How to Manage Technology to Support the Health and Well-Being of Faculty and Students

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Personal & professional journey

- Associate Professor, DE, Athabasca University
- Digital wellness researcher & practitioner
- Mindfulness practitioner
- Contemplative pedagogy
- Neuroscience

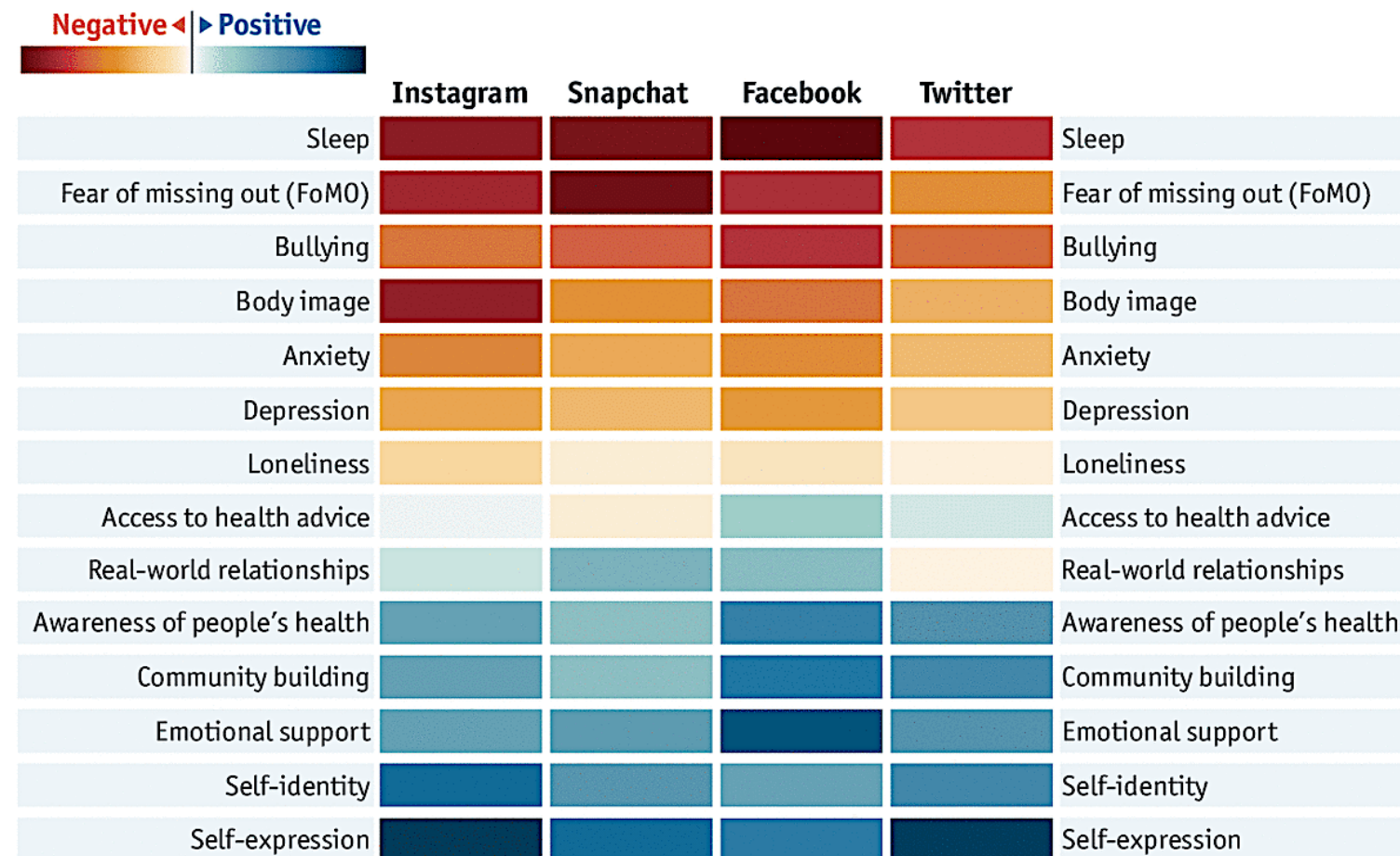# Evidence-based perspective

- Larger context
- Digital learning context
- Impact of technology
- Digital wellness
- Interdisciplinary lens
- Mindfulness practices
- Strategies for digital wellness

Digital context

Like, obsessed

Britain, social media users, 14- to 24-years-old, reported impact on well-being, 2017

