number of problematic issues, the impact of which we are only just beginning to understand.

Think about the following dynamic: the idea that a person can become obsessed with how they present their image to others (_or with how they are seen in the eyes of others_) is far from alien to us nowadays. The therapeutic room has plenty of examples of its own, but even so, we cannot blame Facebook or Instagram for having paved the way for such obsessions to occur. Our tendency to try and gain the favour of others, to **act** and **pretend**, goes back thousands of years. In fact, some intellectuals like Jan de Vos (_in his sophisticated work "The Digitalization of (Inter)subjectivity", 2020: pp. 81-83 5_) go so far as to claim that "investigating **Facebook** and **Google** data can uncover nothing about human psychology, as these platforms **are made according to psychological theories and models in the first place**". This means online data can only shed light on how our psychology has been exploited. And it is not just our social media profiles that our unconscious actively engages with and is thoroughly provoked by. Our regard for information and studying, interpersonal connection and professional relationships, bravely exploring and safely relaxing changes when filtered through the digital medium.

Imagine you have a tendency towards procrastination, but you also want your manager to hold the opinion you are a responsible and capable employee. Working remotely, you start giving yourself the liberty to engage with more pleasant activities online and leave work to be completed at inappropriate times, and under inappropriate measures, as long as the final product **looks** the way you want it in the eyes of your employer. _This may lead to a series of complications both in terms of your performance, as well as your relationship with your colleagues. Appearance is one thing, but the time wasted will inevitably result in a lack of experience and efficiency;_

A more personal example is a fear of rejection being reduced, by the ease with which you can approach others and express yourself online, resulting in unrealistic expectations and further difficulties in your real-world conduct and interactions.

Truly, our relations change when filtered through virtual reality.

Although the digital world makes many aspects of our daily lives easier, it is up to us to inform ourselves of its downsides. The abundance of information readily available on our phones makes each rush of curiosity a Google search away from being satisfied. Freud's pleasure principle is thus abused, regressing us to a childish cycle of striving towards instant gratification. Instead of exploring the real world, where our curiosity helps us pick up new skills and knowledge, meeting new people along the way whilst finding answers to our questions, we become enclosed in a field with predefined possibilities. Our fantasy is reinforced with each moment spent online, submerged in auditory and visual phenomena endlessly tailoring data to gratify our desires.

In these next tasks we invite you to **think of some positive and negative real life (inter)actions of your choice** - with work, colleagues, friends and family, leisure activities or the natural environment - **where your experience is augmented by the fact you are conducting them online**.

Reflect on yourself in terms of at least two professional and two personal activities, tendencies or interactions that are **negatively augmented** when facilitated online. These can be anything, from teamwork and communication dynamics in the workplace, to your fondness for cats or your inclination to often check on people you deem close. Write your answers down so you can get back to them at your convenience.

On a more positive note, of course our lives as we know them today would be unimaginable without the benefits of our scientific-technological achievements. Nuclear power, electronics and electronic-calculating technology, computers and computerisation, robots and robotisation, genetic engineering and cloning, laser technology and biogenetics have laid the foundations of what we call modern life.

Think of at least two professional and two personal activities that have been **positively influenced** when you transferred them onto a digital platform. Maybe you had a knack for painting or design, and you stumbled upon this software that finally helped your creativity flourish with its neat tools and interface, or you found this online library that saves at least half an hour of your day when preparing your students for class? Maybe a friend of yours who lives far away recommended to you this mobile application that turned out to be the best way to keep track of your diet? We are sure this task will not be as challenging as the previous one!

However we look at it, there are always two sides to a coin, but it is also always harder to see clearly through our comfort zone and be honest with ourselves about any bad habits we are developing, especially when they give us momentary satisfaction and relieve us of worries.

When discussing **digital wellbeing** it is impossible to ignore the fact that the myriad of influences from digital technology on the way time is spent has become of the utmost cultural significance. With the ubiquitous physical presence of devices such as mobile phones, the absence of these objects may lead to an experience of separation anxiety as online profiles often **act as an escape**, **as well as a solution to psychological distress**. When psychological security

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and bodily coherence are derived from the reassuring presence of digital devices (*and our connection to the world's data as well as billions of personal profiles*), whether we want it or not - eventually we start living in figures and abstractions. Everything becomes possible, factually and morally. And while we all want to determine on our own what reality is, this wish for self-determination is strongly synonymous with what Rainer Funk (*in his 2014 work "The unbounded self: The striving for reconstructing personality and its clinical impact" Int. Forum Psychoanalysis., 23(3): 144-148*) calls **de-limitation** or **boundlessness**. In this psychological state we are susceptible to identifying with realities in the form of emotional worlds, states of arousal, experiences, emotions, passions, environments and lifestyles which, similarly to drugs and excessive behaviour, do not just afford an escape from reality, but have a high potential for substance dependency.

So, the most important advice we can give here is that you try to be as conscious as possible with regards to what online distractors steer your attention towards and away from (including whatever task you first intended to conduct when you picked up your digital device).

