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IO 4 – Training for Company

Digital Stress Coaches

<English>

Final Version



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1. Introduction

In **the Stress-Less project**, we address the question of how we deal with digital stress in a changed working world, how employees suffer from it and, of course, how we as Digital Stress coaches, team leaders or employers can reduce the negative effects of digital stress.

Due to the growing importance of IT technologies in all work sectors, it has become a necessity to evaluate the challenges and burdens on the work place and develop appropriate tools and training to reduce pressure. Nowadays a work place often asks for more than the “traditional” use of working with one screen, often requiring efficient handling of multiple screens, different technologies or flexible working locations. Henceforth, new occupational realities and challenges are created. Many times, companies and teams are not prepared for these new realities, even though stress factors, digital pressure and challenges could be reduced by applying the appropriate support mechanisms.

The stress factors are classified in 2 different groups:

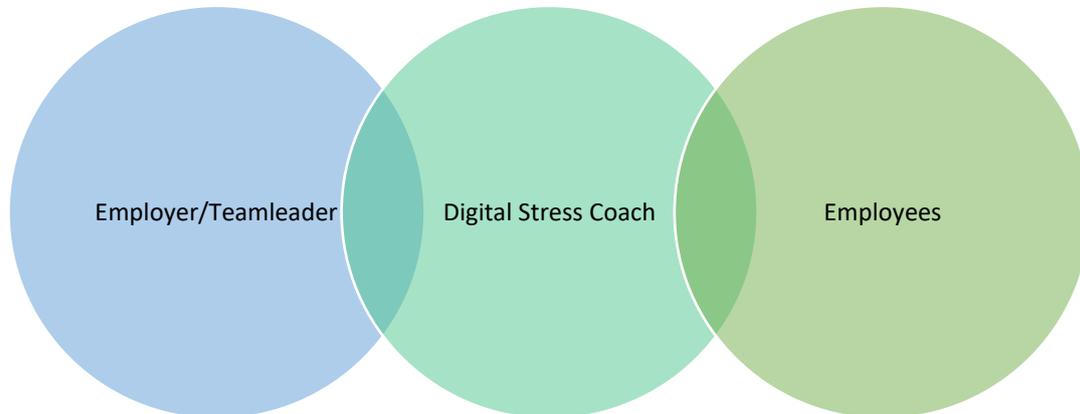
TWO GROUPS OF STRESS FACTORS

1. Stress due to intense, accelerated and inevitable changes in the way of working (which includes work overload, routine and role conflicts)
2. Stress due to digital resources and personal resources (which includes strategies to introduce ICT of characteristics of the user)

Both phenomena may concern people in office at their workplace but also in home office. Home office, often promoted as the perfect solution to combine work and private duties (especially for women), and actually in time of COVID-19 very often the only solution to continue working, may create additional problems that is why we dedicate a specific section to this working form at home.

This specific Training Guide addresses the objective to provide a training to selected persons with personal, technical, methodical and social communicational skills, field competence as well as capacity to act for coaching situations and support solution finding in the area of digital stress in their companies. In this sense they may also be considered as bridge or intermediary in between involved parties at the workplace or as a supporter to bring common interests together to one goal.

VISUALISATION OF THE ROLE OF THE DIGITAL STRESS COACH



They shall be enabled to support individuals or groups– either employees or team-leaders and employers – by providing them support in the solution finding on digital stress reduction. In this sense this training shall provide companies the opportunity to train internal experts to act as points of contact for employees and managers regarding digital stress and to help them cope better with digital stress. Digital stress plays an increasing role in everyday life, especially in the work place as technologies are constantly and very quickly evolving, people have different knowledge and different needs, also different confidence in their abilities to understand and benefit from the technology products and service. For the introduction of digital tools and personal wellbeing of staff working with them people will need more assistance to cope with future requirements.

Thus, the **direct target groups** of this training guide are companies, SME owners, HR managers, in-company VET trainers, mentors, employers’ representatives, who are motivated to take over this role in their organisations or to be hired as external coaches in other organisations.

Indirect target groups and beneficiaries are end-users, employees who will benefit by the support of the direct target groups after going through this training.

1.1 Desired impact of this training – the role of the Digital Stress Coach:

Digital stress coaches will be provided with content that directly addresses the users’ problems and contributes to solution development of these new challenges and scenarios created by the increasing use of IT on the workplace. On the Stress-less Web and App the blended learning solution for Digital Stress will propose several materials on how to better deal as user a with the challenges and threats created by increasing number of digital tools on the workplace or home office. They can serve the trainer as materials for end-user support.



Whilst in this Company Digital Stress Coach Training the coach will find materials to apply in organisations to address directly the employers or team leaders' challenges and problems:

OBJECTIVES OF THE MATERIALS IN THIS GUIDE



How to introduce successfully new tools and reduce demotivation and stress



How to evaluate the digital stress level in order to assess the problematic areas and recommend adequate measures within the organisation

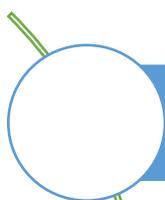


The trainers/coaches will be enabled to provide specific training and help that can bring change as needed

1.2 Desired impact of this training - Benefits for the organisation and its employees

The training or the subsequent implementation of such a DIGITAL STRESS COACHES within the organisations provides the organisation benefits on different levels of the entity. Not only will it bring about positive effects for the organization itself, but it will also add benefits for its employees on an individual level. Consequently, the training and the implementation can contribute to the general corporate health care and well-being strategy. The positive effects are summarized in the following overview:

POSITIVE EFFECTS ON STAFF / EMPLOYEES



Personalized support and guidance in finding their own solutions motivates and encourages in dealing better with digital stress on the workplace



As a result of this, staff/employees will be healthier, less stressed, easier to communicate with, be more productive, suffer less from depression and burn out, take less sick leave



Improved work - life balance and thus more motivation in the job and identification with the organisation



POSITIVE EFFECTS ON THE ORGANISATION /ENTERPRISE ITSELF

Having a Digital Stress Coach in their ranks will be more efficient, effective and competitive.



The combination between the use of the Blended Learning Solution and the personalized approach of the Digital Stress Coach will enhance and make more sustainable the results for both staff and the enterprises in general.