Negative ◀ | ▶ Positive

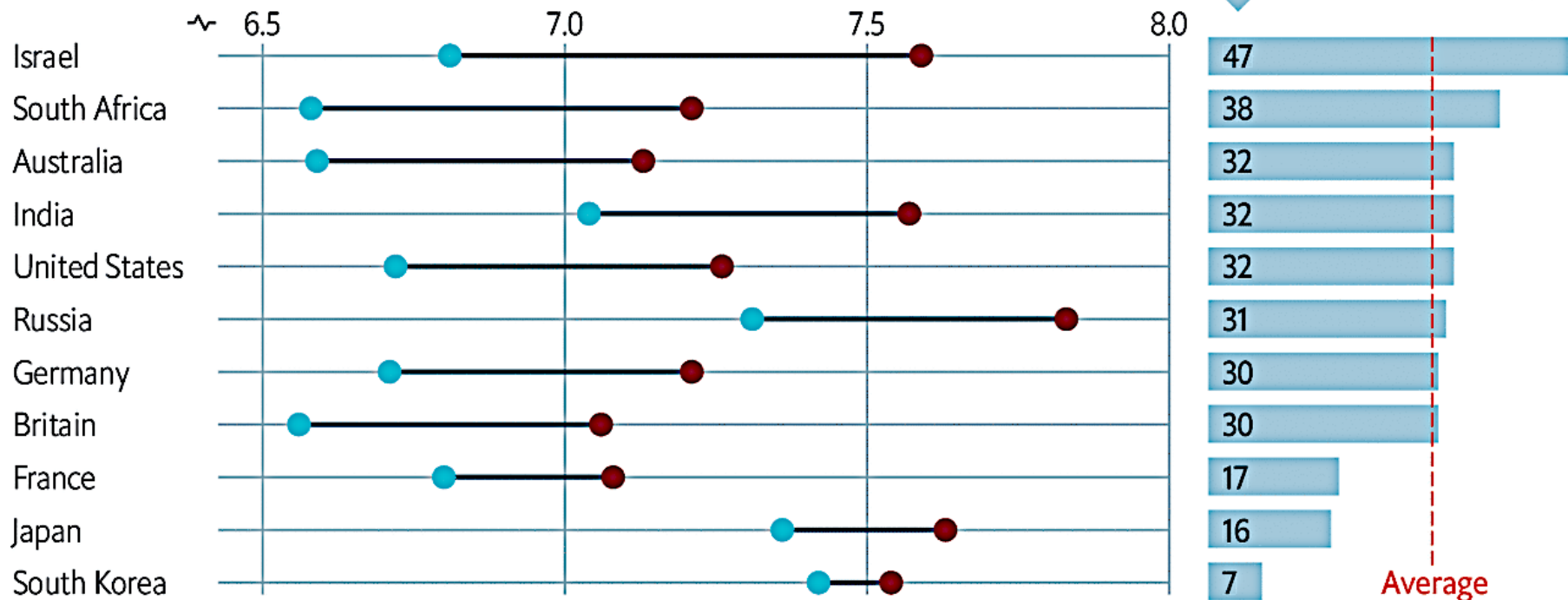Source: Royal Society for Public Health

Economist.com

4

Online context: Longer hours

Working nine to six

Average daily working hours, 2020, selected countries*

● January-February   ● April-May

Total increase, minutes

	6.5	7.0	7.5	8.0	
Israel					47
South Africa					38
Australia					32
India					32
United States					32
Russia					31
Germany					30
Britain					30
France					17
Japan					16
South Korea					7

