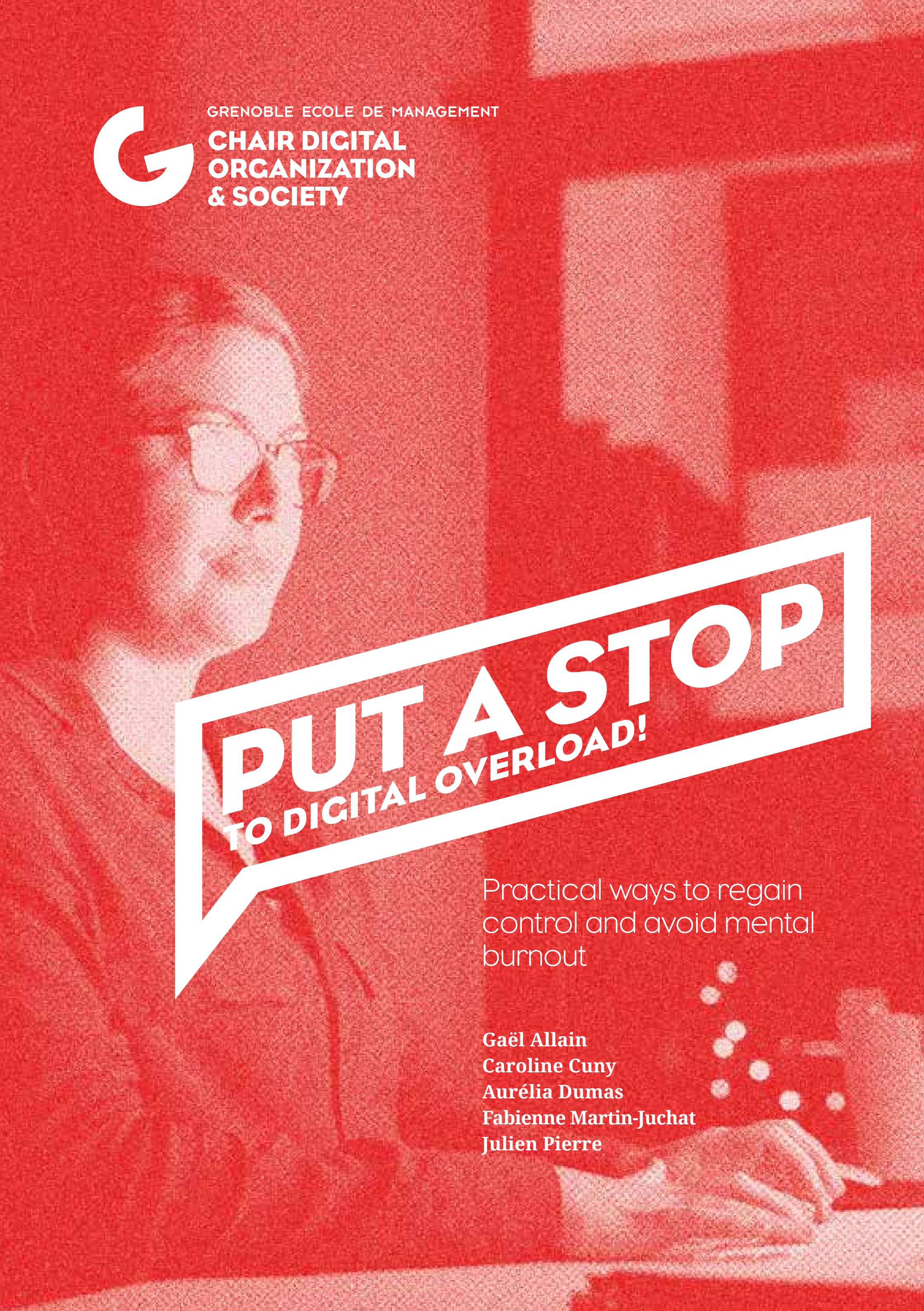

GRENOBLE ECOLE DE MANAGEMENT
CHAIR DIGITAL
ORGANIZATION
& SOCIETY

PUT A STOP TO DIGITAL OVERLOAD!

Practical ways to regain control and avoid mental burnout

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Introduction

Here is a new edition of our handbook originally published in 2016.

Since its first publication, the COVID-19-related health crisis has transformed the way we work, and required us to work remotely whenever possible. During lockdown periods, teleworking even became the only way we could continue our professional activities.

This has made digital tools even more essential than before, as the only means of accessing our professional resources, but also for communicating with our loved ones and enjoying our recreational activities. This is an unprecedented situation for us. From one day to the next, or almost, we were obliged to use our digital tools for everything, and simply had to abandon any activities that could not be accessed by digital means.

Fortunately, digital tools are becoming increasingly sophisticated, giving us immediate access to increasing amounts of information anywhere and at any time. These tools provide real-time access to online resources for remote working, and enable our employees, managers, and partners to contact us via all possible communication channels, while using social media to keep an eye on activities related to our personal interests.

Considering the fact that we must also remain responsive to sometimes urgent or emotionally draining requests which may suddenly arise in an untimely manner, and the need to bear so many things in mind to ensure that nothing is forgotten, the occurrence of mental burnout, or in more scientific terms, mental overload due to information overload, comes as no surprise!

The handbook you are reading is the fruit of research conducted by the «Talents in Digital Transformation» (Talents de la transformation digitale) Chair at Grenoble Ecole de Management. It will enable you to reflect on your use of digital tools in business, in light of your personal choices as well as your employees' and partners' preferences. You will find a multitude of ideas to try out immediately, although some may not be applicable or adapted to your personal situation.

Our goal is to help you avoid mental burnout and increase your efficiency while reducing your anxiety, by putting digital tools in their rightful place as (effective and relevant) tools, and human talent at the heart of performance.

Quiz - My management of emails

Here is a short self-assessment to show you how you are doing! The colors will help you to determine where you stand.

I generally cancel automatic notifications on the software and platforms I use.	I choose which software and platforms send me notifications.	In general, I let all the software and platforms I use send me notifications whenever there is new information.
I feel comfortable with the response time to the emails I receive.	Certain emails require an immediate response, while I can take more time to reply to others.	I feel under pressure to respond very quickly to the emails I receive.
I am aware of the tone that I use when writing an email message.	I am very careful about the tone that I use in emails sent to important people.	It is not really possible for anyone who receives an email from me to interpret it in different manner.
I only check my emails at times that I choose.	My mailbox is open when I'm working at my desk, and closed when I'm in a meeting or not working.	I leave my mailbox open all the time.

I am very aware of how many emails I receive per day.

I have previously counted how many emails I receive per day.

I am unaware of how many emails I receive per day.

I always take time to write and proofread an important email before sending it.

If I can answer my emails right away, I do so to avoid having to come back to them later.

I almost always reply immediately in order to be faster and more efficient.

I try to write clear, well-structured emails which are easy to understand.

You sometimes need to put all the information in writing in an email so that everyone has a record.