2 The Approach of the Digital Stress Coach training

2.1 Digital Stress – What is it and how we deal with it

What exactly is digital stress? According to the scientists T. S. Ragu-Nathan and R. Riedl "Digital stress is a form of stress caused by the use and ubiquity of digital technologies (Ragu-Nathan, 2008) (Riedl R., 2013). A similar definition is offered by Gimpel, a pioneer in the study of stress in Germany:

“Digital Stress:

- Is a negative consequence of stress factors in dealing with digital technologies and media.
- Can reduce professional performance.
- Often occurs together with a significant increase in health complaints.
- Is a cross-industry and cross-job type phenomenon.
- Is often accompanied by a strong conflict between work and private life.”

(Gimpel, 2021)

It is now known that digital stress can have significant negative consequences for both individuals and organisations. Unfavourable effects have been proven both on an economic level and on the level of society as a whole." (Riedl R. T., 2020) A study by the Upper Austria University of Applied Sciences with the participation of the University of Linz and the University of Bonn, has classified the following consequences as the strongest effects of digital stress. (Riedl R. T., 2020)

Consequences of digital stress for the individual:

Emotional exhaustion

Reduced job satisfaction

Work stress

Lack of user satisfaction

Health problems

Depression

Consequences of digital stress for the organisation:

Climate of innovation is lost

Increased absenteeism

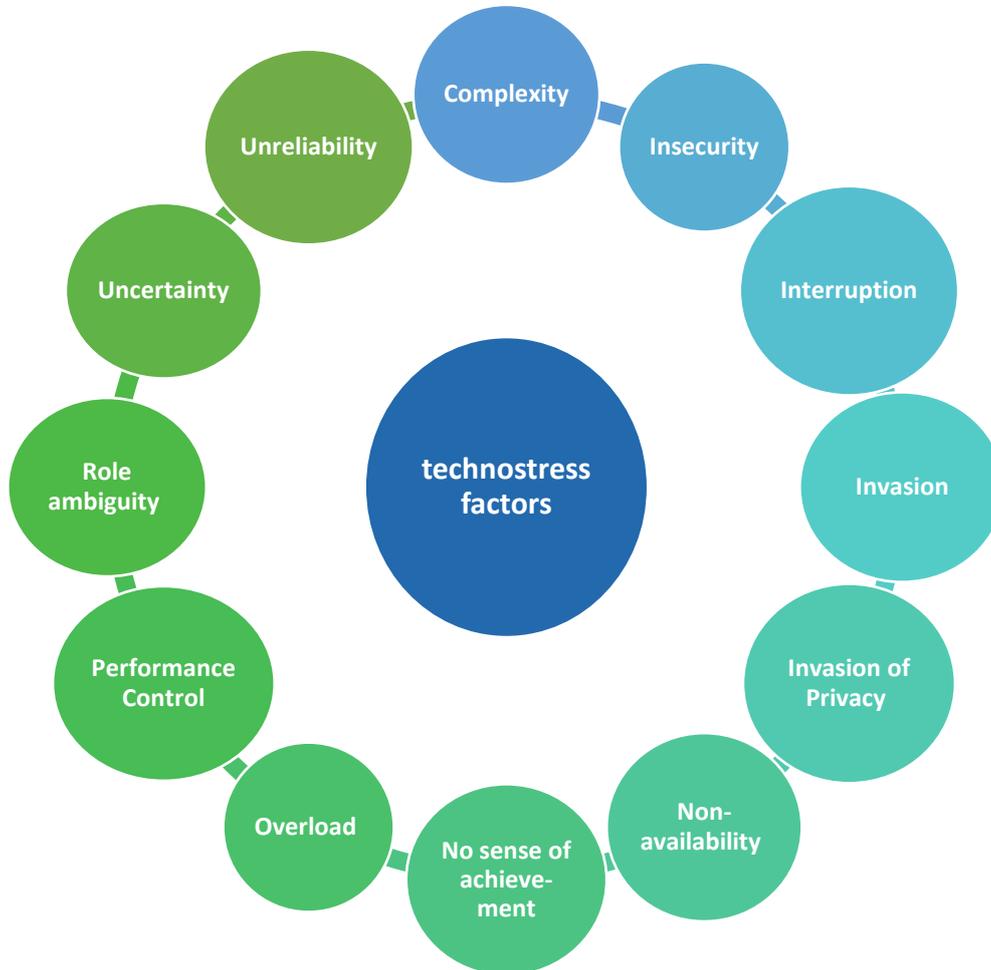
Lower work motivation

Reduced commitment to the organisation

Reduced performance

Lower productivity

VISUALISATION OF THE 12 TECHNOSTRESS FACTORS



Explanation for the aforementioned factors:

Stressor	Explanation
Performance Control & No sense of achievement	The feeling that through the use of digital technologies and media performance monitoring and evaluation are increasing.
Unreliability	The feeling that the digital technologies and media used are unreliable and not up to their task.



Interruption	The feeling that there are increased distractions or interruptions due to the use of digital technologies and media.
Overload	The feeling of having to work more and faster due to the use of digital technologies and media.
Uncertainty	The feeling that one's own skills need to be developed on a regular basis due to constant changes and changes in digital technologies and media.
Non-availability	The feeling that the digital technologies and media they need are not available.
Complexity	The feeling that the high complexity of digital technologies and media exceeds one's own capabilities and that these can only be built up with difficulty.
Role ambiguity	The feeling that more time needs to be invested in solving problems with digital technologies and media than in the actual work activity.
Insecurity	The feeling that job loss is imminent due to automation or lack of competence in using digital technologies and media.
Invasion of Privacy & Invasion	The feeling that the use of digital technologies and media violates the Privacy violated

The most important digital stress factors, identified by the STRESS-LESS consortium, within the implemented in 2021 research are **Techno-Uncertainty**, **Performance Control**, **Techno-Overload**, **Techno-Invasion** and **Interruptions**. Their definitions and more information about them, as well as more theoretical background on digital stress at work and how to prevent

and manage it on personal level can be found in the first part of the Blended Learning Solution for Prevention and Management of Digital Stress – Introduction and Theoretical Background.

