Building e-resilience: helping individuals and organisations manage technology in a healthy and sustainable way

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Technology has considerable advantages for organisations and individuals by offering greater flexibility in the location and modality of work. Technological developments allow an increasing number of people to work flexibly, reducing the time and financial costs of commuting and make substantial savings on capital costs. Fifty percent of work is now compatible with remote working and 80 to 90 percent of the UK workforce would like to do so at least part of the time. The benefits of technology for the work-life balance of employees has also been recognised by helping employees manage the demands of multiple roles. Nonetheless, there is also evidence that technological acceleration is a driver of work intensification and the potential to work anytime and anywhere can reduce recovery opportunities and threaten the wellbeing and job performance of employees.

There is little guidance available on how to help people engage with technology in a way that protects their work-life balance and their wellbeing. Research findings suggest that most organisations only provide their remote workers with general health and safety guidance, meaning that they are forced to self-manage their ICT use. The potential benefits of technology in enabling flexibility are widely recognised, but many employees struggle to set limits on its use and feel overwhelmed by the volume of email traffic and demands for rapid response. A growing number of studies have highlighted the growing potential for email overload and digital burnout. Moreover, the risks to wellbeing may be exacerbated in particular jobs such as knowledge work and under conditions of insecurity where employees may feel obliged to demonstrate commitment by being always available. The importance of individual difference factors, such as job-involvement, boundary management preferences, and some personality variables, in determining what is ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ engagement with technology has also been highlighted.

The nature of work is rapidly changing and the knowledge, skills and behaviours that help employees meet the challenges of the 21st workplace differ to those required in more ‘traditional’ types of work. Insight into how organisations and individuals can manage technology more effectively is urgently required. The concept of ‘e-resilience’ refers to the
behaviours and environmental interactions that help people engage with ICT in a healthy, efficient and sustainable way. This talk examines the benefits and risks of technology for the wellbeing of employees. It considers the meaning of e-resilience and the characteristics of e-resilient organisations and individuals. Guidance is provided on how to help employees and managers maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of technology use. The need for interventions to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate individuals’ preferences and practices will be considered. The importance of multi-level and systemic interventions tailored to specific working contexts will also be emphasised.