I generally try to write detailed emails containing all the information required.

I manage my recipients as efficiently as possible and using the right channel.

When I receive an email, I always include all recipients in my reply.

Putting everyone in copy allows me to keep everyone in the loop at the same time

I am aware that the subject line of my emails improves the understanding of their content.

When I write an email, I insert a subject line that relates to the content; when I reply to an email, I leave the subject line chosen by initial sender.

What matters most is the content of the message, not the title or subject line.

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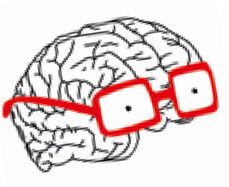

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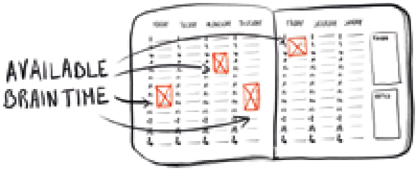
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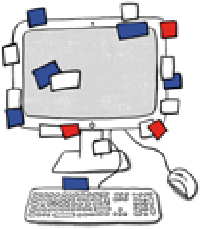

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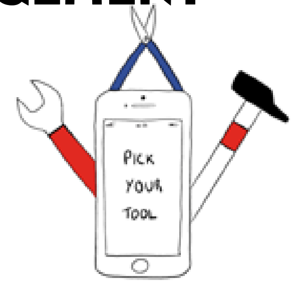
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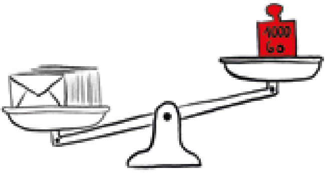

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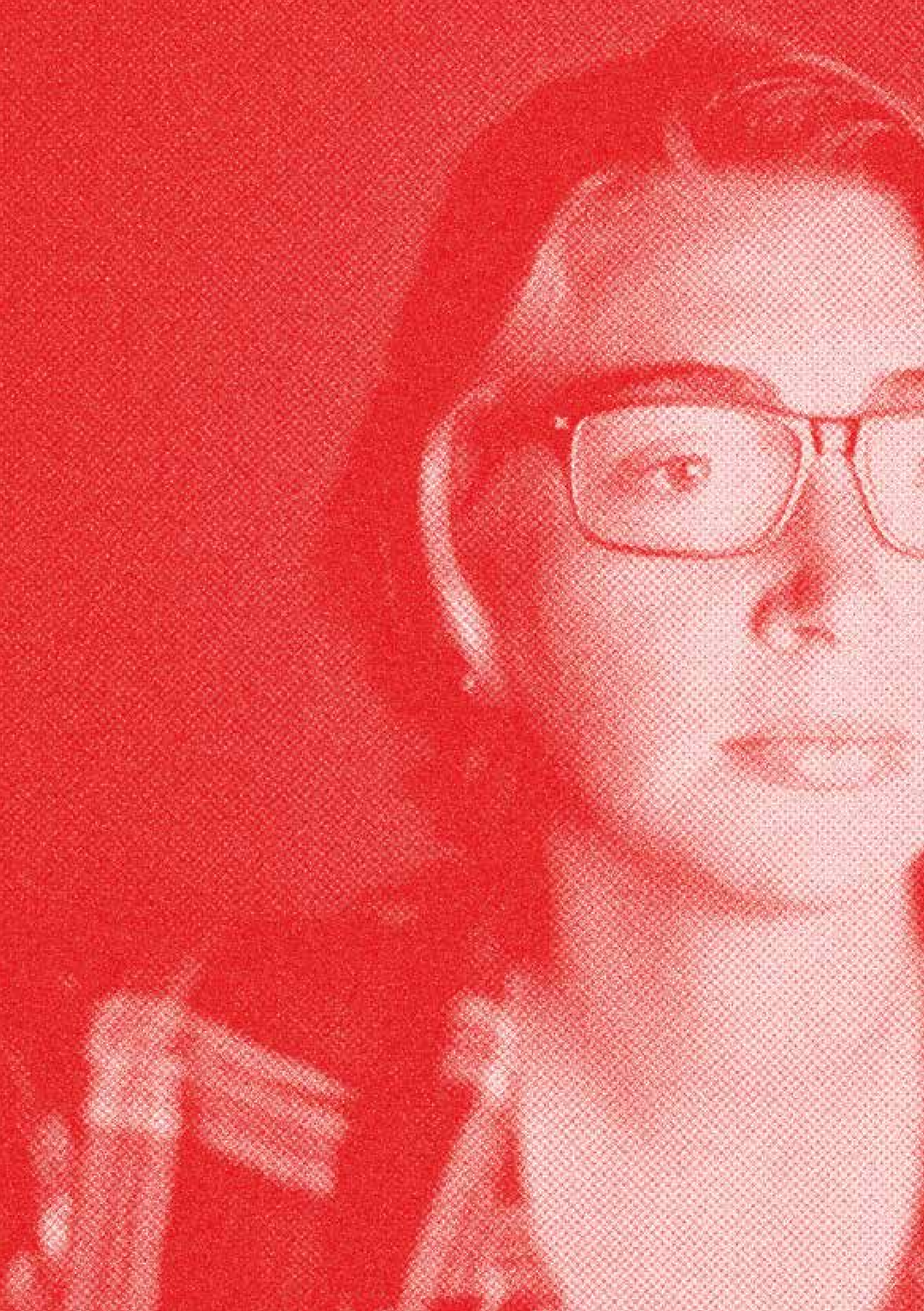


01

Overview

Focal points

Digital tools exacerbate the discrepancy between the speed at which information is transmitted and the time required to create its content! There is a risk of confusing speed with haste and wanting to respond before having taken the time to fully consider the question! In this context, the best ways for us to remain efficient are by organizing data, configuring the tools at our disposal, and being able to organize our activities according to our personal objectives without getting bogged down in the details and without being slaves to 'digital' modes of organization!

However, it takes time to adapt digital tools to our specific requirements. One of the keys to success in our digital practices therefore implies **learning how to spend (a little) time on preparations order to gain (a lot of) time later on.** Next comes the matter of anticipating the relationships and the types of information flows that will be generated by the use of a new digital tool.

In the field..., time is sometimes spent on defining a global strategy required for the proper processing of information. But these are often phases of analysis and discovery in reaction to the occurrence of a critical situation. In most cases, information is processed in real time and digital tools, with their incessant notifications, encourage us to process data – including the most anecdotal – consecutively, which prevents us from taking stock and developing the broader perspective required for the sorting and ranking of information. The main issues to be examined include response times according to the type of contact, the ranking of information to be processed according to the company's objectives, etc.

What you are saying is that there are still times for in-depth work, but they tend to be early in the morning or late in the evening, with the rest of the day devoted to the kind of relational «zapping» or multi-tasking that prevents any real reflection on the issues to be addressed!

One of the keys to success in our digital practices implies learning how to spend (a little) time on preparations order to gain (a lot of) time later on.