2.2 Coping Strategies

Coping with digital stress is similar to coping with any other type of stress, but it also has its specifics. In the Blended Learning Solution for Prevention and Management of Digital Stress, we bring to your attention knowledge and coping strategies that help overcome general work-related stress, but we have adjusted them to target specifically digital stress. We have also included some knowledge and coping strategies that are exclusively targeted at digital stress. The specific, more in-depth knowledge and the coping strategies that we suggest employees use for coping with digital and home office stressors can be found in the Digital Programme for Prevention and Coping with Digital Stress. In order for trainers and learners to be able to make better use of this knowledge and activities we would like to shortly introduce the basics of managing and coping with workplace stress, as well as digital stress.

After recognizing that we experience digital stress in our job we need to recognize and understand the resources we have for coping with this stress. These could be Job resources, which represent any physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that may be functional in achieving work goals, reducing job demands and the associated physiological/psychological costs, or which are stimulating personal growth and development. (Demerouti, 2001) These could also be Personal resources such as the confidence of individuals in their ability to control their environment, as well as optimism and self-efficacy. (Bakker A. B., Job demands–resources theory: taking stock and looking forward. ,2017)

Using these resources employees may apply different coping strategies in order to prevent and overcome digital stress. Coping strategies represent personal resources in overcoming stress.

According to Lazarus & Folkman (Lazarus, 1984) there are two main categories of strategies for coping with stress: Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused. Problem-Focused strategies are aiming at managing or altering the problem, causing the distress. The Emotion-Focused strategies are aimed at regulating our emotional response to the situation. More contemporary scholars argue that this is an artificial division and that the best strategies actually achieve both goals, for example when we make a plan how to solve a problem, we do not only work towards eliminating the cause of distress, but also create the feeling of being in control, which calms our emotional reaction. Within our Blended Learning Solution, we propose both Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused strategies for coping with digital stress.



3 How to develop a Company Stress Management Programme

Due to the increasing digitalisation at work, intensified by the COVID-19 restrictions which subsequently increased the use of digital tools further, the challenges and requirements on the work place have multiplied. Especially in cases when the switch to digital tools is a necessity without being able to plan the transfer with the employees.

These new work forms brought about advantages, as well as dangers and problem areas. Some are listed in the following table:

ADVANTAGES AND PROBLEMATIC AREAS OF NEW FORMS OF WORK

Advantages	New problem areas
The flexibility of work hours enables an easier combination of professional and private life.	Rise of work hours and overworking
Reduction of time usually spend for commuting to/from work	Isolation/Demotivation
Risk reduction of accidents while commuting	Difficulty of separation between professional and private life
Less pollution and strain on the environment due to the reduction of commuting traffic	Consequential damage due to work materials which do not adhere to ergonomic standards
	Interruptions in private and/or professional life
	Loss of information due to lack of connection to the work team



3.1 Main problem areas

A sound summary on the main problematic areas of digital stress can be found in the report of IO1 – National Reports and Surveys. This Guide is based on the findings elaborated and presented in those papers. The overview enables us to identify main problem areas which shall be investigated in more detail during the development of a Company Stress Management Programme:

VISUALITATION OF THE MAIN PROBLEM AREAS

Work hours

- Expansion of work hours (continuation of tasks at home during the weekend or holidays which would have usually been left for the next working day due to the closing of the work day)
- Reoccurring Interruptions

Task management

- Overworking due to work load (quantitative and qualitative):
 - Multi-tasking
 - Accumulation of work interruptions
- Inadequate management of emails, WhatsApp messages, etc. (continuous interruptions, never-ending email conversations, overload of emails, etc.)
- Lack of speed or error-prone platforms and programmes
- Lack of knowledge about IT technologies, proper handling of technical equipment
- Communication:
 - Adequate and sufficient information management between the staff
 - Possibility for further questions / clarifying discussions
 - Feedback
- Team integration:
 - Exchange of experiences
 - Transfer and transmission of information
- Insecurity

Work-Life balance

- Separation between professional and private life, so neither is overtaken by the other

Work materials

- Overburdening due to too many different technical tools (see multi-tasking)
- Visual exertion
- Inadequate posture
- Inadequate materials

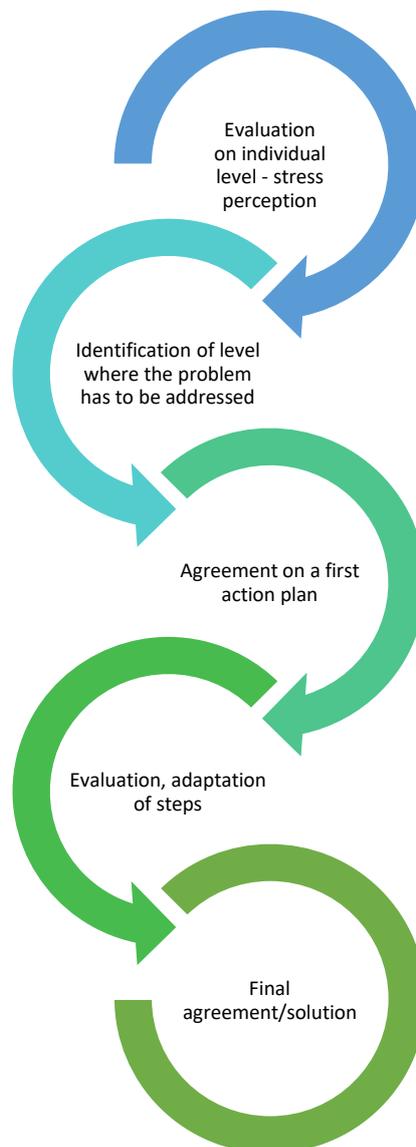
To deal with and avoid these risks and reduce their impact a Company Stress Management Plan in the best way has to consist of two sections:

- The evaluation of the Status Quo
- Possible preventive Measures

3.2 The evaluation of the Status Quo – perception of stress on individual level

For a better understanding we decided to simplify the process of evaluation and reduction of digital stress on the workplace in a 5 steps process which you can see in the visualisation below:

RECOMMENDED PROCESS TO EVALUATE AND REDUCE DIGITAL STRESS



3.2.1 Evaluation grid for digital stress

To allow an evaluation of digital stress in the first step, the Stressless partnership developed this simple tool to analyse if somebody is at risk of suffering from digital stress. After answering the 20 questions in regards to the level of stress, the user will get a green, yellow or red light depending on the level of stress he or she perceives.