You can find much more on **distractions** and **attention** in the digital context in **Module 2: Topics for Learners in an online environment**.

Pre- and Post-pandemic comparisons of digital activity: opportunities for improved wellbeing

W. K. Haselden's "The Pocket Telephone: When Will it Ring?" was first published in The Mirror (UK) in 1919, depicting a caricature of what life would be like if we all had "pocket" phones. Ringing at every moment, the benefits and innovativeness of the telephone device were reimagined as nothing but a nuisance:

If as early as 1919 someone could think to portray such a future for the telephone, this comic's humour has today become anything but a reverie about the world's increasing interconnectedness. Not only are our mobile devices with us everywhere we go, making us available to anyone, anytime, anywhere, but we ourselves have access to every kind of experience imaginable with the click of a button.

Source: https://thenib.com/this-comic-from-1919-imagines-what-it-s-like-to-have-a-phone-in-your-pocket/

Without having to go through the trouble of even travelling somewhere to a show or a seminar, you can access almost anything ever written (this is in reference to the fact 95% of the world's data was generated in the years prior to 2015). It is all there in one place. And if you have money, you can buy nearly anything that has been the product of human knowledge. Simple, right?

Even more so after the pandemic, it seems we are setting our lives up in such a way that the new generations will have it easier. No one has to reinvent the light-bulb or the motor engine, nor figure out quantum mechanics or analytical psychology from scratch.

Notwithstanding the fact that many crucial factors affecting our daily lives have also changed in the last hundred years (i.e., family structure and traditions slowly giving way to ambition and individualism, career culture turning vocation into opportunity and work regimes into flexi-work, and leisure transforming into a ready-made experience), modern technologies somehow stand at the root of our contemporary civilisation.

If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has sped up the process of technologisation. Even this project - this very activity we are preparing you to engage in - is an adaptation to our growingly digitalised world.

However, since going digital seems to have been swifter and more necessary than ever in these past two years, we are now presented with a great opportunity to reflect on how exactly this has affected our wellbeing.

Building upon the previous exercises in this unit, please reflect on at least one digital activity you have undertaken over a long period of time due to the pandemic (*more than 6 months*). Please, use the following framework, where **X** represents a digital activity of your choice:

1. Have I started doing more of activity **X** than before?

2. Is **X** easier or harder to conduct online? Ask yourself ***how***, regardless of your answer.

3. Has **X** had an overall positive or negative effect on me? In what way?

4. Has **X** had an overall positive or negative outcome? *Think of factors external, but vital to you - your work/family environment; close and far-reaching social circle; culture; natural environment, etc.*

5. To what extent have the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic influenced my justification/judgement/feelings towards my digital activity?

6. What would my answers to questions 1-4 be if I start conducting my activity digitally as little as possible?

The aim of this exercise is to empower you in defining potential areas for improvement to your wellbeing by reducing your digital activity, or altering its routine. Backtrack what has changed and make some notes - become more aware of yourself. See how you can revamp actions which have turned into habits. Do not aim to change anything in a day, work in small steps, and set small goals!

Since sociological and psychoanalytic theory have informed most of this unit, it feels only appropriate to give more power to you, the reader, at the end of this unit.

Through these Digital Wellbeing Topics, we are trying to facilitate healthy and purposeful knowledge and behaviour in you that will not only last, but act as a mirror you can review your digital activity with. There is no one person that knows better than you how to improve the quality of your digital activity and mental/physical wellbeing, we are here to simply provide you with some tools for the purpose.

If the function of language is not to inform, but to evoke what is already there in some unconscious-form;

If the meaning behind every sentence lays in the unsaid;

If the purpose of every therapy session is for it to end - *then it is truly through communication and self-reflection that we always end up illuminating the power within!*

https://play.google.com/store/search?q=digiburn&c=apps - This app is both highly informative of the modern implications of **burnout** (not an infrequent psychosomatic outcome of being **always on**), as well as a great tool to keep track of, manage symptoms, and help improve your wellbeing.

Topic: Digital Wellbeing: Strategies for Change

Learning Objectives

♦ manage responsibilities from the standpoint of digital wellbeing

♦ re-establish the boundaries between the personal/professional digital sphere

♦ understand the value in taking time away from the digital;

♦ have knowledge of strategies for organising one's digital activity, such as prioritisation and subtle time-savers;

Learning Activities

Video. Digital distractions need to be managed. But how? Do you believe it is a matter of adopting individual coping strategies, or are there larger forces at play? Journalist Johann Hari argues the latter is the case, claiming that if we don't radically restructure our relationship with technology as a society, all individual solutions will fall short of the problem. Please watch an interview with him (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GR3w6KwWt4). Do you agree with his arguments? Or do you believe that more personal responsibility is needed?

