Technodistress and Anger

Have you ever been moving along paying bills on-line, writing a report and your computer dies? Do you have a new cell phone and can't figure out how to put it on vibrate? In moments of aggravation, have you ever imagined heaving your laptop out the window or screaming when yet another urgent e-mail arrives? You are likely in good company.

Technological Stress/Distress in the Workplace
In a frantic blur, fax machines, computers, cell phones, the Internet and e-mail are now practically embedded in the workplace. More sophisticated items appear all the time. According to a April 2002 report by the National Institute on Safety and Health, as noted by Margaret Wehrenberg in an article in Psychotherapy Networker, indicated, "Revolutionary changes in the organization of work have far outpaced our knowledge about the implication of these changes for the quality of working life and for safety and health..."
Technostress refers to the challenges related to our impact with technology. Technostress becomes *technodistress* when the pace and number of demands to use technology exceeds a person's ability to cope with these requirements.

Another factor of technostress is the amount of information that is now at our disposable. It was only just a few years ago that it was pointed out that the information contained in just one New York Sunday Times was more information than an average person in the Middle Ages was exposed to in a lifetime. There is now another term to describe the vast amount of information that is available through the Internet-*datasmog*. This term also refers to the complicated and frequently perplexing processes of storing and retrieving this information.

Finally, an added dimension of our workplace technology is the encroachment of devices-blackberrys, cell phones, laptop computers– on our personal time and our personal space. While technology can offer us greater flexibility, it has also blurred and in some instances eradicated the line between work and home. There may be the person who sends his/her last e-mail about a work project at 11pm before they head off to bed and then catch up on e-mails received through the night before he/she takes a shower at 6:30am. Individuals find it hard to set limits on the demands of the workplace.

Signs of Technodistress
A significant factor for individuals experiencing stress-related symptoms and/or anger control problems may be related to technodistress. Increased work hours exhaust people. Every project is considered a priority. Constant e-mail and phone interruptions result in missed deadlines. Multitasking is the norm. Yet, despite multitasking being an expectation, studies have repeatedly shown that work efficiency and quality decrease markedly with multitasking and job activities take more time to complete.

Anger may be related to feeling overwhelmed or incompetent at work. Isolation and distrust of co-workers and supervisors can occur as relationships become strained or outright hostile. Emotional reactions to criticism and conflict can undermine efforts to avoid impulsiveness particularly when paired with physical stress reactions like increased adrenalin and heart rate. All these combine to create an atmosphere where irritability and frustration can quickly escalate to antagonism and aggression.

Recommendations to Counter Technodistress
Dr. Margaret Wehrenberg in her article on technostress pointed to studies of human energy that suggest a 90-minute cycle within the daily circadian rhythm. This point suggests that people need to renew their physical, mental and emotional energy not just every day, but every 90 minutes

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during the day to perform adequately. Having a two-minute "recovery plan" could be useful to restore one's energy at work. Some suggestions include the following:

⇒ Doing 2 minutes of relaxation at one's work station or on a break. Relaxation techniques such as visualizations or deep breathing.
⇒ Getting up and getting a glass of water.
⇒ Going for a 2-minute walk.
⇒ Doing desk stretches or desk yoga.

Other strategies to minimize the effects of technodistress could involve:

♦ Make clear distinctions between "answering times" and work-production times.
♦ Take control over what's in your control and don't try to control what isn't/
♦ Drink plenty of water and eat healthy snacks throughout the day.
♦ Identify pleasurable activities outside of work. Schedule times for these that are non-negotiable and commit to doing them.

By being aware of how much our emotional and mental well-being are being effected by technology, we can give more focus to efforts to counter its toxic influence.

Technodistress Article References:

Goldsborough, R. "Overcoming Fear of PCs." Reading Today. Vol:19, Issue: 5 April-May 2002, 92.

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Sanderlin, R. "Managing Technostress in the Organizational Environment: Symptoms and Solutions." Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association. Vol: 7, Spring 2004, 26-32.

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FROM OUR FILES:

Hostility and Stress Level Impact on Insulin Resistance

According to findings published in the September/October 2006 issue of Psychosomatic Medicine, individuals with high stress and high hostility have an increased risk for insulin resistance.

Dr. Jianping Zhang of the Cleveland Clinic hypothesized that hostility may interact with stress to affect insulin resistance. To investigate, the teams studied 643 men (average age 60.6 years) who were free of diabetic medication.

The study found that there was a statistical interaction between hostility and stress level in predicting insulin resistance. The conclusions pointed out that people with higher hostility did not always have worse insulin resistance but they did when they were under high levels of stress, especially high levels of chronic stress.

The study noted that cynicism was a particularly vulnerable personality trait that was strongly related to insulin resistance.
Psychosomatic Medicine 2006:68: 718-726

"Air Rage" Blamed on Alcohol and Tobacco

Great Britain's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) looked at more than 3,600 air-rage incidents dating back to 2001. Researchers found that three-quarters of the outbursts involved men, 35% of offenders were in their 30s and about 40% were sparked by smoking ban aboard airlines. Among the tobacco-related incidents, about 80% involved smoking in the toilet. In addition 40% of air-rage incidents also involved alcohol abuse, with many offenders bringing their own alcohol on board the aircraft. Reports of air rage incidents have quadrupled since 2002, the British agency noted, partly because airlines have adopted a "zero tolerance" policy towards such offenders.

"Smoking restrictions and alcohol were common triggers for disruptive behavior, while arguments between passengers often stemmed from domestic disputes, allocation of seats or the effect of a reclining seat on the person behind," the CAA reported.
Join Together News, October 16, 2006 and December 7, 2007