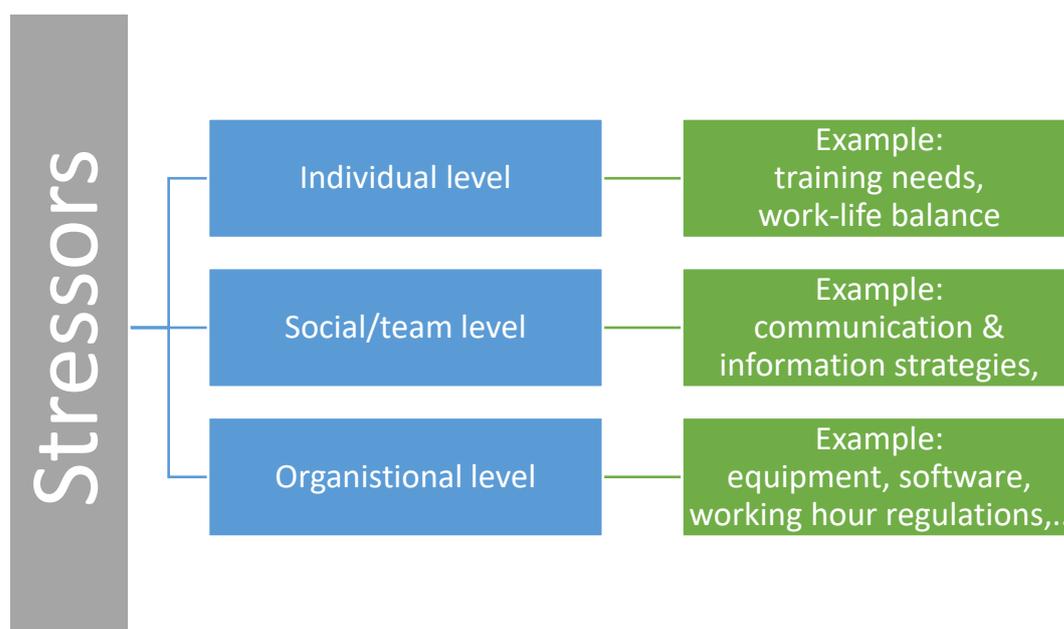
To evaluate your digital stress, please follow the instructions of the tool you find under this [link](#)

3.2.2 Identification of critical areas to allow adequate solution finding

As a second step it is important to identify the area in which the digital stress should be addressed. This step is essential to approach the problem adequately. It does not help if you try to find a solution on your personal level if the problem lies within organisational structures. On the other hand, it happens very often that teams and organisations are trying to compensate individual lack of competences on organisation level. Both will fail, as they are not targeting the stress at the right level, and it will not be satisfactory in the long-term, not for the involved individuals nor for the organisation.

It might also occur that good solutions require actions on different levels at the same time. More about this in the specific recommendations you find at the end of this section. The digital stress coach can assist with legal framework, best practice examples or mediate in teams or with superiors.

VISUALISATION OF THE AREAS WHERE PROBLEMS NEED TO BE ADRESSED



Here you can find further examples of connecting the digital stress to the level on which it has to be addressed and possible solutions:



- Self-responsible measures
Provided to both managers and employees to better cope with stress caused by digitalisation on a personal level:
 - E.g. learning strategies to cope better with digital stress: from relaxation methods to mindfulness methods to meditation etc. (more information on this part can be found in [the training platform](#))
 - Additional training for specific software, tools or general IT training
 - Define disconnected working times
 - Assure that you are disconnected from work in your leisure time
- Decisions that employees can take into their own hands/in teams
 - Demanding regular meetings to assure information flow
 - To agree on rules for information flow, email communication, which tools to use for which information; avoid information overflow
 - Define clear communication rules within the team
 - Taking care for regular exchange within the team
- Operational decisions, guidelines and resolutions
 - Clear agreements with superiors on regulations for digital work in office and home office
 - Demanding regular meetings with superiors
 - Financial support for training needed
 - Adequate hardware, software and tools

There is also a fourth level which is not part of the training, but the Digital Stress Coach should be informed on this (more information and links can be found in the further reading part under point 5 of this Guide).

- Policy decisions, guidelines and resolutions
 - Legal regulations
 - General labour law

3.2.3 Solution Agreement

For sustainable solutions it is essential that solutions are sought with all parties who are involved in the problem. As Digital Stress Coach it is not required and recommended that you present the solution to all problems, your role is more the one of a guide who points at critical areas and assists in finding a solution. To find this final solution which is accepted and pursued by all involved parties in the long-term, it is important that you start the negotiation and solution finding process with the agreement on a first action plan. There needs to be negotiations on how to reduce negative consequences and overcome obstacles involving the key players on the right level as we learned in 3.1.2.



Whichever model of action plan you and/or your clients decide on, it shall first define the problem that should be addressed, define the action to be carried out, identify the responsible person for action and the period and deadline for action. Otherwise, it cannot be evaluated and if needed be adjusted in a further step.

MODEL OF AN ACTION PLAN

Action plan				
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Clear definition of the problem to be addressed				
Level on which a solution has to be developed				
Involved parties				
Concrete action to be carried out				
By whom?				
Till when?				

3.2.4 Follow Up

The last two steps may be summarized under the title of follow up. They are very essential to adjust solutions, as first ideas and intentions might not always be the best. Nevertheless, they are important to kick off a solution process and give a direction. Attentive involved parties might – during the process – identify even more adequate solutions, which might be adaptations or in some cases something totally different.

In any case it is important to evaluate with all involved parties if the goals have been reached, if there are further necessary changes or if another solution is needed. Only at the end if all agree and are satisfied the solution can be considered as final and effective.

To support you and your clients in the solution finding process please find underneath some advice in regards to possible solution finding and processes deriving from our practical experience.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE DIGITAL STRESS LEVEL EVALUATION TOOL

In general, the questions may be structured into 4 main topics. Those may be related to specific phenomena and underlying problems. In the following table you can find a short summary. More information is available in IO1 – National Reports and Surveys.

Scepticism

Invasion - defines the feeling that boundaries between work and private life are increasingly dissolving. With the help of individual tips, the blurred boundaries between work and private life (invasion) can be reduced, e.g. by separating work and private devices, consciously switching off work devices at home, consciously not answering work-related messages during holidays and leisure time.

