

# Improving digital wellbeing at work to lower stress and improve employee mental health

## A partnership between Shine Offline and the Mindful Business Charter

Digital Wellbeing at work experts Shine Offline have partnered with the Mindful Business Charter to help organisations to improve their digital workplace cultures. In today's 24/7 connected world, considering your people's digital habits will help your organisations to work towards addressing sources of workplace stress that impact employee mental health and wellbeing and inhibit employees' ability to work at their best.

This pack has been developed to provide you with an introduction to digital wellbeing at work and its relevance to the MBC. It outlines how digital wellbeing aligns with the Charter's pillars and suggests areas for consideration in supporting staff to improve their digital habits to minimise unnecessary workplace stress.

### About Shine Offline's work

Shine Offline use their experience of working with hundreds of businesses, including a host of MBC signatories, alongside the latest research, neuroscience and psychology, to support workplaces to create healthier digital cultures where employees foster positive, intentional and sustainable digital habits.

Digital technology is amazing and enabled businesses to keep performing, connecting and collaborating throughout the pandemic. However, an accelerated transformation of the workplace to predominantly hybrid, and flexible, working models has increased digital reliance, and in many cases been implemented out of necessity without strategic planning. While this has allowed greater flexibility for staff who are embracing an agile approach to their work, with it has come a change in digital behaviours, boundaries and expectations.

Many people are experiencing a host of downsides as out of control digital habits create numerous stresses.

Shine Offline's research reveals:

- 83% of employees are experiencing overload from their workplace digital technology
- 86% say digital overload is causing them stress
- 89% feel that distractions from digital technology negatively impacts their ability to work at their best
- 91% feel a pressure to be connected through their digital technologies at all times
- 70% say remote working creates a greater pressure to be 'always on'
- 63% say their work life balance is worsened when working remotely.

We live in a 24/7 digital world - for many long hours and stress are unavoidable. If businesses can start the conversation about the limitations of the digital workspace, and strive to find better ways of working rather than simply accepting the status quo, improved wellbeing, work life balance, performance and collaboration can be achieved.

# Digital Wellbeing and the Mindful Business Charter Pillars

## Pillar 1: Openness and Respect – Building trust and effective communication

Digital technology is central to how we communicate at work with both internal and external stakeholders. There has been a huge transformation in methods of communication since 2020 with hybrid, flexible and remote working becoming the norm. With less in-person interaction employees must strive to ensure openness, trust and respect is at the forefront of their communication through digital technologies whether utilising video or text-based digital tools.

When staff are working remotely from managers it is important that a culture of trust is central to the team's ethos. Empowering employees to have autonomy in their working days to manage their time effectively and ensure digital technology is playing a positive role, rather than overloading them and distracting from their work, will help to ensure they feel respected and valued.

Shine Offline research has found that with the move to remote and hybrid working 91% of employees say they experience digital presenteeism – the pressure to always be 'digitally' visible, available and responsive. People often talk about feeling 'guilty' if they miss work communication or are not available. These feelings go hand-in-hand with the always-on working culture that digital technology has been a huge contributor to, and the real or perceived expectations that people will be responsive and reactive at all times.

### Tips and considerations – things to think about

- Leaders and managers play a crucial role in setting the digital working culture of their team
- Modelling good digital habits and encouraging open communication will engender a culture of trust
- Discussing digital wellbeing and healthy habits amongst teams, and including it in the agenda for team meetings, 1-2-1's and in client communications, will result in greater awareness, trust and openness
- Having upfront discussion with colleagues and clients regarding their preferred method of communication, working patterns and response time expectations can help combat digital presenteeism
- Being open about the need to be offline to enhance performance and minimise stress will manage expectations and work towards reducing the feeling of needing to be always available
- Using e-communications deliberately and thoughtfully, taking care of what is sent, when and to whom, will enhance communication and underlines mutual respect.