Average

Source: Atlassian

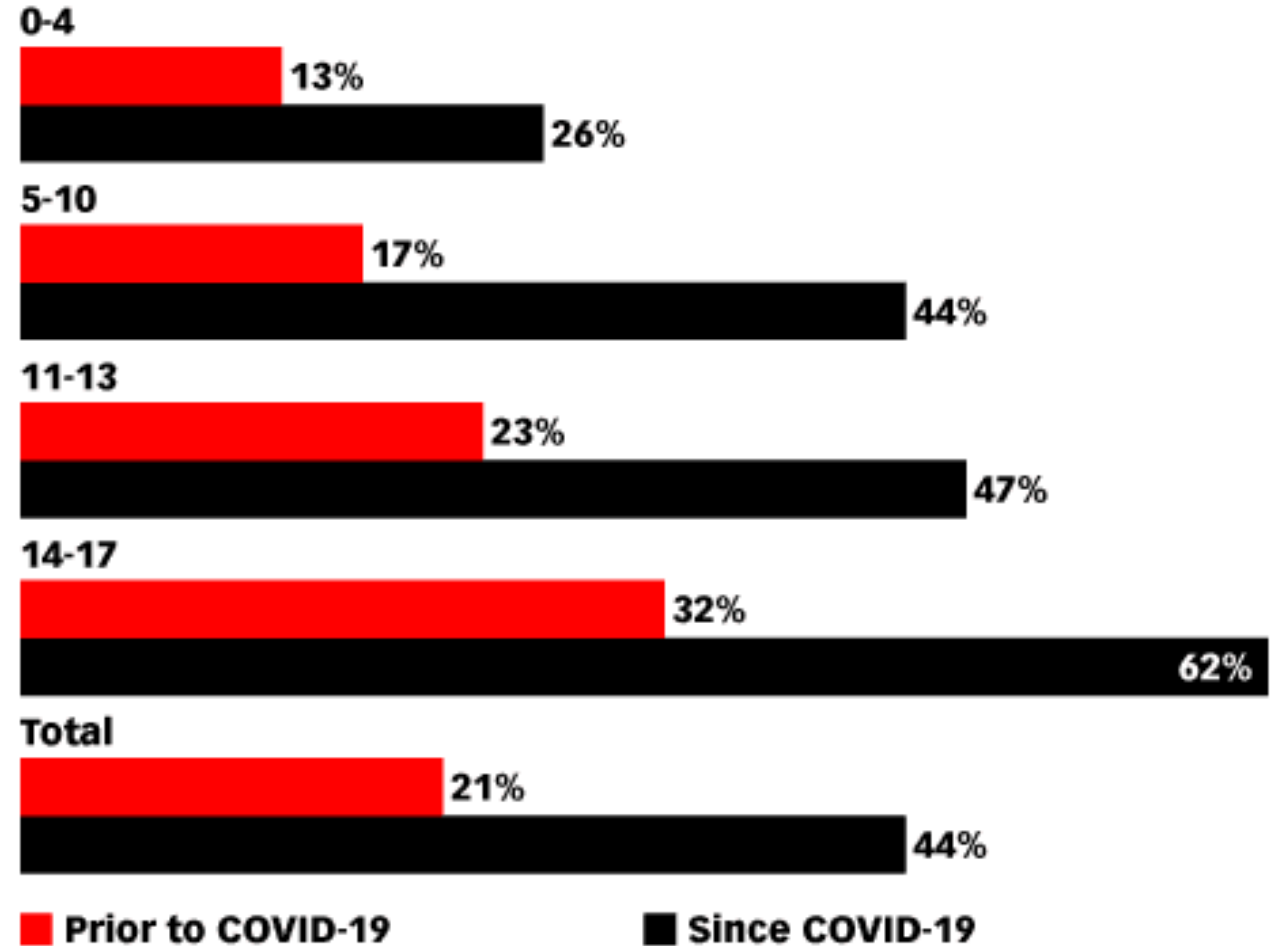*Survey of 65 countries

The Economist

5

Digital context: Screen time

3,052 US adults -Iowa State University faculty, staff, students
April 2020

Physical activity was reduced by 32.3% ...No longer being active & increased screen time ... associated with
- *worse current mental health*
- *higher depressive and anxiety symptoms*
  (Meyer, J., et al., 2020)

US Children/Teens Who Have Spent More than Four Hours Daily Using Electronics Devices Before vs. During the Coronavirus Pandemic, by Age, June 2020

% of respondents in each group

Age	Prior to COVID-19	Since COVID-19
0-4	13%	26%
5-10	17%	44%
11-13	23%	47%
14-17	32%	62%
Total	21%	44%

■ **Prior to COVID-19**   ■ **Since COVID-19**

Note: devices such as tablet, smartphones, etc.; according to their parents
Source: Ipsos and The Global Myopia Awareness Coalition (GMAC), July 8, 2020

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6

Digital context: Last year (2020)