Performance - defines the feeling of being monitored using digital technologies. Transparent communication from the management is particularly necessary to explain whether and to what extent the company's own technologies are used for monitoring. Since performance only addresses the feeling of being monitored, it may mean that the company does not even use this data but employees feel that they are being tracked. Nevertheless, this feeling can have a negative impact on the perception of stress.

Fatigue/Overload

Addresses the feeling that workload increases due to the use of digital technologies. Due to simplified and faster communication channels and the constant updating of data and news, employees are exposed to continuous changes and new work assignments. Concerning overload, methods on structuring one's own work are particularly helpful, e.g., employees and managers can divide their tasks into four fields according to importance and time (deadline, duration) and thus determine which work they should focus on first. With the help of such techniques the perception of stress can be reduced because deadlines and prioritized tasks are completed sooner.

Fear/Uncertainty

Uncertainty - deals with the feeling that skills have to be developed regularly due to frequent digital changes. Knowing the existence of the stressor and possible tips on the individual level are not sufficient in the long-term. For these reasons, there is a need to help managers and employees to learn and develop their skills in technologies they depend on or which are crucial for their work. ICT training and contact persons for software problems are more effective so that employees and managers can handle their tasks with the technological tools provided.

Inefficiency/Challenges

Interruption - deals with the feeling of frequent interruptions during work. With regard to interruptions, it helps to have fixed times when you are not available to anyone and can work undisturbed. Deactivating push notifications and muting for a few hours also leads to a work environment in which one can work without interruptions from digital technologies.

To improve the situation and find appropriate solutions it might always be helpful to reflect on the specific questions and the answers where we felt stressed.

As mentioned in the Module 2 Agency and Trust of [IO3 – the blended learning solution for digital stress](#), it might help to start with the reflection of:

- What I can decide for myself, what is my field of action
- What I can do, no matter of external circumstances
- What I can expect from others, understand how to make others contribute
- Be proactive, take responsibility
- Trust more (Other people deserve more trust than you know)
- Performance control – am I actually being monitored or am I struggling with the feeling that I might be controlled, large discrepancy between feeling and reality, information from employees and employers shifts from uniformed trust to informed trust.
-

More specifically feedback to the respective questions:

I question the usefulness of digital technologies in my work

First step needs to be to identify what is the real problem behind this doubt. May be

For this specific job digital technologies are really not relevant Then there is no problem of stress

It might be that the user needs more time to fulfil the task with digital tools, because he/she lacks training with specific tools Problem needs to be addressed on individual level

The tools on the workplace are not used in an adequate way or the tools themselves are not efficient The problem is a structural one and needs to be handled either with the team or superiors, depending on the specific problem.

The monitoring of my work performance is increasing and this violates my privacy

Try to define the real problem (how is your work performance monitored, which situations exactly violate the privacy?)



Is the problem that more privacy would be appreciated or is there a violation that can be claimed by law?

In case that law is broken this problem has to be addressed with superiors; it might be advisable to seek help with employees' representatives like trade unions etc.

In case that it is not a violation of law, it might help to reflect on specific situations and think about ways on how to assure more privacy, not to use digital means of the organisations for private conversations; not to take business tools with you, when you are not working...e.g.,

What can be done to protect my privacy better?
If possible, solutions are identified and they affect the cooperation with others, this needs to be discussed in teams and with superiors.

The digital technologies I use are unreliable or unsuitable for my work

Why is the situation perceived as such?

Are the wrong tools being used? Are there better tools on the market which might be affordable?

This has to be addressed with superiors if better tools can be identified. For sure this is also a matter of cost and organisational decisions, but sometimes superiors are not even aware of specific problems, especially if they themselves are not working with the tools. In some cases, feedback might be even appreciated to improve.

Are the tools themselves the problem?

Are there bugs which have to be corrected then they need to contact the tool providers or talk to superiors to change to other more useful tools, on the long-term demotivation costs more than seeking for a better solution

Is the user the problem? Are they not able to use the tools adequately?

Training on individual or team level might help?

I have the impression digital technology could be used more efficiently

As this question is quite general, it has to be asked by whom?

By myself

Further training could improve the situation

By the team or clients

Maybe a team training or measures in client support are necessary, in the long run this might save time and avoid frustration



Structural problems in the use of digital technology

Have to be checked with superiors, maybe the tools could be used more efficiently

The digital technologies required for my work are not available

The background for this statement needs to be clarified.

The technologies are not relevant

Then there is no problem

They are not affordable

This is something which has to be clarified by the management

Does it mean they are not available in the organisation and not used?

Maybe it could be an idea for future development of the organisation and increase of efficiency? In [IO3 – the blended learning solution for digital stress](#) Module 4 Business Communication in Digital Environments, you can find more information in regards to this topic.

Working with digital technologies makes me tired, I feel exhausted and have no energy for any further private and social activities

In this situation it is important to investigate your work-life balance to improve the situation. Lots of information in regards to this topic can be found in [IO3 – the blended learning solution for digital stress](#) Module 6 Healthy Workstyle in the Digital Workplace and Module 8 Work-life Balance in the Digital Era.

Due to the use of digital technologies, I experience frequent interruptions during my work

In this case it is recommendable to reflect on our use of digital tools and behaviour on the workplace.

It might be recommendable to do more monotasking, as multitasking is toxic and we should focus on prioritising tasks. More recommendations in [IO3 – the blended learning solution for digital stress](#) Module 3 Single-task Strategy.

Due to the use of digital technologies, my workload increases

Here the specific problem needs to be identified to find an appropriate solution. Is the problem within the tools which need time, or is it the way that they are handled? Some inspiration might be found in [IO3 – the blended learning solution for digital stress](#) – Module 3 Single-task Strategy, but also in Module 4 Business Communication in Digital Environments.

Due to the use of digital technologies, my boundaries between work and private life are increasingly dissolving



In this case we recommend an analysis of the overlapping areas and how a balance between both might be created. We recommend [IO3 – the blended learning solution for digital stress](#) – Module 8 Work–life Balance in the Digital Era.

I do not have enough time for private obligations

This leans in the same direction as the question before but it has to be clarified if the work is overdemanding so that there is no time left for private obligations or due to private obligations being tense which makes it impossible to fulfil professional tasks. Before ending up in a burnout it might be recommendable to investigate options of time outs, reducing hours or sabbaticals in your organisation/country.