## Digital Wellbeing and the Mindful Business Charter Pillars

### Pillar 2: Smart Meetings and Communications – adhering to smart meeting and communication guidance

Although digital technology allows employees greater and easier opportunities to communicate with each other, workplace digital communication has its limitations. With a move to predominantly hybrid working there has been an emergence of excess back-to-back video calls and the associated ‘Zoom Fatigue’ that accompanies it.

Video meetings are more cognitively and emotionally demanding as the brain has to work harder to process information without the usual non-verbal cues of the physical workspace. Shine Offline have found that 61% of staff and 92% of managers say they are suffering from ‘Zoom Fatigue’.

An excess of meetings can lead to habitual distraction as people attempt to multi-task to keep up with their work with consequences for trust, efficiency and feelings of stress.

The volume and frequency of meetings mean that less care is taken as to how meetings are managed, reducing the quality of the thinking and discussion that takes place. People are also less able to prepare properly for meetings due to a lack of time. These factors can then spiral as people are less likely to prepare for and engage in meetings that they regard as being ineffective.

There is a particular risk in hybrid meetings of creating a sense of exclusion for colleagues who attend virtually who feel they are spectators of a meeting that is taking place physically, as opposed to being equal participants.

The advent of multiple communication channels is creating confusion and overload for many employees who feel they are spending an excessive amount of time trying to ‘keep up’ with the constant influx of new messages and notifications. Text-based

communication such as email and instant messenger, is fraught with potential for misunderstanding, anxiety and inefficiency – often dashed off in a rush and absent of the tonal and nonverbal cues that make up so much of human communication.

#### Tips and considerations – things to think about

- The role of leadership for meeting and email culture is crucial as their behaviours and attitudes will set the tone for those they work with
- Teams should be encouraged to agree how different communication platforms will be used at work and be prepared to switch communication channels where necessary - sometimes it is better to pick up the phone
- Employees should be encouraged to consider carefully who they invite to meetings, meeting length, what meetings they accept and encourage clear agendas
- In a hybrid workforce ‘video first’ meetings should be considered so that everyone feels valued and is able to contribute regardless of physical location or personality type
- Consider appointing a ‘host’ for video meetings to make sure everyone’s voice is heard
- Support in building intentional, empathetic digital body language skills is important, especially amongst leaders, to benefit individuals, teams and the workplace culture as whole
- Enable and empower employees to manage their digital engagement by muting alerts, using ‘do not disturb’ and working offline
- Fostering a culture that prizes conversation will rehumanise the workplace.

## Digital Wellbeing and the Mindful Business Charter Pillars

### Pillar 3: Respecting rest periods – consideration given to the need to switch off

We live and work in an ‘always-on’ world. Digital technology has brought us amazing connection, information, entertainment and opportunities. The flipside however is that most people lack the necessary headspace within their working and personal time to avoid overload and burnout.

#### Rest periods during the working day

During working time, wanting to stay on top of things and collaborate effectively when working remotely has resulted in back-to-back meetings. This leaves little space to get tasks completed within contracted working hours, but also a lack of pause to step away, process the day’s work so far and reset. Many people report that when they do take a coffee or lunch break they spend it scrolling through their social media or newsfeeds. Many feel too ‘guilty’ to take breaks whether due to a sense they need to be always-on or a fear of work piling up.

#### Tips and considerations – things to think about

- Managers can lead by example, encouraging people to take breaks through the day and visibly doing so themselves
- Celebrating rest time is invaluable in a world where information streams and online notifications are never-ending
- Normalising breaks and encouraging people to step away from the desk and leave the phone behind is vital. Avoid lunchtime meetings and ensure there is a break between meetings by having 25 or 50 minute meetings as standard
- Learning about the benefit of even short microbreaks not only to promote wellbeing but also focus, will benefit individuals, teams and the digital culture.

#### Work life balance

We live and work in a 24/7 connected world, and many employees feel the pressure to be digitally responsive to demonstrate their commitment and diligence. This can lead to toxic cultures where people struggle with

putting appropriate boundaries in place to protect their personal time from work intrusion.