- 4 >> 6 hrs digital screen time
- 69% of employees experience burnout symptoms while working from home (Monster survey, 2020)
- ~ 60% respondents - physically drained and less productive due to screen-related aches and pains (OnePoll survey, 2020)
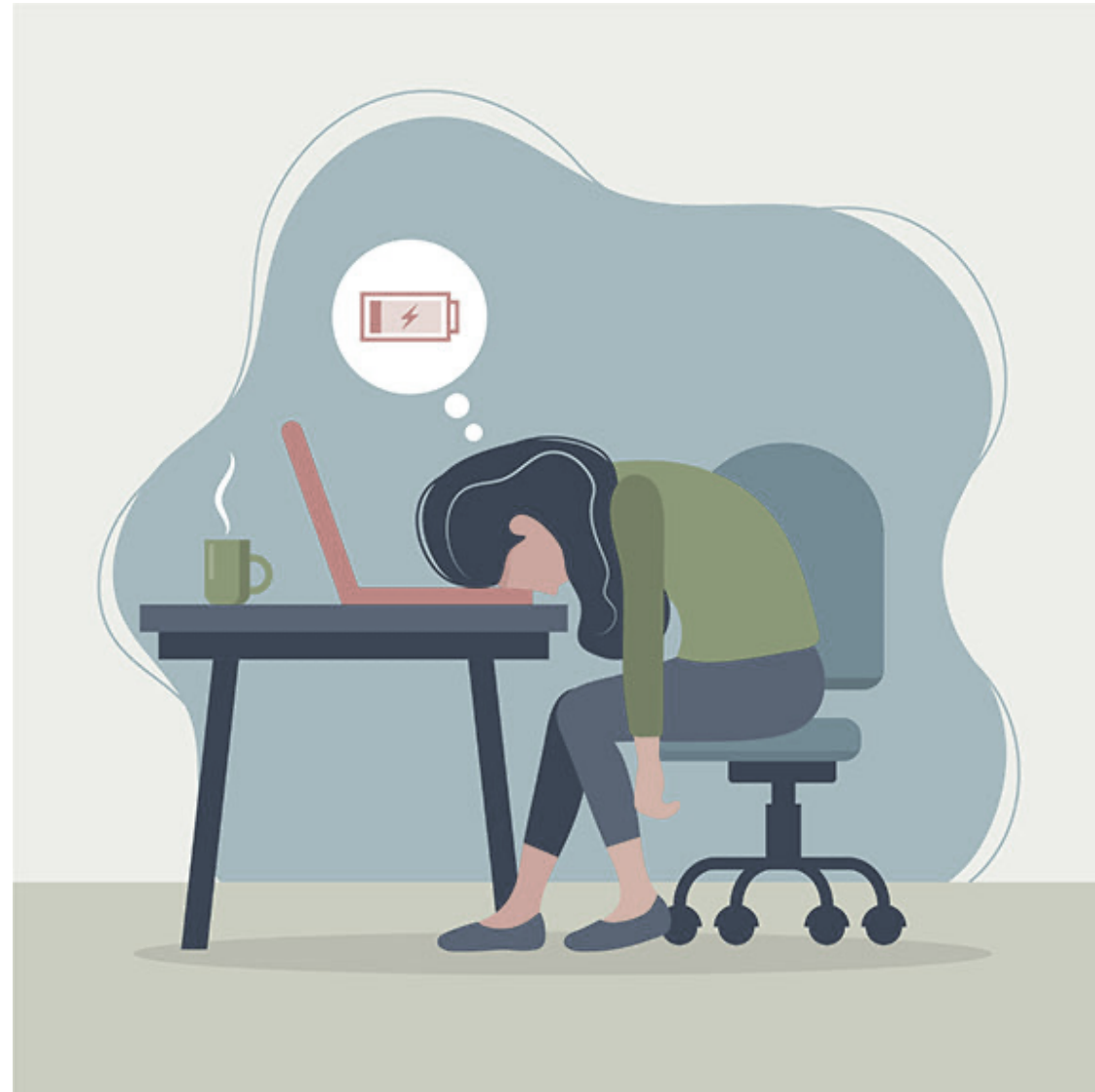- not taking enough time off to recharge...

Digital fatigue

Image source: https://thinkupconsulting.com/for-the-virtually-exhausted/

8

Digital students' concerns

- Time pressures
  - Fast-paced learning
  - No time to think
  - No time off
  - Expectations to be working 24/7
- Information-intensive > deep learning?
- Information overload & fragmentation
- Distraction & urge/demand to "multitask" to stay current
- Sense of overload & confusion
- Technology misused – absence of presence & disconnection
- Stressed by the "always-on" lifestyle & its requirements
- Confusion & low self-efficacy

The (unintended) impact of tech:
Cognitive consequence

- Digitally overwhelmed

- Information overload

- Distraction & chronic distractibility (internal & external)

- Multi-tasking & Continuous Partial Attention - constant fragmented attention motivated not by productivity but by the desire to be connected; "trying to follow and deal with everything while, in fact, failing to focus on anything" (Stone, 2006)

- Hyper-attention (Rose, 2013)

- Significant levels of anxiety, stress & even depression

Challenge on _attention_

Need for attention literacy

- **Attention literacy defined** (Lankshear & Kobel,2003; Palalas, 2018; Wenger, 2019)

