Fear of missing out (FoMO) is a key risk factor for employee mental health and, along with information overload, may increase burnout, according to new research.
Researchers from the University of Nottingham's Schools of Psychology and Medicine analyzed survey data from 142 employees to investigate the "dark side" of digital working and found that employees who are worried about missing out on information and are overloaded by it are more likely to suffer stress and burnout.

The results have been published today in SAGE Open.

"The digital workplace is now recognized as a key strategic asset in organizations that enables worker productivity and flexibility in the context of hybrid working. However, the potential downsides in terms of worker well-being also need to be considered, especially given the proliferation of digital communication channels and tools since COVID," says Elizabeth Marsh, Ph.D. student from the School of Psychology.

This new study connects to previous work that revealed that employees who are more mindful in the digital workplace are better protected against stress, anxiety and overload.

In this research, FoMO is defined as anxiety about missing out on both important information and updates, as well as opportunities for relationships and interactions. FoMO has long been a term used in relation to social media, and now this new research shows it is an effect that is being felt in the workplace.

The participants in the study were surveyed about their experiences of the dark side effects of the digital workplace, which were identified as; stress, overload, anxiety and fear of missing out and how these affected their well-being.

The results showed that among the dark side effects, those relating to information—both feeling overloaded by it and fearing missing out on
it—proved particularly detrimental for well-being both directly and by elevating overall stress related to digital working.

Elizabeth adds, "The glut of information flowing through channels such as email, intranets or collaboration tools can lead workers to worry about missing out on it as well as succumbing to overload as they strive to keep up. To help people cope with information overwhelm, serious and sustained attention should be given to both optimizing information management and supporting information literacy."

The research makes some practical suggestions for employers that include investing in practices to optimize the amount and flow of information to employees. The findings could also be used by HR departments to consider policy and training options that would support the end-users of the digital workplace to better access, manage and consume information in a way that is conducive to well-being as well as productivity.

"Consideration of the digital workplace in work and job design is essential to not only employee productivity but also well-being in modern organizations. Where this is lacking, elevated stress and burnout as well as poorer mental health may result. Our findings indicate the information ecosystem as an important area for attention both inside organizations and among the research community," says Professor Alexa Spence, School of Psychology.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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