Employees working in global organisations, or with clients in different time zones, can feel additional pressure to work and respond around the clock to collaborate effectively.

#### Tips and considerations – things to think about

- Leader behaviour is especially important in this area – regularly sending emails throughout evenings and weekends sets the tone for what is normal, acceptable and expected
- Promoting an attitude of working smart as opposed to working hard/long and modelling this from the top will create the right culture
- Explicit conversations around expectations and discouraging non-urgent out of hours communication, is an important step in respecting the work life boundaries of employees
- Staff need to be empowered to take personal responsibility for their work-related digital behaviour in their non-working time and the impact on their own wellbeing as well as their colleagues’
- Mindful and deliberate consideration needs to be given to how one-off requests to work outside contracted hours can quickly become the norm
- In a global business, standards regarding people working a rota system for meetings outside their own working hours should be considered
- The use of out of hours email signatures, and drafting and scheduling emails to arrive in the recipient’s working hours, will improve collective behaviours
- Processes to ensure people take their annual leave, prepare a thorough handover and clear guidance as to when, and how, it is acceptable for people to be contacted when on leave, will allow people to take the break they are entitled to and for it to be as restful as possible.

## Digital Wellbeing and the Mindful Business Charter Pillars

### Pillar 4: Mindful delegation – implementing a best practice approach to collaboration, instruction and delegation

In today's hybrid world our digital tools are central to work, communication and collaboration. Whilst not sharing the same working spaces we must rely on email, instant messenger and other digital communication channels. This inevitably leads to more digital noise, the dangers of miscommunication and a greater sense of overload.

Digital presenteeism is now commonplace in organisations with employees experiencing a sense of guilt if they are not 'on' all of the time as proof that they are conscientious. This poor digital behaviour feeds a culture of mistrust and results in employees not feeling the autonomy to be able to manage their workload and go offline when required to complete their tasks.

Considering how other people's expectations are managed in relation to digital activity is very important if an organisation wants to ensure they are collaborating, instructing and delegating effectively.

#### Tips and considerations – things to think about

- The tech choices and behaviours of every individual have an impact on the digital workplace culture but it is doubly important that those in positions of seniority model good digital habits. Regular 1-2-1's should include issues around digital behaviours and impact on performance, collaboration, wellbeing and work life balance

- Managers and team leaders need to have and encourage open, clear conversations about timeframes, expected response times, the need to delegate when on annual leave and the difference between 'important' and 'urgent'
- Reviewing the digital channels being used at work, and clarifying if employees understand the use of each one to avoid repetition and confusion, will help to minimise overwhelm and make collaboration much more effective
- A conversation about delegated work rather than an email instruction in communicating what is needed, in what form and by when, will better allow the person to whom the work is being delegated to ensure they have understood what they are being asked to do
- A big part of communication is non-verbal. Fostering deliberate and effective 'digital body language' when communicating over email, instant messenger or video call will work towards minimising misunderstandings and build trust when the nuance of in-person interaction through body language, tone of voice and eye contact isn't present.

Zoom fatigue, excessive out of hours working, lack of daytime breaks and digital overload due to multiple communication channels are all the product of our new way of working. These are creating unnecessary stress for staff and this is where Shine Offline and the work we do around better digital wellbeing at work comes in. Normalising conversations around digital behaviours at work and encouraging people to ensure their technology is playing a positive role will help to build trust and result in a healthier digital workplace culture.

Shine Offline will be delivering Mindful Business Charter digital wellbeing sessions throughout the year. Get in touch with Richard on [richard@mindfulbusinesscharter.com](mailto:richard@mindfulbusinesscharter.com) for more details.

If you are interested running a digital wellbeing programme to help embed the Mindful Business Charter in your business you can find details [here](#) or email the Shine Offline team on [mbc@shineoffline.com](mailto:mbc@shineoffline.com)