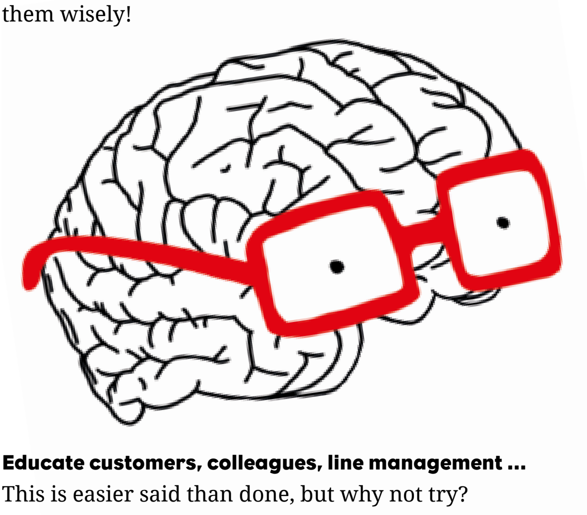
How can we cope?

Autonomy

>>> Prioritize

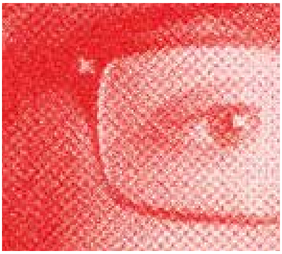
Autonomy of action: let's assume that the human brain does not function in the same way or at the same pace as a computer... Anything that enables us to gain more control over what we do and how we do it improves our efficiency and our intellectual comfort, including in the management of digital tools. Let's remain in control and take our time! Unless the latest emergency is genuinely our current priority.

Autonomous in our use of digital technology: we quickly waste time and energy on trying to improvise quick fixes. Exchanging information and best practices can soon help each of us to master the tools at our disposal and use them wisely!



Educate customers, colleagues, line management ... This is easier said than done, but why not try? At the beginning of a professional relationship, clearly explaining the importance of deadlines to us, and that a given procedure must be used for emergencies, enables us to clarify the situation from the outset, which will improve comfort and efficiency later on.

Autonomy in corporate life: how much flexibility am I permitted in the performance of my activities? What types and levels of constraints are imposed on me by my hierarchy, my field of activity, my digital tools? But even in the most restrictive environments, I must always set aside time to work autonomously, to guarantee the effective mobilization of my cognitive resources.



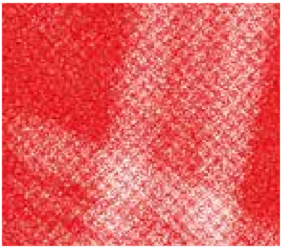
Ranking

>>> Organize

Move from the global to the specific when our tendency is to do the opposite! Digital tools exacerbate the risk of saturating our processing capacities, and especially our working memory, by amassing totally unrelated details. The right strategy is to reverse this trend by clearly setting a general objective and then focusing exclusively on the relevant details later on.

What matters most for us? In connection with the previous chapter, it is important for us to consider this question, which may seem somewhat incongruous and whose answer is not necessarily easy to formulate, as we are all used to having several things on the go at once! How we answer this very simple question will depend on our ability to organize ourselves efficiently and prioritize all the information that arises.

my PRIORITIES
things that matter most for me
1
2
3
4
5



Managing multimodality = the same digital information can be very easily presented to us in different formats and media. To make things easier, we need to contextualize this information and immerse ourselves in the logic of its production.

How can digital tools help us?

Choose the right digital channels

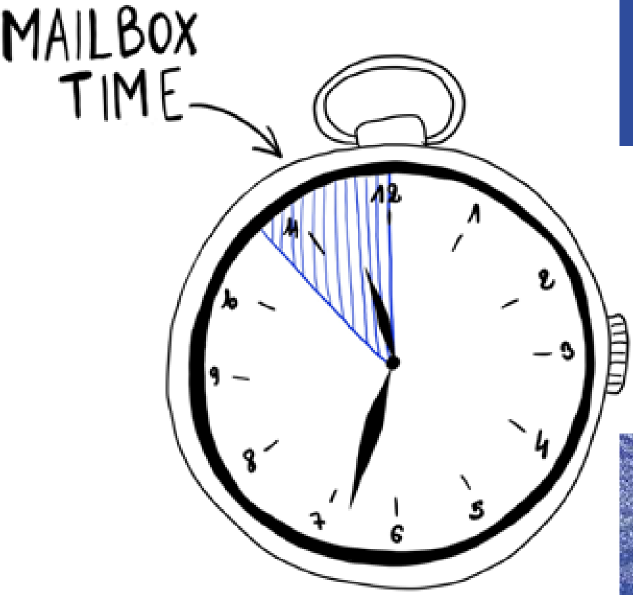
>>> 1 channel per type of contact

For many of us, it is not possible or practical to have two mobile phones. However, we can use the «Contacts» app to identify the different preferred channels: simply ask your contacts how they want to be reached. We can also simplify our browser use. Chrome, Edge, Firefox, Safari or Opera... decide which one you will use for work, which one for online shopping, which one for social media, etc.

Settings

>>> Adapting the tools

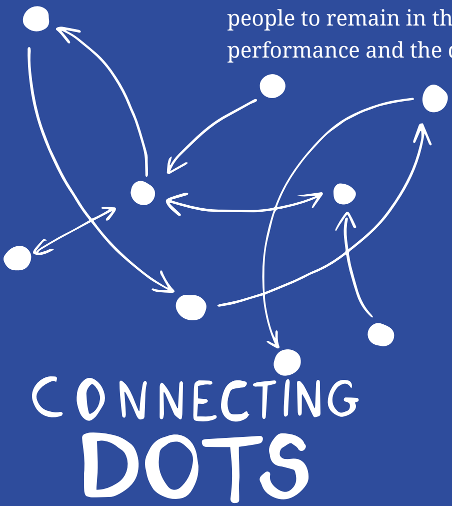
The right tool at the right time!
Also respect your contacts' preferences in terms of digital tools.
(See the list of tools at the end of the guide)

