

# Neuroscience of Hybrid Work

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## *Neuro-productivity tactics to optimise your workday*



### HYBRID WORK SHIFTS

The shift to hybrid work poses both opportunities and threats to knowledge workers' productivity and wellbeing. The chief threats are workers are now facing digital bombardment from an array of digital communication tools (such as email, Slack, Teams, WhatsApp), they're participating in increasing virtual meetings that are taxing, are often working in an environment that is different to their normal working environment which the brain finds confusing (it causes muddled cognitive associations) and they have a propensity to be 'always on'. This may lead to 'digital burnout'.



### 1. TACKLE DEEP WORK IN YOUR PEAK-PERFORMANCE WINDOW

Determine your chronotype- are you a lark, middlebird or owl? Get your individualised report **here** (use the code CHRONOVIP for free access).

Research found that people who carved out peak focus hours were 5 x more productive than those who did not. Map your workday to your chronotype by doing your 'deep work' (mentally challenging tasks) during your peak-performance window and 'shallow work' outside this window. Establish your ideal week by scheduling when you'll tackle your deep and shallow work tasks.



### 2. BUILD A FORTRESS AROUND YOUR FOCUS

Distractions put a dent in our productivity and compromise our wellbeing. It takes the average adult 23 minutes to reorient their attention and get into a deep focused state after a distraction has diverted their attention. Knowledge workers now have an average of 2 hours and 48 minutes of deep work each day because of the preponderance of distractions. Learn to mono-task and avoid multi-tasking. Establish your team's core collaboration hours (by ideally considering your team's dominant chronotype). Some other strategies to optimise your focus include working with your phone out of sight, managing our notifications (disable non-essential, batch/bundle, set up VIP lists) and use tangible signs like wearing headphones or have a physical sign on your desk or door to signal 'Do Not Disturb'.

### DIGITAL BURNOUT

One of the biggest threats to hybrid work is digital burnout. Why? Our digital load has increased substantially due to distributed teams, we're working in ways that are incongruent with our neurobiology (multi-tasking, having constant virtual meetings, working for long stretches of time) and we've perpetuated an 'always on' culture, where employees feel they need to be seen to be instantly responsive to emails and messages, as they see this as a marker of productivity. Digital burnout is fatigue, frustration, or apathy resulting from prolonged stress, overwork, or intense activity from overuse of digital devices. Digital burnout can result from excessive or unsustainable digital habits. This is why it's imperative that teams establish their digital guardrails- explicitly stating the norms, behaviours and principles around digital tool usage and hybrid habits. Take Dr Kristy's **Digital Burnout Barometer Assessment**.

## About Dr Kristy

*Having personally experienced how our always-on digital culture is compromising people's wellbeing and is counter to optimal and sustainable performance, award-winning researcher and speaker Dr Kristy Goodwin is on a mission to promote employee wellbeing and bolster workplace productivity in an always-on digital world.*

*As one of Australia's digital wellbeing and productivity experts, she shares practical brain-based hacks to tame tech habits and the latest evidence-based strategies to decode the neurobiology of peak- performance in the technological era. Senior business leaders and HR executives from the country's top organisations engage Dr Kristy to help them promote employee digital wellbeing and performance in the technological era.*



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## 3. WORK IN DIGITAL DASHES

Humans have ultradian rhythms, meaning our energy goes through natural peaks and troughs roughly every 90-minutes. Working online is also mentally taxing, so we need to work in sprints, not marathons, especially when working online. Try to set your workday up to work in 90-minute intervals (give or take, according to your ultradian rhythm).

Take good breaks between your digital dashes- good breaks using the REMNAC framework: restorative, exposure to sunlight, movement, nature, autonomy (having some choice over what you do in your break) and connecting with others. Taking regular breaks will help with your retention of information, as you're catering for the recency and primacy principles, where we tend to remember the beginning and end of information.



## 4. TAKE PEAK-PERFORMANCE PIT STOPS

You cannot outperform your neurobiology. Humans are not machines and are not designed to keep going, without taking breaks. Just like race cars, we need to take pit stops to optimise our performance. We need to see rest as a responsibility, not as a reward, or something that we do just on the weekends, or on our annual leave. To beat digital burnout, there are three types of breaks that knowledge workers need to take (these are the absolute minimal dose):

Micro breaks: 5-10 minutes each, taken daily

Meso breaks: 2 hours, predictable time off each week

Macro: 1-2 full days off each month  
Deakin University research shows that short, regular bursts of recovery are the best way to prevent burnout.

Take micro-movement breaks each day, ensure you're getting at least 2 hours outside (green time) to calm your nervous system and reset your circadian rhythm.



## 5. OPTIMISE YOUR HYBRID

Use overhead lights when working to increase your alertness, particularly in the first half of the day. Use artificial lights, if you don't have natural light sources. Having exposure to bright lights within the first 30 minutes of waking up will send a message to your hypothalamus and create a sense of alertness. Listen to playlists whilst working (and only when working) to create cognitive associations with a focused state. Music should be soft, slow (60-80 beats/minute to imitate your resting heartbeat) and either familiar lyrics, lyric-less or in a foreign language. Have consistent places to work, because your brain is constantly scanning for sensory cues (in fact it processes 11 million pieces of sensory data/second). Try to perform similar tasks in the same locations to boost your recall (it's referred to as 'state dependent recall').

“ THIS IS A PARADIGM-SHIFTING MOMENT AS WE REDEFINE NEW WAYS OF WORKING.

THE SILVER-LINING OF THE PANDEMIC FOR KNOWLEDGE WORKERS IS THAT WE CAN NOW CREATE WAYS OF WORKING THAT ARE ALIGNED TO OUR NEUROBIOLOGY.”



## Let me help you to thrive in the digital world

*I share regular tips and tricks on social media (the irony isn't lost on me) and in my newsletter. Access my FREE eBook Five Essential Digital Productivity Hacks (sign up here and I promise not to add to your email overwhelm). I also have two eCourses that you can access at your own pace to help you thrive online.*



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