- **Awareness & attention**

- **Choice & agency**

- **Digital literacy** (Pegrum, 2019)

Just being aware is a powerful response, one that changes everything and opens up new options for growth and for doing.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living (1990)

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The (unintended) impact of tech:
Other Consequences

1. Design of digital technologies
2. Information seeking habits
3. Physical consequences
4. Implications for mental health

Digital wellness

- A way of life, habits of body & mind, while using technology
  - promote optimal health & well-being
  - supports individual & societal thriving
  - within the human, natural & digital communities

- Journey vs. destination, verb vs. noun
- Take advantage of benefits / avoid harms of tech

- *Evidence-based mindfulness-informed perspective*

https://digitalwellnesscollective.com/

Where are you on the scale of digital wellness?

14

Interdisciplinary lens

Neuroscience: I'm only human

Due to their very complexity, our brains are extremely vulnerable to dysregulation, dissociation and emotional distress (Cozolino & Santos, 2014, p. 157)

- **Negativity bias**

- Pre-programmed
"**fight or flight**" responses
for survival

- **Propensity for distraction**
 1. Focused attention
  2. Open attention

Neuroscience: Universal human needs & behaviours

- **Regulate** emotions - they drive attention & memory, motivation; **avoid** excessive **stress & anxiety**

- Create learning space that feels **safe & secure**

SAFETY FIRST

- **Regulate attention** – intentional attention
- **Allow time** for brain – body – mind processes
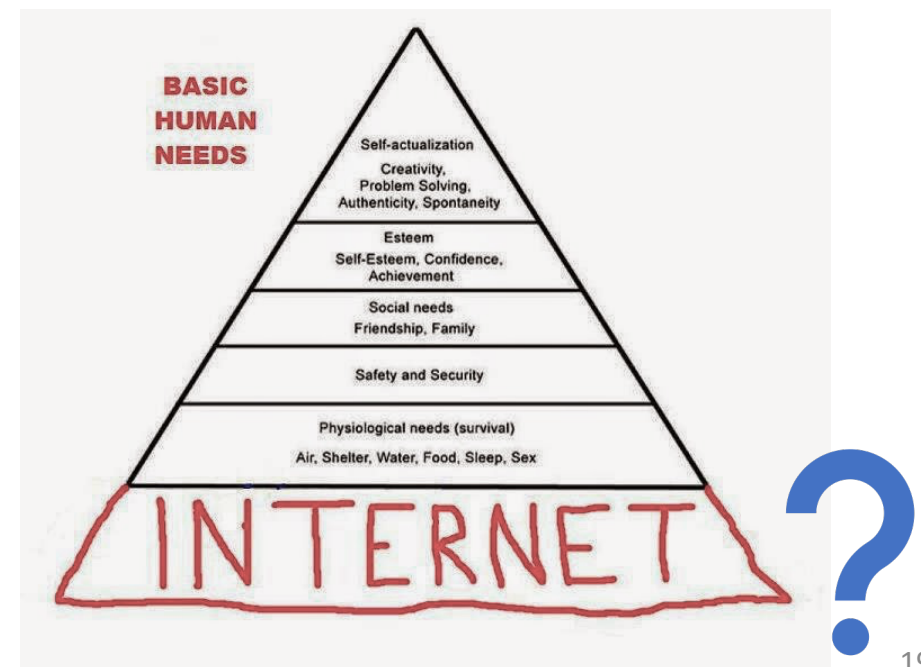
Neuroscience: Other critical discoveries
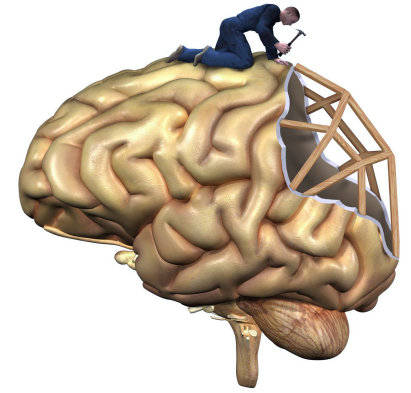
- **Neuroplasticity** & self-directed neuroplasticity

  We are all electricians of our brain

  - **Neural circuits** formed, weakened, strengthened, & purged - unconsciously; can be consciously driven
  - **Intentional attention** - secret to deliberate circuit building
  - **Meditation** is an act of **circuit building** - control & direct your attention