The work with digital technologies makes me feel uncomfortable, I am afraid to use digital technologies wrong and thereby destroy valuable information

Additional training opportunities could be investigated which might help to reduce the fear of digital devices. Also, it might help to learn what could be the worst-case scenario and how data could be restored. Such a backup might help to reduce panic.

I feel a need to educate myself in order to be able to use digital technologies in my workplace

Additional training opportunities might be of help, maybe there are even others in the workplace who have the same problem, so that solutions could be sought together?

The high complexity of digital technologies exceeds my abilities

Digital tools are getting more and more complex, additionally they are not always working properly... If they totally exceed the abilities and the user considers him/herself to be better in other tasks, reorientation for a less demanding job in digital skills might be more satisfactory in the long-term, or if training can help the handling of the tools in a better way, this might be solution.

I feel my work becomes less and less relevant to the company with the usage of digital technologies

Instead of being paralysed by the fear of losing the job, it might help to keep the eyes open for alternative opportunities. Fear is always a bad consultant. Maybe the change does not mean that the job will be irrelevant, maybe one's tasks will just change over time. Maybe there are opportunities in other departments or something completely different could be an opportunity.

Digital Tools were introduced without sufficient explanation, I did not receive sufficient training to use digital technologies in my job

This seems to be a concrete example for an inefficient introduction of tools. More in this regard can be found in the section 2.2. of this guide.

I find it difficult to work with digital technologies and there are many applications I can't use efficiently



Training opportunities, internal staff training or help from colleagues should be evaluated. It might be also good to keep your own digital tool training diary to monitor your progress and not feeling constantly exposed to something new.

Due to the use of digital technologies, my work progress is hardly perceivable

It might help to re-structure the working day in regards to periods of online availability and periods where other work needs to be done.

I have to invest more time in solving problems with digital technologies than in my normal work activity

It might be that the choice of tools has to be adapted if they are not suitable for the work that is being done. Furthermore, it could be influenced by not having the proper equipment or training to handle the tools correctly. If the tools are not working properly from a technical standpoint it has to be discussed with management and/or the technical support to find solutions.

I lack information, adequate internal/external communication channels are not established

This is a question of internal/external communication structures and should be clarified in an adequate way with the team and superiors.

In case of technical difficulties, I do not know whom to contact.

Support structures have to be clarified with superiors.

3.3 Digital Tool Introduction Checklist/Plan

The other important field of action for a Digital Stress Coach might be the one in regards to stress prevention. Managers have a crucial role and with this also responsibility in digital stress management. The way as tools / materials are introduced, available or not available this determines the level of stress in the execution for the end-user/employee.

The same we can say in regards to the organisation of work flows, communication processes and solution finding procedures. These organisational structures have severe influence on the working climate and efficiency, in digital work environments even more.

Therefore, before introducing new tasks at this point generally questions like the following should be raised:

QUESTIONS WHICH SHOULD BE RAISED

How/through which measures can stress be reduced?

Which stress prevention measures are there already?



The same questions we may raise in case we observe problems in our teams. From best practice recommendations we compiled the following check lists for employers and organisations to reduce digital stress at the workplace. As you can see on the titles the lists are for different purposes and you are free to use them depending on the needs you detected or the topics you aim to address during your interventions.

OVERVIEW ON AVAILABLE CHECKLISTS





CHECKLIST 1	
Recommendations for the digital work organization in general	
Task	ok
Descriptions/manuals/processes	
Working instructions are available and up to date to actual recommendations of public authorities	
General and specific tasks are formulated and communicated in a clear way: Each employee knows his/her tasks and responsibilities (in general as a job description, but also tasks of the week/month)	
Procedures are clear to all team members	
The amount of work is equally shared in between all employees (no one is constantly overloaded or waiting for others)	
Deadlines and objectives are reasonable and announced early enough, so that the employee can organize the work, adapt to circumstances and prioritize tasks.	
Materials	
Each employee has the technical equipment to fulfil own tasks for his own or shared with colleagues.	
Office equipment and materials which meet the necessary standards is available	
Materials correspond with the task which has to be fulfilled	
Supporting aids which help improve the posture in front of the computer	
Information on a healthy workplace (light, postures, prevention measures to avoid mental tiredness, stress management, physical exercises, healthy food) are provided by the organization.	
Communication	
Communication channels and rules for individual or group information exchange are clearly stated (email, social media, video conferences, phone,...)	
Working time	
Possibility to decide on breaks, allocation of work hours and requirements	
Flexibility	



CHECKLIST 2	
Introduction of new digital tools or programmes	
Task	ok
Descriptions/Manuals/processes	
Tasks are formulated and communicated in a clear way (responsibilities, processes, deadlines)	
New procedures are explained and introduced in a clear way to all involved parties	
Possible conflicts of responsibility due to contradicting/overlapping tasks are monitored	
Material	
Each employee has the technical equipment to fulfil own tasks	
Office equipment and work materials adhere to standards and the new work tasks	
Training	
Training on how to handle digital support tools and programmes in general	
Training on specific programmes/software	
Training on specific technical equipment	



CHECKLIST 3

Recommendations for the information of and communication with the employees

Task ok

Information

Employees are informed about changes in the organization, ask them their opinion

Employees are informed about processes in the work and how this affects the workflow

Employees are informed on the plan and calendar, contacts, chats, videoconferences, ...

Information on a healthy workplace (light, postures, prevention measures to avoid mental tiredness, stress management, physical exercises, healthy food) are provided by the organization.

Employees are informed on the overall situation of the enterprise, new hours, shifts, assistance numbers, services provided, etc.

They are informed on their contractual situation

Communication

Establish a timeframe of availability for employer and employees and keep in mind that working digitally does not mean to be available for 24 hours

Be available for problem resolution and doubts for employees

Answer with clearness and honesty to any doubt that employees may have

Propose a contact system for the workers so that they can keep easy contact to each other; inform on their personal and professional situation. Motivate them so that they do not feel alone.

Avoid an overflow of information

Provide ongoing feedback and honour the work done, especially in such difficult circumstances.



