Transcript for Digital Distractions

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Slide 1: Introduction (00:00-01:05)

Welcome to our video about working remotely and this week we are looking at avoiding digital distractions. It's extremely difficult at the moment of course, we've all got to be online for a lot of the time whether it's for socializing relaxing or just doing our work. And of course in a pre-lockdown situation we may very well have been online quite a lot of the day but it's quite unusual to not be able to take a break at all and not say read an academic text in a library or meet with friends in a cafe or relax by undertaking a hobby and these would normally be our kind of digital downtime moments. So this video will look a little bit at why being online so tiring and the need to look after a mental and physical health while you're online. We'll look at a few suggestions for sort of digitally detoxing but also acknowledging that being online can really be positive at such a disconcerting time.

Slide 2: Online Pluses (01:05-02:05)

This is what I would like to start with. This kind of idea that being online is really positive. I think a lot of what you want from online is what we want from our face to face world. We want to show that we care about people, want to connect with people and to participate in in activities and online discussions. We want to get information from the online world we want to use it as a way of relaxing a time to learn and a sense of being seen and I think this is a really important thing to acknowledge that actually it's a way of affirming what we're doing at the moment, to share experiences with other people to realize that lots of people are going through the same thing at the same time. So it's not necessarily that we're addicted to our phone or our technology but what we are addicted to is being social and interacting with people and needing to know what's going on. So definitely there are ways of using digital media and of using technologies that can mean it's a really positive thing.

Slide 3: Mindful Technology (02:05-03:23)

So when we're talking about mindful technology what we're definitely not saying is that you need to disconnect completely. As we've outlined there are loads of really positive things that you can get from being online and we're not saying that there's one way to do things or that you need to make better choices about how you spend your day. You absolutely know best how to do it but sometimes it possibly feels like you're kind of under pressure to align yourself with how other people are behaving and connecting online. So it's just taking a step back and thinking actually if I'm really tired after having been online a lot today, if I've been connecting a lot with people, say through Zoom, that can be exhausting in a completely different way as to if you've been busy at college, so it's really difficult to process some of the nonverbal cues when you're on Zoom, you know the quality isn't as good so facial expressions can be quite difficult to connect with, when you listen to someone you have to kind of then listen to the tone and the picture their voice more, you can't see their body language. You can't see people's hands very often. I use my hands all the time but some people's hands will be below the camera level and you can't see how they're sitting. Do they look comfortable? Do they look open to a suggestion? So that consumes a lot of energy so really all that we're suggesting is that you just pause for a moment and think about whether or not it's beneficial to you to be online.

Slide 4: Identity conflicts? (03:23-05:46)

And one of the big things that is tiring is there's kind of multiple identities that were having to assume when were online. You would have done this before, obviously being in a supervision is very different to socializing with friends in the bar. You have a different way of talking, use different body language, you would dress differently but one of the difficulties now is definitely that you are doing everything in the same space. So you might have seen a BBC article online recently which was about why we're finding Zoom so tiring and partially that is the stress of lockdown and it's distressing when we see people online that we can't connect with face to face but it was quite a nice little bit in it there that said you know "imagine you go into a bar and in the same bar you're talking with professors you're meeting your parents and you're dating someone isn't that weird but it's what we're doing now" And so there is a sense that you know talking with friends face to face at the end of the day isn't necessarily relaxing because you're sitting in the same chair that you were having a kind of stressful conversation with somebody earlier. That kind of lack of downtime definitely contributes I think to, to tiredness. I mean of course we were always moving between these boundaries before there was no geographical boundary between and when you're doing work and when you're at home you've got your smartphone with you wherever you are you're kind of always contactable so those sorts of things haven't changed but I suppose previously there were gaps in the day where you could transition between space so whether it's a kind of actual commute or walking between your lectures and your room in college or walking between the lab and you know a cafe to go and meet friends there were moments in the day where we could kind of process and self-reflect so I suppose it's just looking at you know when we're online: are we being the work person or we being a kind of personal persona that we're projecting? Are we passively in scrolling through Twitter just sort of mindlessly looking at what's been going on or are we kind of seeking active engagement? Do we want to be noticed want to talk to people to promote what we're doing is it about quality time engagements? You know do we want to connect with friends and family and it might be really short but actually that would be the quality or it actually is it about the quantity and it's important for you to be online all day to be monitoring what's going on on social media to be watching the

news all those sorts of things and for you actually it's much more satisfying even if you know that some of that time isn't being spent to best effect.

Slide 5: Agency (05:46-06:55)

So I suppose the point I'm making is that you have agency. That you can engage knowingly in social media and as long as you know that you're going to spend an hour on that and why you are doing it. Are you doing it to find out about what people? Are doing you're doing it to contribute to discussions? Is there something particular you want to put out there and communicate to people about your day? That's absolutely fine but at the same time if you want to make an active choice to disengage that's fine as well and it's giving yourself permission because digital spaces would quite happily consume 24 hours of the day. So at some point we have to call it off and say it's either because you're tired or you're hungry you've got work to do but having a bit of a plan and feeling comfortable and confident about why you're doing that is really important also it's about organizing the digital activity. You know this might be files on your desktop it might be notes of readings, it might be your emails in your inbox, it might be WhatsApp groups you want to mute a few of those because then you're taking control and you're not getting notifications all the time if you use Twitter, for example, you could use TweetDeck and the way I've organized all the different conversations that are coming in.