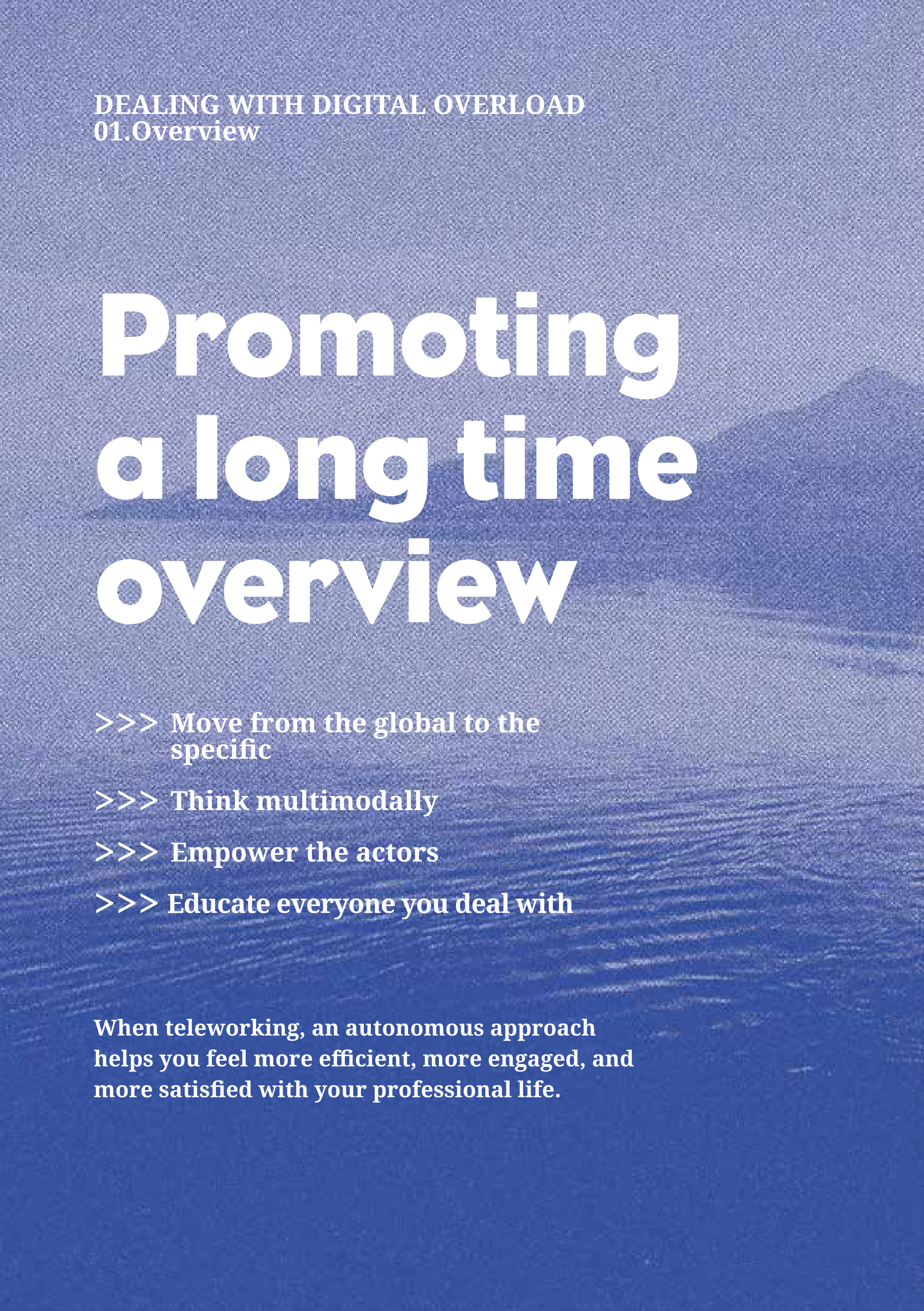


Focus On…

Four or five blocks of information at the most … An excellent cognitive strategy for processing digital information consists in focusing one's mental efforts on detecting the links and connections between information items rather than trying to accumulate information on each data item data separately. This reduces the burden on our working memory, which becomes saturated very quickly, while reinforcing our understanding of the information to be processed by engaging in a more intense and personal appropriation than for a simple data collection procedure.

The freedom-form company is a very interesting concept for structuring and organizing management and exchanges within an entity. Some of its aspects deserve to be implemented in all companies, particularly in the context of digital data management. Prioritizing expertise over hierarchy, mobilizing people in relation to a common goal rather than individual performance, and empowering individuals in the workplace are all ways to facilitate information management and allow people to remain in their comfort zone, enhancing their performance and the quality of their production.





Promoting a long time overview

>>> Move from the global to the specific

>>> Think multimodally

>>> Empower the actors

>>> Educate everyone you deal with

When teleworking, an autonomous approach helps you feel more efficient, more engaged, and more satisfied with your professional life.

02

Cognitive resource management

Focal points

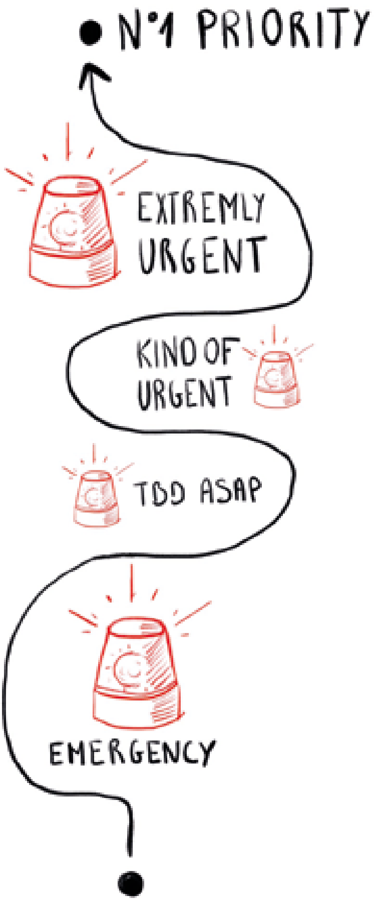
The main factor in triggering the mental overload situations revealed by our study is the handling of emergencies, which creates a disruption that is hard for people to overcome at their workstations.

More precisely, the management of emergencies has a tendency to cause significant disruption to the activity in progress by triggering a transition from a **'proactive' operating mode** in which the integration and organization of the information to be processed are controlled by the individual, to a **'reactive' mode.**

Under these conditions, the digital tools used to transmit urgent information very quickly become the focus of attention and monopolize a large proportion, if not all, of the available intellectual resources, to the detriment of individual strategic and activity-planning capacities.

In the field..., there are many situations in which we are confronted with more information than we are actually capable of processing! Under these conditions, an attentional shift occurs during which our brain, without our knowledge, selects only a proportion of the data... to the detriment of the rest of the information! This is typically what happens when we make a phone call while driving, even if we think that we know the way by heart, or when a computer specialist embarks on an impromptu «debugging» session. He or she will gradually become overwhelmed by the influx of new information (not all of it relevant), and lose the overall thread of his/her reasoning due to a lack of available resources. **Our working memory can only follow one line of activity at a time**. These situations are also frequently encountered by assistants whose services are requested, independently of their own organizational procedures, by colleagues and/or via digital tools, creating disruptions which are incompatible with the accomplishment of their key tasks.

What you are saying … «It was my investors who insisted that I hire an assistant. They told me that it was no longer my job to bring them coffee. They didn't need me to be nice and friendly; they needed me to be focused», S., a young start-up founder, shortly after raising a large amount of money.