- **Social brain –** biological & psychological social beings
  - Our brain & mind are both **embodied & relational**
  - **Connect** with, attune to others; help each other build new neural connections
  - **Intrapersonal attunement** (self-regulatory practice) & **interpersonal attunement**
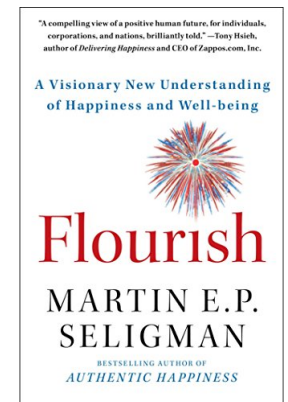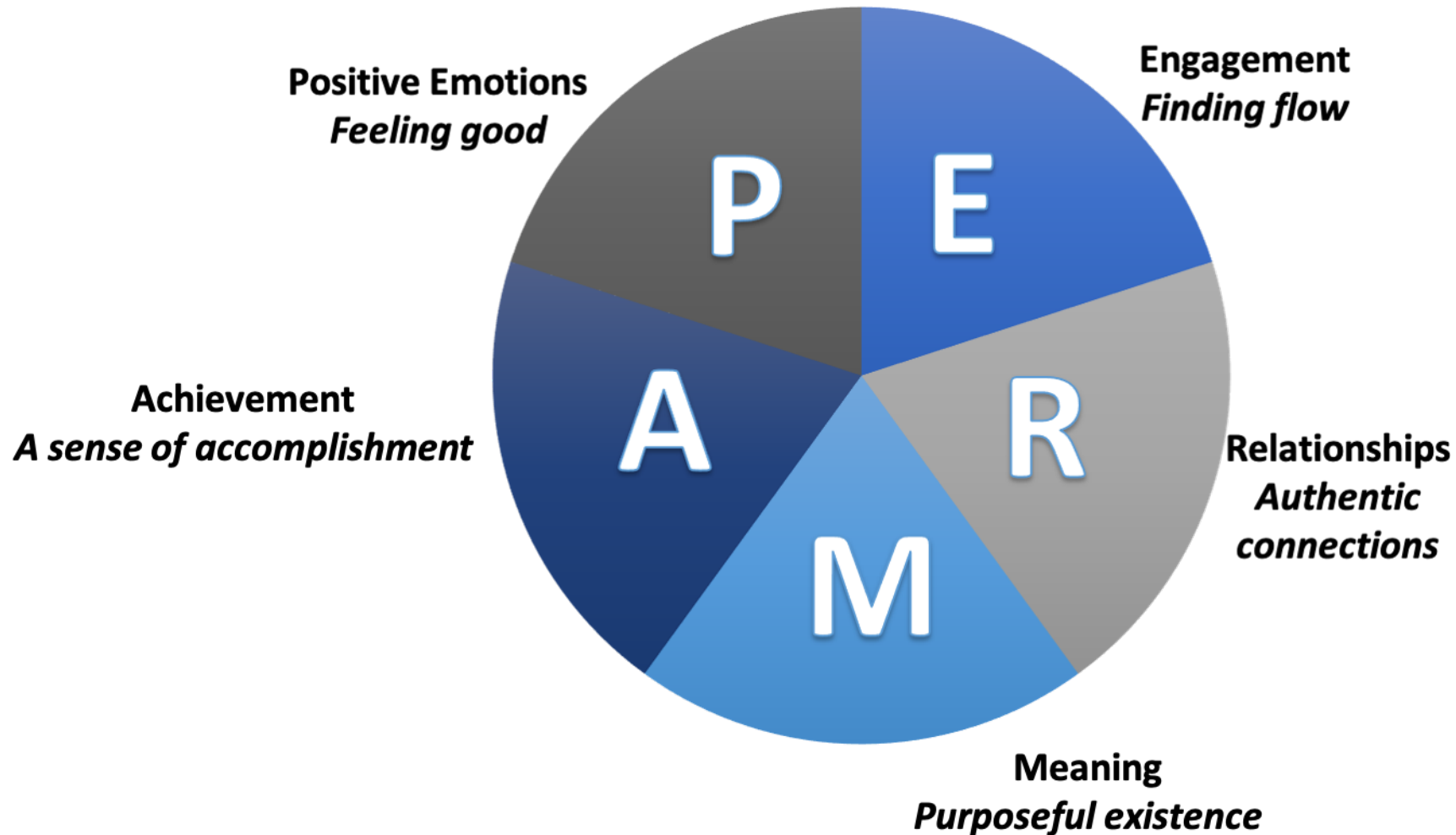
Basic psychological needs (SDT)

"Supports for autonomy, competence, and relatedness … facilitate more self-determined and high-quality functioning in the immediate situation, … promote the development of more effective self-functioning, resilience, and enduring psychological health for the long term." (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 12)

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Self-actualization
Creativity,
Problem Solving,
Authenticity, Spontaneity

Esteem
Self-Esteem, Confidence,
Achievement

Social needs
Friendship, Family

Safety and Security

Physiological needs (survival)
Air, Shelter, Water, Food, Sleep, Sex

INTERNET

?