CHECKLIST 4	
Recommendations mutual trust/support	
Task	ok
Performance of the superior	
My supervisor(s) recognizes my development opportunities.	
My supervisor(s) uses his/her possibilities to help me with my work problems.	
My supervisor(s) would help me out of a predicament at their expense.	
I understand the professional problems and needs of my employee(s).	
I recognize the development opportunities of my employees.	
I use my possibilities to help my employees with their work problems.	
I would help my employees out of an awkward situation at my own expense.	
Performance of the employee	
I have enough confidence in my supervisor(s) to defend his/her decisions.	
I know how my supervisor(s) views me in general.	
My employees have enough confidence in me to defend my decisions.	
My employees know what I think of them in general.	



CHECKLIST 5	
Recommendations for the psychosocial health of employees in times of confinement	
Task	ok
Provision of recommendations for the prevention and problem solution, so that recommended measures and information from official and reliable sources are available	
Information that the situation may have an emotional impact, employees know this and are asked to seek help in case of problems.	
Anxiety and stress are normal reactions which may manifest in multiple forms like ongoing reflections, pessimism, worry, constant irritation, bad humor, anxiety, problems of concentration. Each person lives this with a different intensity. Mental health is actively promoted in the organization.	
Information on psychological services are available if needed.	
Communication channels for employees who face problems under these circumstances are communicated	
Plan the work, the schedule and procedures	
Focus on what can be done	
Be positive. Staying at home can help to save lives. Be aware of the risks if you do not work from home. Consider this isolation as useful.	
Stay active, busy...	
Avoid over information. Staying always connected can create unnecessary risks and anxiety. Check only reliable sources of information.	
Check information you share	
Identify thoughts which you do not like. If you think on bad things feeling uncomfortable increases.	
If you feel overloaded, ask for help or professional consults	
Keep contact with the new technologies, social contact is the best form to reduce fear and depression, loneliness and boredom.	
Be aware of the emotions and target your worries with information. Accept what you feel, it is quite normal for such a situation to have different emotions	
Help others, if possible, it feels more comfortable to be part of a team and to develop solutions.	
Do physical exercises. Do connect and use practical tools to relay. Do things you normally enjoy.	
Relax with breathing techniques	



3.4 Special section: Home office

Due to the restrictions and recommendations by the government and health authorities in the recent years, companies and organisations transformed their services, products and staff to be accessible via distance working or home office. For many, this situation was new and there was insufficient time to prepare and plan this transformation. Over different time frames, problems became apparent and additional effort had to be made to organize work appropriately.

Apparent problems and limits of distance and home office are:

- Not enough or adequate working place at home
- Need to share devices/room with others
- Demanding family situation with depending family members (children, elderly people)
- Social isolation of the employee and confinement
- Uncertainty and labour insecurities

MEASURES FOR PEOPLE WORKING IN HOME OFFICE

The Organización Internacional del Trabajo has developed a practical Guide “Practical Guide on Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond” (2020), that provide practical recommendations for effective telework, to support policymakers in updating existing policies, and to provide a flexible framework through which both private enterprises and public sector bodies can develop or update their own telework policies and practices. According to the Guide many companies have established specific working groups, steering groups, or welfare working groups, which include representatives from different departments and sectors of the organisation. These working groups are tasked with updating existing policy documents and identifying information and skills gaps. In addition, they are required to put in place training, information provision and communication measures to ensure the participation and mental health of their team members during a period of telework. These measures shall include:

- Training on occupational safety, digital rights, psychosocial, ergonomic and organizational risks
- Digital communication strategies regarding accessibility, deadlines, employer and employees’ expectations
- Support services for employees with fears and concerns
- ensure that employees are technically equipped to carry out their work and provide training on the equipment used.
- Promoting the separation of professional and private commitments through guaranteeing the right to disconnection and to a certain autonomy in the distribution of working time.



- Luz Rodríguez Fernández (2020) added on the duty side, that employees must comply with the instructions of the employer on data protection and information security, use correctly and keep the digital devices made available by the employer, and submit to any checks on their work activity that may be foreseen, including those carried out by telematic means.

CHECKLIST	
Home office general	
Task	ok
Descriptions/Manuals/processes	
Keep your staff/and also other team members informed about processes in the work and how this affects the workflow (this is not only a task for superiors, but also team internally)	
Keep your staff/and also other team members informed on the plan and calendar, contacts, chats, videoconferences, ...so that they feel included in the whole team	
Materials	
Information on a healthy workplace (light, postures, prevention measures to avoid mental tiredness, stress management, physical exercises, healthy food) are provided by the organization.	
Communication	
Establish a timeframe of availability for employer and employees and keep in mind that working from home does not mean to be available for 24 hours	
Answer with clearness and honesty to any doubt that employees may have	
Be available for problem resolution and doubts for employees at certain hours.	
Propose a contact system for all staff members so that they can keep easy contact to each other; exchange on their tasks and cooperate in teamwork	
Inform yourself on the personal and professional situation of all your employees and colleagues. Keep them connected to the team, so that they do not feel alone, because isolation is a big killer of motivation	
Provide ongoing feedback and honour the work done, especially when working on distance	
Avoid an overflow of information	
Keep all your staff informed on the overall situation of the organization, changes, developments, etc.	
Legal	
Keep employees and yourself informed on legal aspects, new regulations etc.	



4 Overall training structure

The main training will be conducted on the implementation of

- ❖ The evaluation grid for digital stress
- ❖ Related identification of problems and adequate solution finding
- ❖ The digital tool introduction plan

After this training in Chapter 4 participants can find additional information and further readings. Depending on their profile and additional skills they can choose chapters they consider useful.

For the training being practical and effective participants will be encouraged to work on personal examples from specific workplaces and organisations.



OVERVIEW OVER THE 5 LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Analysis of individual stress level

- Know the Stress-less tools and their application
- Practice use of the stress evaluation grid
- Practice use of the grid with a partner

2. Development of solution approaches with employees

- Group work with 4 participants
- Roles: one coach, one employee with stress problems and two observers
- Activity: discussion of solutions for digital stress and development of an action plan

3. Development of solutions in the organization

- Group work with 4 participants
- Change of the roles from the previous step
- After the discussion the observers give feedback to the developed solution

4. Evaluation of implemented solutions

- To what extent have the recommendations been implemented
- What are the advantages or disadvantages of implementing these recommendations?
- Short reflection and discussion of the personal experience

5. Analysis of framework conditions for the home office

- Division into small groups
- Research of regulations for home office work and presentation of the findings
- Short feedback round at the end



4.1 Learning Activities

Activity Nr. 1

Activity Name	Explore your personal digital stress level
Activity Type	Tool 2.1.1 application
Duration	20 min
Nr. of participants	individual

Description

Step 1: To be able to work as a digital stress coach and counsel others it is important to know the tools and how to apply them.