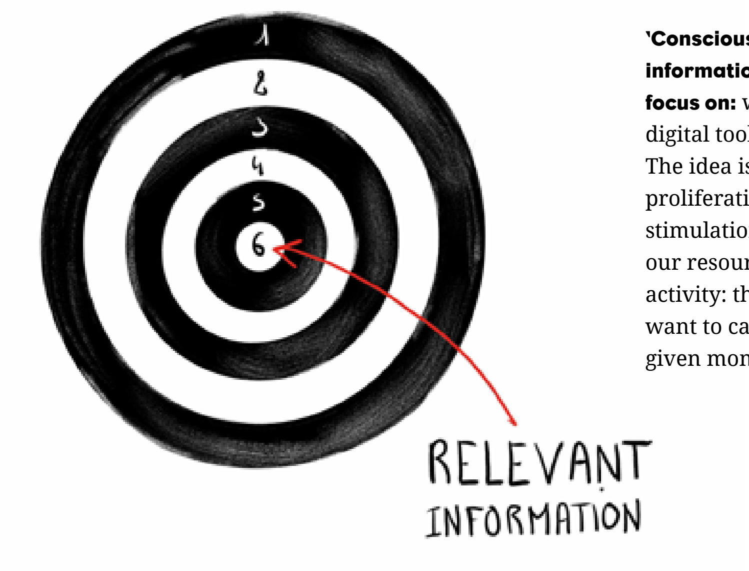

N°1 PRIORITY
EXTREMLY URGENT
KIND OF URGENT
TDD ASAP
EMERGENCY

How can we cope?

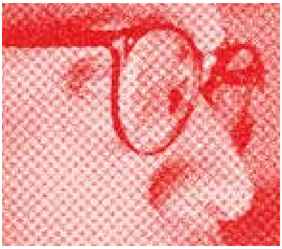
Perception and attention

>>> Take account of our limitations

Practice the art of compromise = the pursuit of digital exhaustiveness is a lost cause; we are unable to process all the information to which digital tools give us constant access. We must accept this fact and choose our sources accordingly.



'Consciously' select the information you want to focus on: we must not let digital tools decide for us. The idea is, despite the proliferation of sources of stimulation, to allocate all our resources to a single activity: the one that we want to carry out at a given moment.



Be aware that my limitations also apply to others including my assistant and all the people on my team. How can I make their lives easier and help them optimize the management of the different tasks? When teleworking, can I take into account the specificities of my team members?

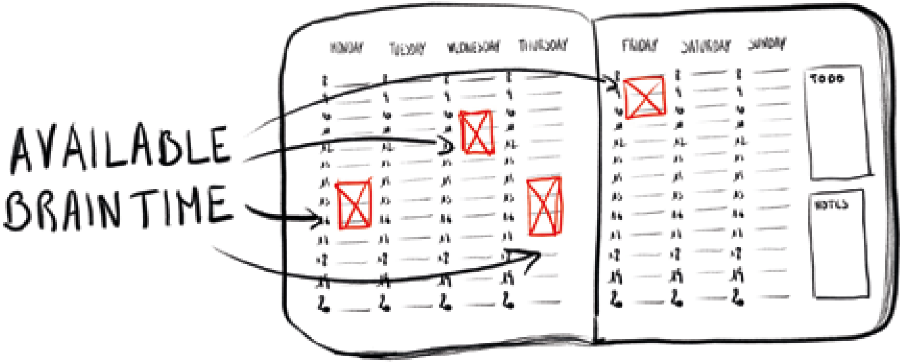
Mental burden and memory

>>> Be proactive

Resist the urge to battle the clock to avoid derailing our own intellectual organizational mode. Regain control over the ordering and sequencing of the information we require to develop our reasoning, strategies, etc.... We can start by diagnosing our available brain time and how frequently we use it.

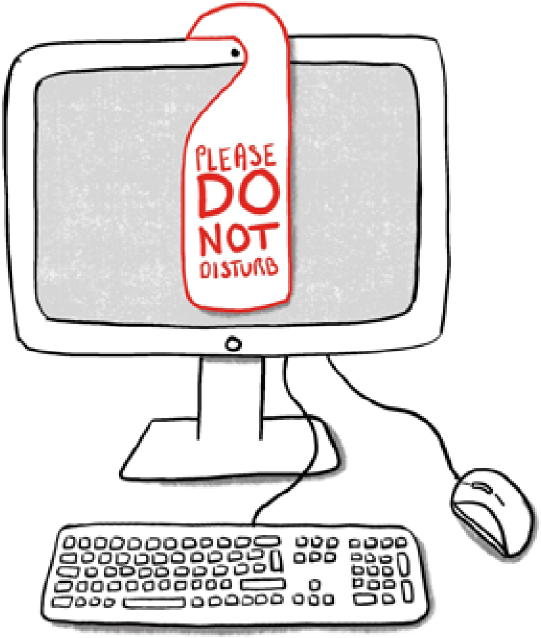
Opt for the sequential processing of information and avoid intellectual dispersion. Group activities together based on the principle of «birds of a feather flock together», and only work with a limited amount of information simultaneously (<5).

Learn how to automate repetitive activities and perform them without using too many resources.



Emergencies and interruptions

>>> Avoid multitasking



Keep interruptions to a minimum, e.g. by not leaving unused digital tools open, especially those that send out notifications.

Create interruption-free time slots by setting aside specific places and times for ‘key’ activities.

Anticipate and plan your activities to mobilize your resources and gather the right information at the right time.

To cope with the teleworking requirement, I also organize my professional and personal time to enable me to carry out my daily work, while also managing my daily household duties.

Do one thing at a time. This allows us to develop a more serene approach to the problem of «infobesity».

Focus On…

30%… that's the average amount of time lost due to interruptions! Beware that this can rise to 50% when an interruption occurs at an inopportune time, particularly when we are already trying to keep information alive in our memory. Under these conditions and once interruptions have been dealt with, we need to refocus our resources on our original activity and retrace our steps to retrieve the information that has disappeared from our minds due to the interruption. Obviously, when an interruption occurs while we are performing very routine and therefore much more automated activities, the attentional costs will be lower.

Default mode… is a brain activation mode that was originally identified in individuals at rest during periods when they were not paying attention to anything in particular. However, this automatic mode of operation, which does not place any attentional strain on the brain, accounts for a very large proportion of the brain's activity, and enables it to organize knowledge, regulate emotions, etc. In this context, the intensive use of digital tools and the almost constant attentional focus that this requires are a real impediment to our proper cognitive functioning!

