

Managing distractions and multitasking in a fragmented, digital world

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The rapid rise of modern technology has profoundly affected the way we work, changing the way we interact and collaborate with individuals and organisations on a global scale. Over the last year, communications technologies (e.g. Zoom, Teams, Slack) have become a critical aspect of our everyday working lives, allowing us to sustain collaboration in the absence of face-to-face communication. Although the benefits of these technologies are abundant, a number of challenges emerge as individuals must balance increasing demands on their time, switching between different tasks, computer platforms, modes of communication and groups of people quickly and more frequently than ever before. At the same time, individuals must navigate numerous distractions, ranging from digital notifications (e.g. emails, pop-ups, smartphone notifications), to interruptions from other people or events within the surrounding environment (e.g. taking care of a child or family member). In particular, it is often women workers that feel the brunt of such distractions somewhat more than their male counterparts.

Through micro-level investigation, this project seeks to explore the process and impact of managing distractions and multitasking in digital-based work. The research will seek to understand a) *how* individuals balance competing demands in order to ascertain the most effective ways of working and communicating digitally, in terms of collaboration, concentration, and productivity, b) the *implications* of these ways of working on home and work life, and c) *how* individuals' experiences of these challenges differ across demographics (e.g. gender, age, occupation). Gaining an understanding of these areas will help to support both individuals and organisations in fostering effective and inclusive modes of working over the coming years as part of evolving digital corporate responsibilities.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this project will draw upon psychology, human computer interaction and organizational studies research. It will consist of three main components:

- Literature review of existing research and theoretical approaches toward understanding digital-based work, computer-mediated communication, and multitasking, particularly in the context of women workers;
- Mixed methods data collection: a) conducting interviews to capture individual's experiences of digital work and b) performing experiments to explore the effects of distractions and multitasking across different real-life contexts;
- Creating solutions: developing and testing interventions to help aid productivity and time management in digital-based work.

Applicants interested in this project should prepare a research proposal setting out how they would proceed with engaging with this topic, including a brief review of the relevant literature, the research questions they would like to address, the methods they would apply in answering those questions, and the other challenges they would likely face in completing the research.