PERMA™ Theory of Well-Being

Positive Emotions
Feeling good

Engagement
Finding flow

P E R M A

Relationships
Authentic connections

Achievement
A sense of accomplishment

Meaning
Purposeful existence

"A compelling view of a positive human future, for individuals, corporations, and nations, brilliantly told." —Tony Hsieh, author of *Delivering Happiness* and CEO of Zappos.com, Inc.

A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being

Flourish

MARTIN E.P. SELIGMAN

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS
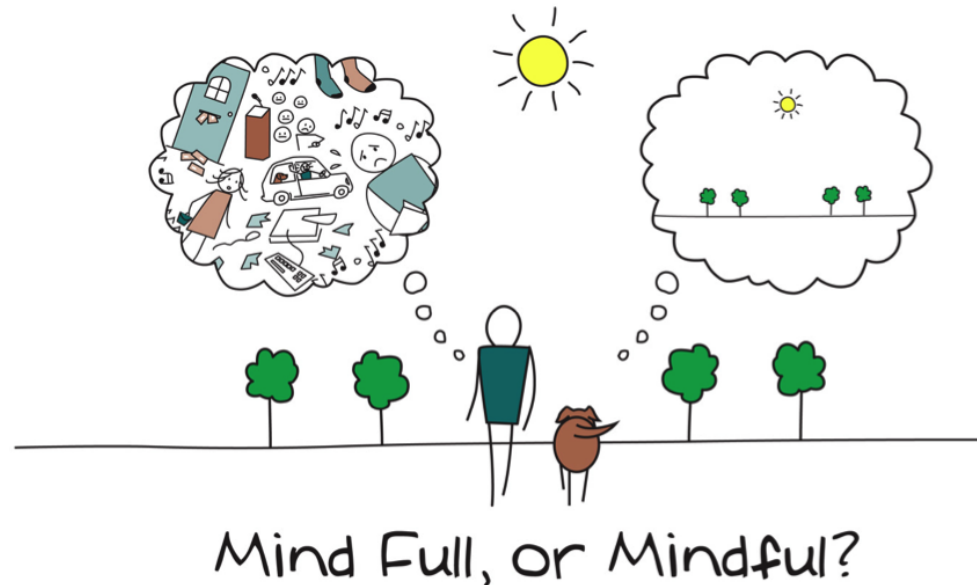
Authors: Nina Hersher, MSW ● Sophie Janicke-Bowles, PhD ● Anna Lomanowska, PhD

Mindfulness

"The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145)

Mind Full, or Mindful?

Central components: (1) regulation of attention to keep it on the immediate experience; (2) approaching experiences with curiosity, openness, & acceptance, regardless of whether they are positive or negative

Mindfulness in education

10 key benefits of mindfulness for students

1. reduces anxiety before testing
2. provides tools to reduce stress
3. improves participation by promoting impulse control
4. pro-social behaviours and healthy relationships
5. self-reflection and self-calming
6. social and emotional learning
7. attentions and concentration
8. readiness to learn
9. academic performance
10. holistic well-being

(David & Sheth, 2009, p. 9)

? **Online learning**?

Mindfulness practices in AU online courses

Mindfulness & neuroscience forum

Contemplative pedagogy

Safe, non-threatening, empowering environment (synchronous & asynchronous)

- connected community of inquiry
- choice based on dialogue
- focus on process
- mindful feedback
- time & space boundaries negotiation

Focus attention on intention

- set intentions
- uncover what motivates the learner

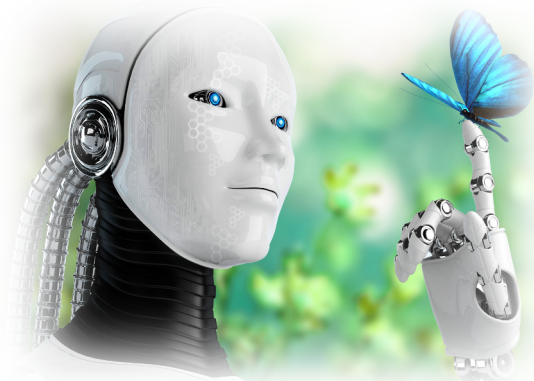## Self-awareness and reflection

- journaling (mind & digital habits)
- self-inquiry, introspection
- insights, "a-ha moments"