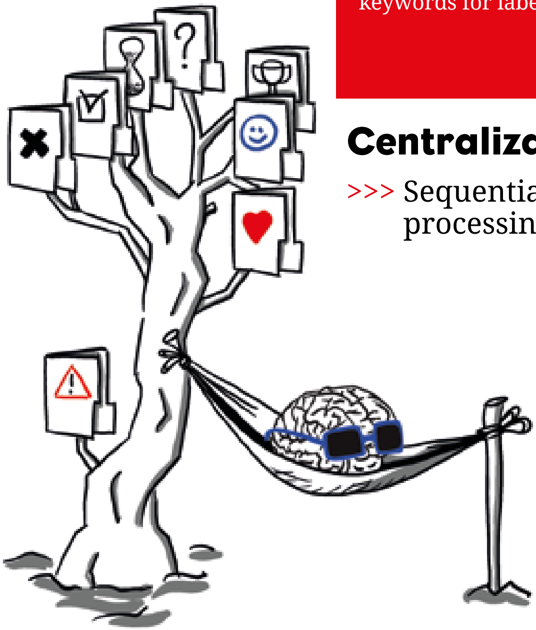
DEFAULT MODE
BRAIN RECHARGE ULTRA
DEFAULT MODE
BRAIN RECHARGE ULTRA
DEFAULT MODE
BRAIN RECHARGE ULTRA
DEFAULT MODE
BRAIN RECHARGE ULTRA
DEFAULT MODE
BRAIN RECHARGE ULTRA

How can digital tools help us?

Storage

>>> Structure your files

Use the functionalities of the tools to break down the information and retrieve it when required. Establish a detailed tree structure of your files (and if they are shared with other employees, clarify, or negotiate the organizational structure with them). Add a set of keywords for labeling messages and files.



Centralization

>>> Sequential processing

Use tools that promote the sequential processing of information and avoid having to switch from one tool or organizational mode to another. Adopt a suite of organizational tools combining email (with labels or a tree structure), a calendar and a task list.
(See the list of tools at the end of the handbook)

Automation

>>> Routine procedures

Configure your digital tools to perform the most routine procedures autonomously.
Implement response patterns according to the nature of the requests: “to be dealt with quickly”, “to be delegated”, “to be followed up for response”, etc.

Use tools that promote the sequential processing of information and avoid having to switch from one tool or organizational mode to another.

How much brain time is available?

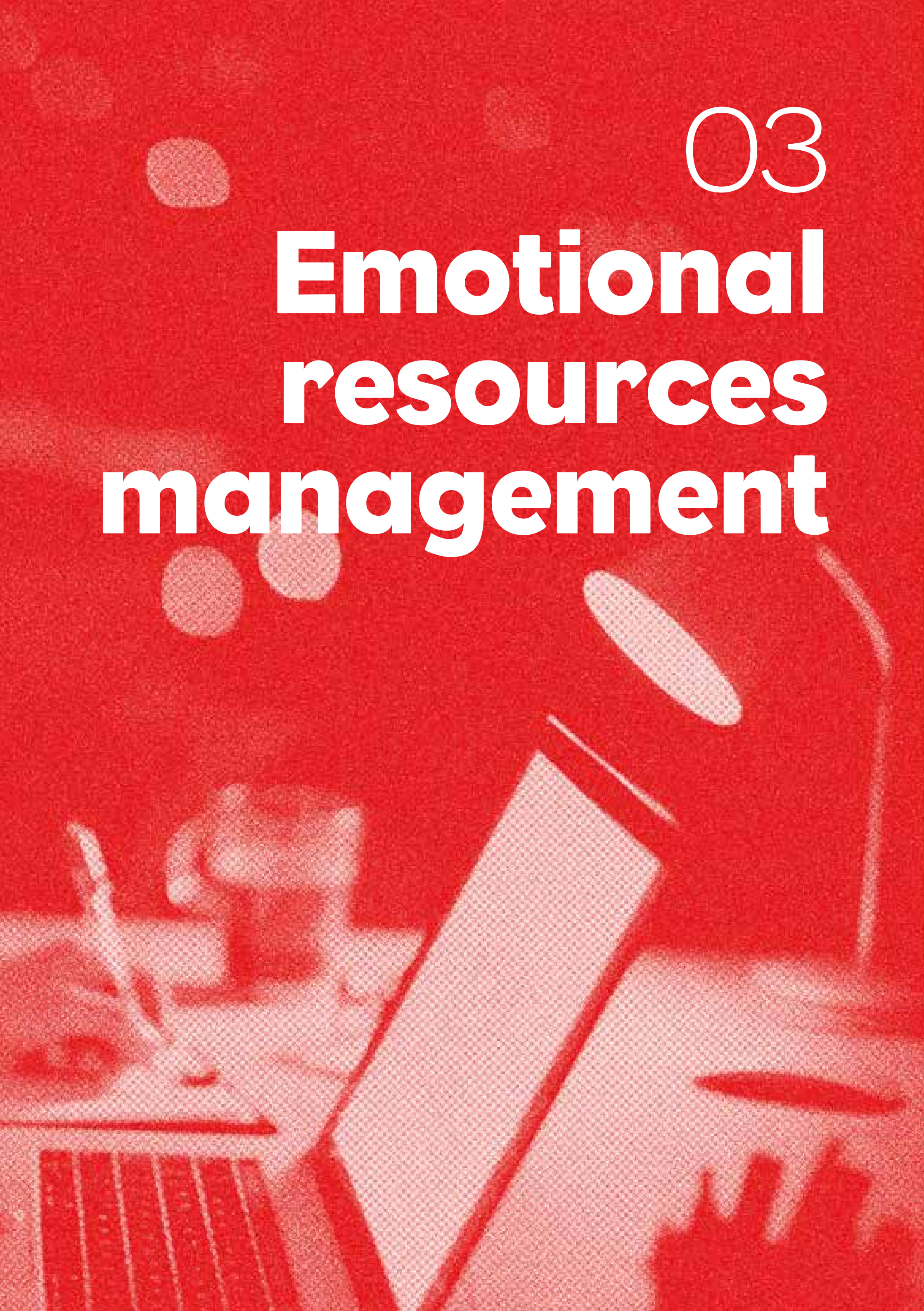
Working memory: One line of activity at a time

>>> Make compromises

>>> Deal with emergencies

>>> Work mindfully

30% of time is wasted due to interruptions
Limit interruptions – anticipate – arrange



03

Emotional resources management

Focal points

The information we process generates emotions: pleasure, surprise, anxiety, anger. The more information we are exposed to, the more emotions we feel. In addition, not being able to process all this information creates frustration. We need time to assimilate emotional stimuli. By letting ourselves become overwhelmed by information flows, our emotional capacities become saturated.

In this context, information «zapping» leads to **emotional zapping**. The same problem applies to both cognitive and affective processing – everything happens too fast! Not only can we no longer take our time and temper our responses, we have lost the ability to identify other people's emotions. We no longer have time to control our emotions and adapt to the moods of the people we deal with. And the difficulties are multiplied if we also have to look after children at home while teleworking...

In the field..., **the feeling of battling the clock prevails;** the frequency of interruptions gives the feeling of always lagging behind and requires us to constantly function in reactive mode in response to digital information. This way of working – triggered by the tools and demands placed upon us – shatters the concentration required for the development of information literacy, and therefore for greater intellectual and emotional comfort. Knowing how to take time for ourselves and take stock of the situation without it being perceived negatively by those around us guarantees better performance and serenity in our professional environment.