Slide 6: Digital Detox (06:55-08:41)

And while kind of reaching a digital balance is possibly unreachable at the moment because we have to be online and there's no alternative, I suppose it's worth asking the question whether or not you need to be on digital, and communicating that to family and friends. So you might be able to say in the day I really need to get on with work so you could expect to hear from me in the evening or on an email you could put on your signature you'd say actually these are the hours that I'm working, you know, I probably won't go back to an email in the evening because otherwise it's really easy to fall into this kind of state of continual partial attention where we are constantly checking different websites, checking our phones, we're not really giving full attention to anything we're trying to get on with a little bit of work but then we're easily distracted by you know a link that's in the text and it's kind of different to multitasking because multitasking is about being really effective and really efficient and it's about kind of eating lunch while sorting out paperwork while you know tidying up around the house all at the same time. Whereas continual partial attention the idea, this idea comes from Linda Stone and she wrote about it in 1998, actually long before you know we had some of the technologies that we have available now, but very much that idea that we're not actually doing anything very effectively because we're constantly flitting all over the place. We're really worried about missing something. So sometimes there is a way of just saying to ourselves we need to take a little bit of time away from the technology to do it in a totally structured way, not to go cold turkey and feel that we've just got to you know throw our phone out of the window, but just thinking of why we're doing certain digital actions and why are we engaging with certain sites.

Slide 7: Tips to help you turn off (8:41-12:30)

So we've already talked about a few different ways of turning off but I thought I'd kind of bring them together on this screen here, so there's a few tips and a few tools. The first tip is just to give yourself permission to work away from the screen so this might be literally moving to a different chair to do

some physical reading when you've got a book to hand or you've printed something out. It might be just changing your work environment so it might be getting out to a garden or a balcony if you're lucky enough to have one or even just moving a chair and sitting in front of an open window natural light can really, really change the way you feel about the work that you're doing and as we know it's really important to take breaks from the screen. So there's something called EyeLeo which you can download on your computer and it reminds you to take breaks every few minutes very short ones but also slightly longer breaks as well and I think this idea of kind of time limits is really, really important when working on the screen so much. So set a timer. You might have heard of the Pomodoro Technique which takes its name from the tomato kitchen timer or you could engage with something like our Shut Up and Write sessions that take place on Wednesday afternoons when you work for 50 minutes and take a 10-minute break and then do that a few more times. Lots and lots of evidence to show that when we take regular breaks were more effective at the work that we do we retain more information and particularly when you're revising or trying to remember something from a text to do it to write up an essay or a thesis. And when you're setting these time limits something that might help is to block sites on your phone so that you can kind of carry on working but you block certain sites or you can't perhaps log in to your phone at all. So you've still got it next to you and if there was an emergency it would still let a call through. So there's something like Forest or Offtime and they both work at kind of prioritizing time away from the screen. Of course you could just hide your phone in a drawer in another room. Think about turning off notifications whether that's all together or just say actually during the day I'm going to turn off social notifications and in the evening I'm going to turn off notifications from things like university email that I want to kind of, confirm, confine to a particular work time. And I think is really important to think about our engagement with digital technology not as a given that actually some of these tasks should be on a to-do list. So things like checking email or checking social media or even you know reading online news, this is something that should be in your calendar so you don't find yourself doing it all the time, you can commit time to doing it and then feel confident in taking a bit of time away from that to do some reading or some writing and just to talk a little bit more about email think about filtering your emails. So if you know you're going to get emails from certain Moodle courses they could go into a folder straightaway, if you're going to get them from certain individuals they could go into another folder. Certainly, I get lots of emails notifications from Eventbrite when people book on WolfWorks courses and I like those to go straight to a folder I don't need to see them in my inbox but it's nice to check in with them from time to time. Of course that you can unsubscribe from emails if you're getting a lot of emails when you're constantly deleting just take a moment to unsubscribe and it will save you a lot of energy and angst in cleaning up your inbox. And then finally when you're searching the internet to think about decluttering webpages: so things like Safari and Firefox you can have a browser reader view and this just takes away that kind of busyness around the sides so you're not tempted to click on links. Or if you are reading a journal article why not have some sort of bookmarks folder? I use Pocket, you might have come across that, and then you can save all these links for later and then that can be sort of in in the downtime, you can flick through those in a different context but it stops you taking your attention away from the most important thing that you're doing right now you know whether that's work or socializing.

Slide 8: Practice-mapping template (12:30-14:05)

So if you're not quite sure where to start and which tools you might be able to sacrifice you could look at something like this practice mapping template. And this was some research that was done a couple of years ago looking at what online spaces mean to people how do they feel about them,

what do they have to do, what do they want to do, when do they have choice, and what might they be able to change about some of their digital practices. So as you can see with the triangle you say whether or not use a tool for creating something digitally, for conversation or for consumption and things inside the triangle are stuff that you are doing work time and things outside the triangle are things that you do in your leisure time, in your own time. And then they've got people to put these emoji stickers on to make, to sort of say how they felt or at least how these tools made them feel. And here is the blank template without all the annotation so this is something you could do at home you can draw a quick diagram like this or we've got a sheet that you can download from the WolfWorks web page, list your tools and practices, draw all the emojis and if something makes you feel kind of frustrated and cross when you've been you know on Twitter reading things that might be a moment for you to actively and knowingly disengage from that particular tool to say 'I'm only going to engage with it at this particular time because there's no way I think kind of then work creatively afterwards. I get all het up about it I have to go on and just do a very procedural task after I've read that or it's something I do at the end of the day'. But just kind of again is kind of for the e-to-do list slotting in digital technologies into your daily routine.

Slide 9: Contact details (14:05-14:37)

So, thank you very much for listening. If you've got any particular questions then please do make sure that you get back in touch with us. You can either do that with my email academic-skills@wolfson.cam.ac.uk or you can contact me on Teams.