

Technostress: Afflicted by Advancement

Introduction

Today, we spend every waking hour juggling cell phones, computer screens, apple watches, Ring cameras, and on and on it goes. Even the dashboard of our vehicles offers connectivity to text messaging, Spotify music, and Waze navigation. It's a love-hate relationship that leaves us satisfied and weary all at once. Especially if you are out of reach of a tower. Ouch!

Thich Nhat Hanh, an influential Buddhist leader, said in his book *Creating True Peace* "We often live our daily life in forgetfulness, allowing consumption to intoxicate us and our children."

Is it possible to embrace technology and still embody wellness? After completing this course, you will be able to define technostress, identify the signs and symptoms of technostress, explore the causes of technostress, and practice coping strategies to keep you moving as peacefully as a monk under a plum tree.

Technostress Defined

Way back in 1984, author Craig Brod defined technostress for the first time in his book *Technostress: The Human Cost Of The Computer Revolution*. He said, "Technostress is a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with the new computer technologies in a healthy manner." (Brod, 1984) Can you picture or remember the computers in 1984? What a shock it must have been for workers moving from pen and paper to technology 40 hours per week!

A 2017 article by *Career Development Quarterly* explains “The use of technology can enhance workplace efficiency, productivity, and flexibility; yet, technological tools can have negative effects on individuals’ cognitive, psychological, and physical health, as well as on organizations (Atanasoff & Venable, 2017)

In essence, technostress is an affliction caused in part by the advancement and utilization of technologies. It may not affect everyone every time, but some good to know signs and symptoms are in the next lesson.

Technostress Signs and Symptoms

According to an article by King University, technology users either struggle with the bombardment of technology or embrace it. Or worse, they can’t live without it, or attach to it in an unhealthy way.

According to their research, technostress can have physical, mental, emotional symptoms. Let’s explore.

Physical symptoms include: headache, insomnia, body aches, and the inability to chill out

Mental Symptoms include: difficulty staying focused, making mistakes at work, low confidence, and mental fatigue

Emotional Symptoms include anxiety, irritability, anger, and helplessness

Managers of employees experiencing technostress may notice general burnout, a decrease in creativity and problem solving, a drop in employee satisfaction, and a decrease in employee commitment (“Technostress: Your brain on computer screens,” 2017).

In a future lesson, we will hear how Dr. Shirish C. Srivastava, Professor, HEC Paris, thinks by knowing each technostress type, they can be managed to “stimulate, rather than hinder, innovation.”

For now, let’s practice identifying symptoms of technostress in a workplace scenario.

Kristin is your coworker; you even work in the cubicle right next door to her. You know she always takes on a lot of work and loves to please your boss by finishing projects before the deadline. She gets to work early every day and is the last to leave the office. That has always been fine because you know that is who she is. Recently, you notice she isn’t greeting you at your cubicle entry with a chirping “Good Morning!” In fact, she barely leaves her seat at all. You hear her sometimes sighing loudly or banging on her “stupid computer” when it’s not going as fast as she would like.

Causes of Technostress

A 2017 article by King University entitled, *Technostress: This Is Your Brain on Computer Screens*, echoes Craig Brod’s 1984 assignment that technostress is plainly the inability to adapt to the technology you are forced to or choose to embrace.

Other factors contributing to technostress include performance anxiety, or lack of training with technology, multiple interfaces at once, or an overworked workforce. (“Technostress: Your brain on computer screens,” 2017)

Research done by the *International Journal of Psychology*, suggests that problems caused by the use of information and communication technologies may range from technostrain to technoaddiction. Those afflicted with technostrain reported anxiety, fatigue, and low confidence and technoaddicts reported guilt for their obsessive-compulsive use of technology. The cause of technostrain is said to be caused

by work overload, role confusion, and emotional overload, as well as a lack of leadership and social support (Salanova et al., 2013)

Now putting the responsibility square into the employees' hands, let's explore smartphones as a root cause.

Scientific America wrote an article on the term, Nomophobia. No, it's not the fear of seeing gnomes, but the fear of being without your cell phone. (Valdesolo, 2015) If you've ever gotten to work, settled into your station, and reached for your phone and realized you left it at home - you know Nomophobia. This fear of separation from your hand-held technology can compound the issue of technostress.