What you are saying ... is that the world seems to be engaged in a hellish race in which everything is accelerating. **This leads to a feeling of having lost almost all control**, and places people in an uncomfortable position in which it is hard to find sources of satisfaction. Intellectual fatigue is often associated with a feeling of frustration when people realize that they can no longer deal with everything that needs to be handled, and that their actions, including their failure to respond, will have a negative impact on their image and on the lives of the people to whom the responses will not be transmitted (or not sent quickly enough)! Other uncertainties include the amount of information to be processed, the difficulty of saying no when priorities are not clear, etc.

How can we cope?

Management of emotions

>>> Regain control

Practice positive psychology and value everything that works well in your life without limiting yourself to the professional sphere.

Allow yourself to take recreational breaks without digital tools in order to think about other things and/or let your mind wander.

Manage your stress by practicing appropriate exercises (see list below) and by accepting the need to incorporate this adaptive approach into our professional practices. In other words, it is not a matter of ignoring stress, but of using this state of psychological tension to seek greater emotional and intellectual comfort.

Practice cardiac coherence by lowering your breathing rate to 6 cycles per minute (5 seconds in and 5 seconds out). Five minutes of practice = 4 hours of emotional stabilization: it's simple but effective!

Practice mindfulness – making yourself fully available for what needs doing at a given moment helps to alleviate the stress that is often associated with envisaging future situations or anticipating the potentially negative consequences of our actions.

Write down every thought that enters your mind and prevents you from concentrating. Avoid trying to mentally resist these 'fixed' ideas that disturb you. After noting them, you should move on. Another simple but effective tip!

Making the decision to defer or not process some of the information at your disposal is the first phase of an effective digital data management strategy!

Self-assertion

>>> Learn how to say no

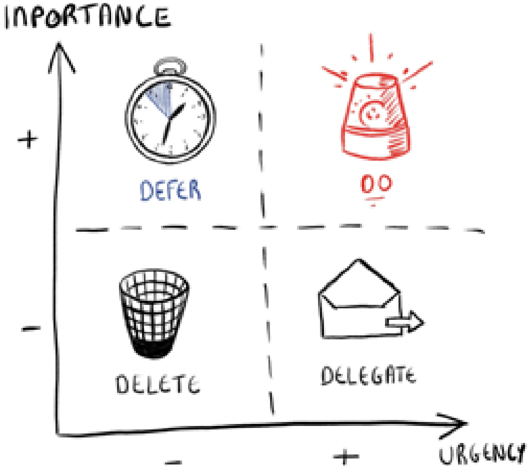
Don't confuse urgency with importance – the speed at which digital information arrives does not mean that it is necessarily urgent! Nor will it always be important, far from it. Therefore, making the decision to defer or not process some of the information at your disposal is the first phase of an effective digital data management strategy!

Learn how to isolate yourself physically and psychologically, and explain clearly why and how you want to isolate yourself so that the people around you (colleagues, staff, hierarchy, relatives, etc.) do not perceive it as a mood swing on your part and respect your isolation 'protocol'.

Take a break from them in the evenings and at weekends or during times that suit us, and which we must also choose 'mindfully'.

Communicate in person to prevent situations from degenerating. E-mail exchanges are often more abrupt than face-to-face discussions. 'Digital' communication can therefore be more hostile than speaking in person.

Do not become dependent on digital tools, especially as we all need moments of calm and concentration. However, at least acknowledge this dependency if you want to 'mindfully' enjoy a few moments of recreation associated with these tools!



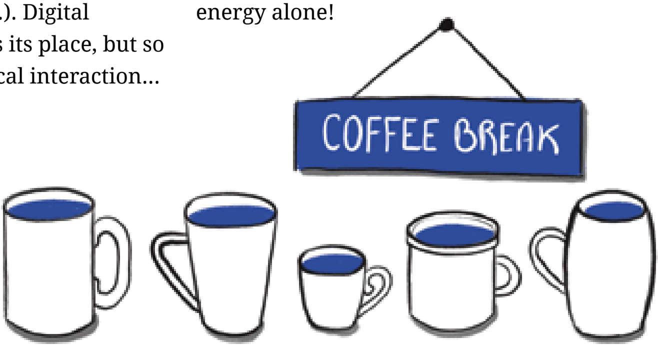
Collective approach

>>> Share your emotions

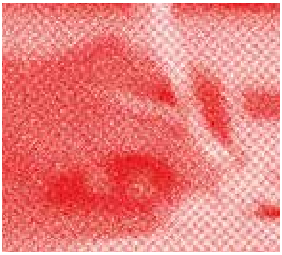
Establish clear and shared priorities – a clear and precise objective improves the cognitive and emotional efficiency of the sorting and selection of information to be incorporated into our reasoning. Under these conditions, decisions become clearer and easier to make.

When possible, keep sharing moments of conviviality and non-virtual discussions with colleagues (informal breaks, etc.). Digital contact has its place, but so does physical interaction...

Share the workload evenly by pooling the available expertise and talents. Digital information circulates quickly; documents can be shared and exchanged rapidly, so why not make the most of everyone's expertise in order to avoid wasting too much time or energy alone!



Negotiating deadlines and remaining in control of the timing of your activities is a guaranteed way to increase your efficiency and emotional comfort. Learn how to put off responding to digital (or other) requests until you feel it is the right time to do so! In this context, management has a very important role to play, particularly in terms of setting an example!



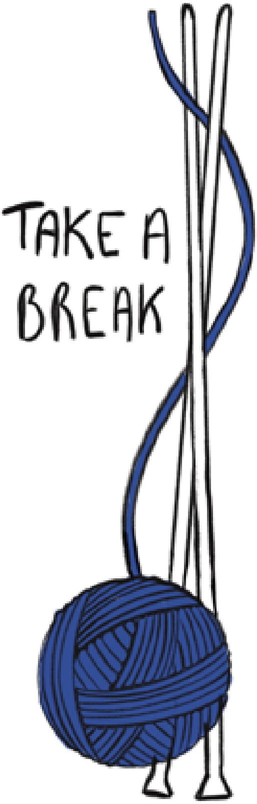
How can digital tools help us?

Relaxation applications

You can relax by taking a break, or by getting away from anything related to digital technology. You could take your book, some knitting, a sudoku book or a pair of dumbbells to work, or you could use digital technology for recreation, but subject to several conditions: you must be aware of enjoying a moment of relaxation, which means that you must have finished any activities you had set for yourself.

However, since relaxation is also an activity, you must not interrupt this interlude at the slightest distraction.