Activity: Regardless of your position on the extent to which digital distractions are a societal problem, it is clear that the solution must also involve some individual responses. What can you personally do to increase your digital wellbeing? Please define **three strategies** for managing one's digital life better. Try to describe them so that you can convince others to adapt them. You can use the following guiding questions:

1. What is the strategy about?
2. What efforts will it involve?
3. What benefits will it bring?

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4. How long will it take for it to be effective?

Workshop. In a group, all participants present their strategies and try to convince everyone of their merits. Then the group attempts to come up with a ranking. Which strategies should be adopted by everyone? Using the ranking, participants prepare a brochure on 'Educator's advice on digital wellbeing`.

Activity: Compare your suggestions with the list proposed below. Have you missed something? What do you think of the broader scope of interventions?

Tech-specific solutions

The solutions in this section are based upon the recommendations of Google (https://wellbeing.google/). They represent the most immediate response you can take – changing the way in which you use your devices in order to make them less distracting and harmful of your ability to perform quality work and to relate to others.

Creating **device-free zones** and times is a key step towards re-establishing you digital wellbeing. Just keeping your phone out of your line of sight can improve your concentration, your ability to retain information, and help reduce stress. Limit device use when with others. When engaging with other people, put down your devices and turn off their notifications. That is how you can focus on the meaningful communication with them, and not get distracted.

♦   **Turn off your devices/ notifications at night.** Some people prefer to charge their phone in a different room to the one they sleep in. Others switch off their internet connection. And some people use dedicated apps to manage their digital connection, setting times free of notifications.

♦   **Disconnect from notifications.** Most apps can be programmed to disable their notifications at certain periods of time. That is how you can read all your emails in one session, similar to reading an old-time newspaper, and not pause your work to reply to every single one.

♦   **Monitor device use**. Both Android and IoS devices allow you to monitor how you use your device – how often you unlock it, how much time you spend on it in general and on specific apps. You can then create some boundaries for yourself, creating reminders to take a break, or hard limits on how much you can use specific apps.

♦   **Managing the home screen.** Having few icons on the home screen, and the rest organized in folders, helps you focus and not lose track of what you are doing. Turning you screen black and white (grayscale) makes apps less engaging when you're trying to focus.

Improving focus

The solutions in this section are based upon the work of Johann Hari (Hari Johann (2022). Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention. Bloomsbury Publishing). They take into consideration the way your ability to concentrate has been endangered by certain lifestyle choices. Sometimes getting distracted is not only due to the technology you use, but also the environment you find yourself in.

- ◆ **Avoid physical exhaustion.** Get enough sleep – most people in modern society are systemically sleep-deprived, and that significantly affects their ability to concentrate and think. You might think that you are more productive when you stay up longer, but actually the reverse is true – you are spending more time in front of a screen without completing anything. Sleep allows the brain to transfer information from the short-term into the long-term memory and prepares it to be productive the next day.

- ◆ **Get physical exercise and a healthy diet.** The relationship between your body and brain is well-established. Brain chemistry is affected by body chemistry, and there is no getting around it. If you want to be productive, you need to take care of both.

- ◆ **Limit your information intake.** The human brain can only process so much information, but it is increasingly bombarded by news, mails, social media, notifications etc. Each distraction leads to a loss of focus, and makes you take longer to meaningfully complete any task. That is why it makes sense to create `safe zones` free from notifications where you can truly focus on what you are working on.

- ◆ **Avoid multitasking.** Unlike computer processors, the human brain cannot actually work on several threads at once. Multitasking for us means switching between different tasks – with a loss of productivity. Devoting yourself to one task at a time, especially one that is meaningful for you, is much more rewarding.

- ◆ **Take time off concrete tasks.** Again, less is more. Dedicating some time when you don't have to do anything – you could let your mind wander – will allow you to reach deeper insights. An overworked brain is a superficial one.

Managing stress

There is a general agreement that strong emotional distress and stress in general hinder one's performance significantly. But how to deal with them when they occur? The World Health Organisation has a few suggestions (World Health Organization (2020). Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide. Geneva.):

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- When facing strong emotions, **ground yourself** by noticing your thoughts and feelings, try to slow down and connect with what your body is experiencing.

- Then try to notice what thought or feeling has got a hold of you – **define** it, give it a name, and refocus on what you were doing with full attention.

- Realise what key **values** are important for you and pick one way that you can act according to them in the following days.

- **Be kind** to yourself and others. Notice when kindness is lacking – name the unkind thoughts and feelings you might have.

- **Make room** for difficult thoughts and feelings – pushing them away doesn't really work. Notice what you are experiencing, give it a name, and let it come and go like the weather. If you are not fighting with the weather, then you will have more time and energy to engage with the world around you and do things that are important to you.

Explore. Please have a look at the proposed list of wellbeing apps. Do you think there might be one useful for you? Would you recommend it to others? What reasons can you provide to persuade them?

https://wethegeek.com/google-digital-wellbeing-alternatives/

Workshop. In a group, each pair can review a specific app and present what it can do to the rest. The group than comes up with its own ranking and adds the suggestions to the brochure created in the previous step.

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