The line between work and home is no longer a line, but a wavy halftone of gray that leaves users to compartmentalize between the two. It also causes problems in compartmentalizing night and day. Smartphones can keep you stimulated just because of the blue light they emit. The scary part comes from a decrease in memory function and a loss of sense of direction from our reliability on the constant guidance of our phones. (Valdesolo, 2015)

As you can see, causes of technostress, technostrain, or even technoaddiction can come from varying sources. Some out of your hands and some in. In our next lesson, we will explore positive responses to these stressors and ways to leverage your stress to increase a work-life balance.

Before we move on, let's take a moment to assess another scenario to practice sniffing out the root cause of technostress.

This next scene brings you to your own home. Your partner has been acting a little "off" over the last week. She has dark circles under her eyes and rubs her neck and shoulders when you see her. She also complains of not being able to sleep at night. Her company

just landed a new contract and she takes her laptop home to work on it late into the night and gets up early to work on it again before work. She is frustrated because a member of her team quit and she has to take on his work, too. She has asked for more training on the project management software she has to use but has not received any. She seems to lose her temper easily and you wonder if it's you.

From Technostressed to Techno-mindful!

We have come full circle in this course. It is time to return to Dr. Srivastava's proactive approach to breaking down and managing technostress. In his webinar, *Technostress - Can You Translate Your Adversities Into Opportunities?* he suggests that an increasing amount of stress, caused by technology, can actually increase productivity and innovation. The research was based on a survey of 164 senior managers. When done well, these companies invested in adequate training for their staff and supported individuals based on their custom needs and personality types. These companies saw technology integration as a challenge rather than a hindrance and put the right resources in the right places (Srivastava, 2021).

In May of 2021, at the edge of an abnormal shift in technology use due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the San Francisco State University posted a Resolution on the Impact of Technostress on their website. The post was aimed at acknowledging the possible negative impact of technology on wellbeing and offering solutions and preventative measures. They also acknowledge the struggle of working remotely to include poor wifi connections, uncomfortable work setups, and the lack of office resources at home. The University gave employees and students a free pass to take breaks from technology and find more hands-on ways of achieving their work tasks. These included fitness breaks, breathing, meditation, access to natural light, and even offered ergonomic assessments of their at-home work station ("Resolution on the impact of Technostress," 2021).

As Ralph Waldo Emerson claimed in his 1836 essay *Nature* – “In the woods,” he wrote, “I feel that nothing can befall me [. . .] which nature cannot repair.”

This sentiment is echoed in a 2019 Psychology Today article, *Coping With Technostress: The healing power of nature and managing technostress*. Professor Jasmin Tahmaseb-McConatha, Ph.D., aging and well-being researcher, writes how important it is to spend time in nature. Time in nature can increase confidence and contains no negative side effects. She suggests that spending time in nature is, well as natural for human beings as breathing; most of the human existence was spent this way (Tahmaseb-McConatha, 2019)

Have some fun with this matching activity that pairs Dr. Srivastava’s five types of technostress creators and learn some positive ways to manage them.

1. Techno-overload
 - a. New technologies added to my plate and I’m required to work faster!
 - b. Solution: on-time company provided resources and support
2. Techno-invasion
 - a. I can never escape and must always be reachable!
 - b. Solution: the company provides clear expectations when working from home
3. Techno-complexity
 - a. New technology learning curve AGAIN. It’s time to retool and feel inadequate again.
 - b. Solution: company-provided time and resources to retool
4. Techno-insecurity
 - a. I can’t remain relevant with all of this new technology. I’ll get fired, for sure.
 - b. Solution: company-provided security and right-fit job descriptions to those who enjoy technology innovations

5. Techno-uncertainty

- a. I'm too old to keep learning this new technology every other month.
- b. Solution: Upgrade your knowledge to stay in the game!

In conclusion, technostress is indeed an individual and company-level affliction. The good news is that it can be managed with increasing mindfulness by managerial staff and the individual himself. Further research will continue to immerse when it comes to technology and wellbeing as it began in back in 1984.

Thank you for taking this course, please take the following quiz to measure your understanding of this topic.

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