Step 2: Best to get to know the digital stress evaluation grid is to use and fill it yourself.

Step 3: To do so form couples and do an interview on the grid with your partner.

Additional Remarks You can also compare if the observations you got during the interview correspond with the remarks you find in this guide in regards to the questions of the grid. They should be an inspiration to find an adequate solution.

In case that you nor your partner does not have any digital stress do role play on a possible user (please define the problem very clear for yourself before starting the play)

Online	possible
Implementation	
Sources	Tool 2.1.1

Activity Nr. 2

Activity Name	Develop possible solutions with the employee
Activity Type	Discussion
Duration	70 min



Nr. of participants Group work in 4

Description

Step 1: Form groups of 4 participants each, in each group there is one coach (which should not be the one who did the grid before), one employee with digital stress problems and two observers;

Step 2: The coach and the employee shall discuss possible solutions for the digital stress problem; they have to identify the critical area and develop an action plan (use the template provided) the observers share their feedback after the other two agreed on a solution;

Step 3: After the feedback of the observers switch the roles

Step 4: When all groups did the whole cycle, share the experiences in the plenum.

Additional Remarks After the activity each participant should have been 1x employee, 1 x coach and 2 x observer

Online possible

Implementation

Sources You can use the action plan template provided in this guide or go for any other action plan you like. Discuss your choice with the other participants and check if all relevant information can be found in the template used.

Activity Nr. 3

Activity Name Negotiate with colleagues or superiors – seek solutions on team or organisational level

Activity Type Mediation Role Play

Duration 15 min preparation for all
15 min role play each group – max 1 hour

Nr. of participants Group work in 4 (3-4 groups in total)

Description



Step 1: Form groups of 4 participants each, in each group there is one coach (which should not be the one who did the grid before), one employee with digital stress problems and two observers;

Step 2: The coach and the employee shall discuss possible solutions for the digital stress problem; the observers share their feedback after the other two agreed on a solution;

Step 3: After the feedback of the observers switch the roles

Additional Remarks After the activity each participant should have been 1x employee, 1 x coach and 2 x observer

Online possible

Implementation

Sources You can use the action plan template provided in this guide or go for any other action plan you like. Discuss your choice with the other participants and check if all relevant information can be found in the template used.

Activity Nr. 4

Activity Name Evaluate the Checklists

Activity Type Reflection and exchange in the plenum

Duration 5 min reflection and 20 min in the plenum

Nr. of participants Whole group

Description

Step 1: Reflect how far these recommendations have been introduced in your actual or prior work place,

- What recommendations have been implemented successfully in your workplace
- what are the positive or negative effects of following such recommendations?
- Do you have any additional advice which you consider useful and are not listed?



Step 2: After a short reflection of 5 min on personal experiences, discuss different approaches in the plenum.

Additional Remarks This discussion will provide more insight to different working procedures, problems existing and solution finding.
If you find additional points add them to the checklists.

Online possible

Implementation

Sources Checklists under 2.2 of this guide

Activity Nr. 5

Activity Name Home office regulations

Activity Type Investigation groups

Duration 50 min

Nr. of participants Groups to max. 5 participants each

Description

Step 1: Split the group into working teams of max. 5 participants each.

Step 2: Investigate the main important regulations in regards to home office in your country. Write a flipchart to present to the others. Half of the working groups should imagine that the audience are employers and they have to inform them on all important points they have to know to introduce home office in their organisations. The other half of the working groups should imagine that their audience are employees who have to get familiar with these regulations.

Step 3: There is 20 minutes preparation time and then 5 minutes for each group. At the end do a quick feedback round on the activity.

Additional Remarks -

Online possible

Implementation

Sources National regulations mentioned in point 5 of this training



5 Additional skills required to work as a Digital Stress Coach

To be able to address the solution-finding on different levels, specific skills are required. As possible candidates may have different competences already due to their profile and prior training, this section will propose possible activities to improve these skills and recommend further reading.

For each skill which might be needed, we propose a link for training activities and/or further literature organised in the structure below (following the context in which they have to be applied). Maybe they motivate you to further explore the topic on the internet.

On personal level:

- [Interview Techniques](#)
- [Basic coaching Methods](#)
- [Analysing skills to identify the individual need of the person, level of problem and solution finding possibilities](#)

On team level:

- [Knowledge on teams and how to introduce changes in teams](#)
- [Identify specific team culture of the organisation](#)
- [Involving key players, dealing with challenges and withdrawals](#)

On organisational level:

- [Identify company structure and change management](#)
- [Intermediator skills and negotiation challenges](#)



6 Further reading

6.1 National legislation and European legislation

Underneath you find the links and respective resources to inform yourself on the specific topics. Links were provided per partner country if available in English otherwise in partner language, so that the reader can access relevant information of the country and identify reliable resources on these topics (with help of a translation programme if not available in English).

- **WORKPLACE EVALUATION**

AUSTRIA

BULGARIA

GERMANY

[SPAIN](#)

- **REQUIREMENTS FOR IT WORKPLACES**

AUSTRIA

BULGARIA

GERMANY

[SPAIN](#)

- **HOME OFFICE**

[AUSTRIA](#)

[BULGARIA](#)

[GERMANY](#)

[SPAIN](#)

- **MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OF WORKING CONDITIONS**

AUSTRIA

[BULGARIA](#)

[GERMANY](#)

[SPAIN](#)

- **LIMITATIONS AND RESTRICTIONS AFFECTING THE WORK AND HEALTH ON THE WORK PLACE**

AUSTRIA

[BULGARIA](#)

[GERMANY](#)

[SPAIN](#)

- **PREVENTATIVE MEASURES RECOMMENDED**

AUSTRIA

[BULGARIA](#)

GERMANY

[SPAIN](#)



6.2 European Agency for Security and Health on the workplace

The European Agency for Security and Health on the workplace offers a collection of tools from different countries ([tools available](#))