Centering practice and breathing exercises

- arriving practice
- meditation
- embodied practices

Connection with others

- mindful speaking, deep listening
- messages of support, gratitude, & compassion

Mindfulness practice benefits

Respondents felt that they **benefited** the most from:

- Attention/awareness strategies
- Reflection strategies
- Self-regulation strategies

Respondents recommended **more**:

1. Mindfulness strategies
2. Explicit instruction on mindfulness
3. Mindfulness resources
4. Time for self-practice
5. Integration & earlier integration of mindfulness strategies in the MEd program

All respondents reported practicing strategies in personal & professional lives after the course

Challenging to adapt mindfulness strategies in online learning environment, but welcomed & viewed as holistically beneficial

More benefits reported by students

- Awareness of mobile & online habits (e.g., heavy usage, autopilot)

- Awareness of attentional choices (moment-to-moment microdecisions – Levy , 2016)

- Enhanced "attention literacy" (Palalas, 2018)

- Gradual development of coping mechanisms "to select what's of interest & fight the attention robbery"

- Focus on process vs. product >> enhanced learning experience

- Slowing down >> higher levels of focus >> lower time demands ("*no more clicking around aimlessly looking for answers outside…online*")

- Enhanced quality of engagement

- Improvement on personal/professional level

Solution: Practice awareness & attention

- What kind of user are you?

how?

when?
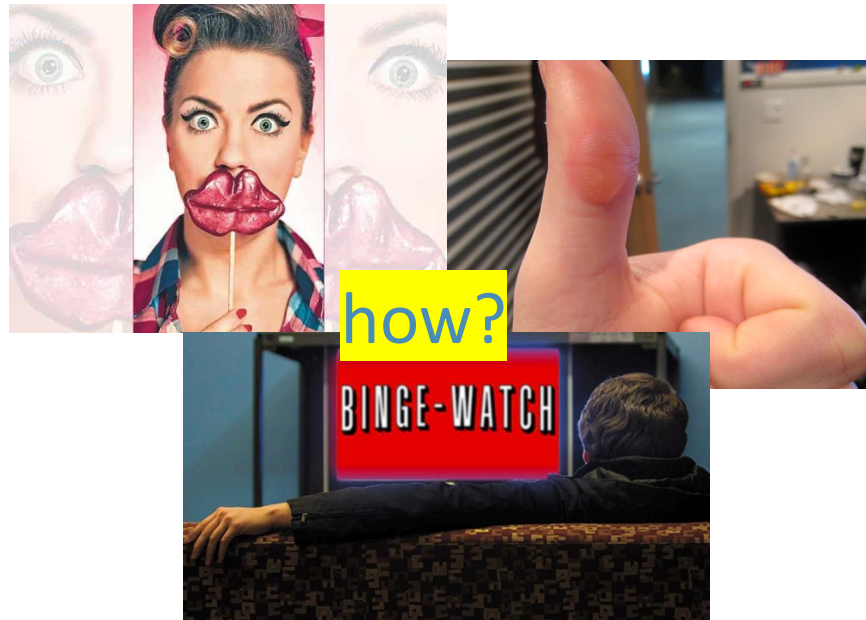
how long?

Strategies for digital wellness

1. Increase **awareness**
   - how you use digital devices in your daily routine (work, leisure) – your habits
   - build new healthy **awareness and attention habits** (body, mind, & spirit) – attentional literacy (mindfulness)
   - make healthy choices; set intentions
2. Strike a **balance** between staying connected & avoiding distraction
3. Take daily digital **downtime**

Awareness

Mindfulness

Set Intention

Balance

New Habits

Tools & Hacks

Downtime

Rest

Recharge

28

https://www.digitalwellbeinglab.com/recharge-u

Implementing…everyday practices

- Save your mental energy (pause when emotion take over; do one thing at a time)

- Minimalize distraction (declutter, create untouchable FOCUS time; calendar)

- Manage negative mindsets (ask questions of yourself & others that lead to solutions, greater understanding, not blame)

- Take small steps to avoid burnout (be okay with delegating, do not take over or "over-help"; check with your intention)

- Select daily activities that trigger your quiet time/meditation/silence

- Schedule digital detox

- Listen mindfully; you don't have to reply (count to 10)

- Cultivate joy (bring awareness to what you do regularly that you enjoy)

Digital learning design

- Holistic pedagogy

- Contemplative activities

- Redefining time

- Redesigning assessment

- Emotional impacts

- Focus on relationships, community & connection

- Presence

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Thank you!

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