Identify the benefits you expect to gain from your moment of relaxation and choose the activity – or the application – accordingly: there are apps offering immediate rewards (MyMentalTrainingPro), intellectual challenges (Sudoku, 2048), zen aesthetics and meditation (type in ‘zazen’ or ‘mindfulness’ in the Google, Apple or other app stores), fast-paced challenges with an uncluttered atmosphere («Alto» “Dots”, «Atomas», «Crossy roads»), escapism («Color Zen»), or random entertainment (like “Game of Life”). And avoid games with an excessively busy interface, or those with time limits (of the harvesting type: Farm Ville, Clash of Clans, etc.). Giving yourself 15 minutes to relax on social networks is also a solution, provided that you treat it as such: a definite break that you are mindful of, which is clearly distinguished from everything else.



To do list

One of the keys to success in personal organization is identifying tasks and monitoring their accomplishment. There are dozens of ways to do this, and the GTD® (Getting Things Done) method is one of them, enabling you to transform each input into an action, and to associate a type of treatment with it. The Bullet Journal is another way to categorize the actions to be taken.

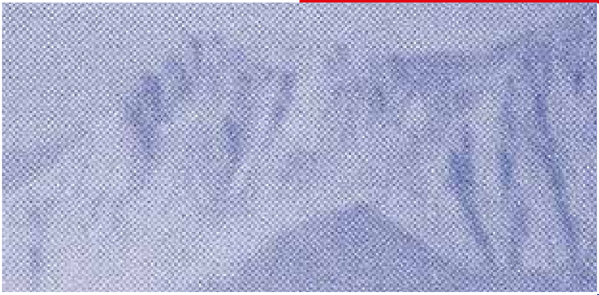
The main thing is to stick with one of these methods (which you will improve as you go along), and take pleasure in marking the task you have just finished as accomplished. To do this, you can strike out, tear up, or throw away what you used as a reminder, but – and this is very important – try to keep track of it: both for your records, and to show you everything you have accomplished during the day, the week, and the month.

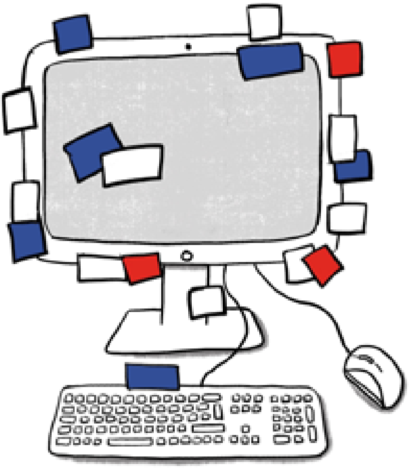
You can adopt/adapt these methods to your own situation: on paper or post-its, with software extensions or mobile applications.

TO DO
Getting Organized
Take
Filter
emails
Getting things done

Automation

The more we delegate tasks to tools, the more we transform processes into habits, and the more useless clutter we can eliminate from our brains.
The path to happiness is through routine: identify recurrent tasks, transform them into automatic reflexes, and use information technology to help you do so. Good email software is full of clever ways to label mails, filter them, and direct them to files or contacts.



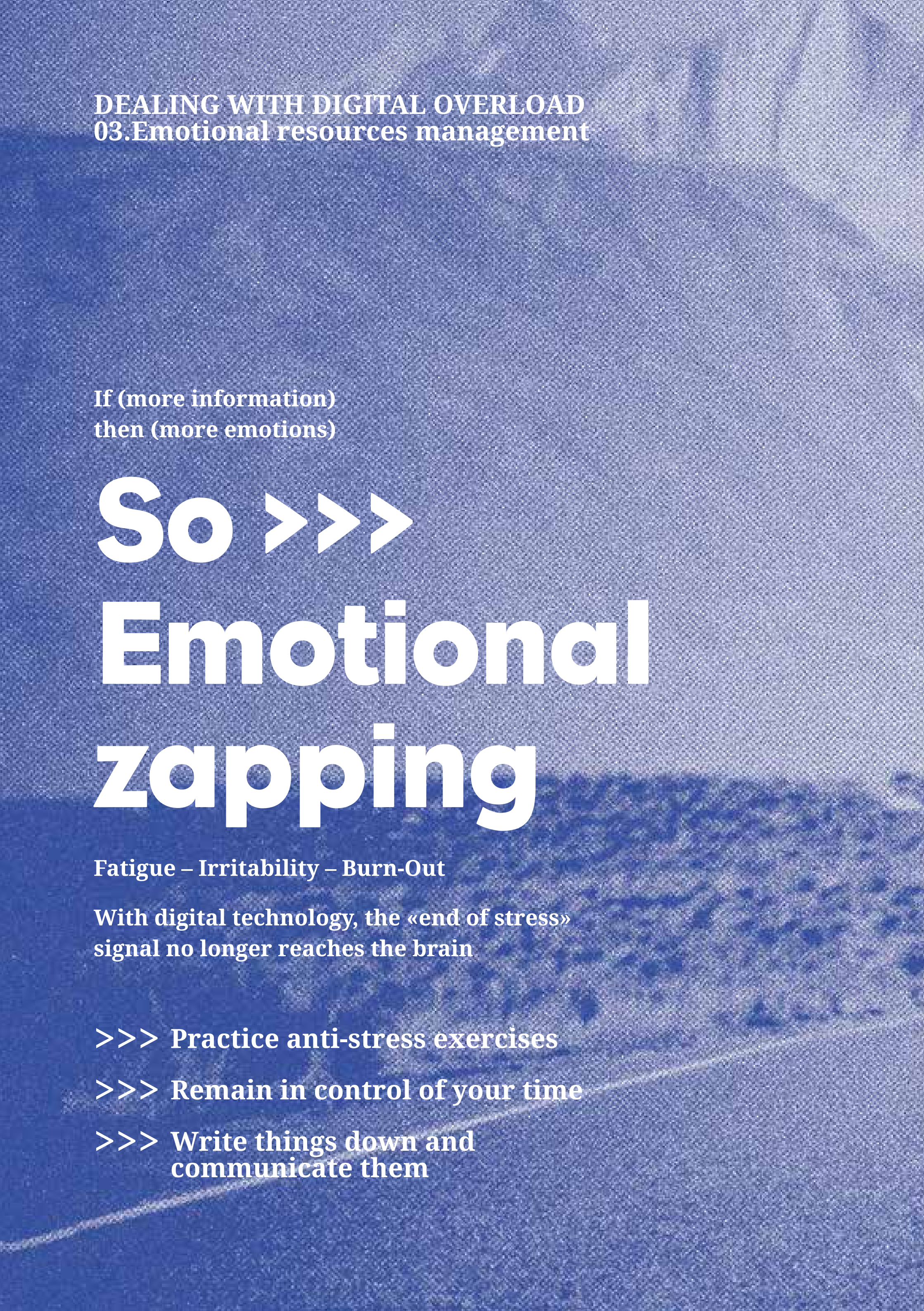


Here are a few examples: got a new contact? Immediately associate him/her with a category, keywords, or a notification priority. Found an interesting web page? You can save it, add keywords, indicate when it should be consulted (with the keyword toread, later, etc.). Received a new email? Filter it, label it, and transform it into an action in the task list.

Focus On...

Understanding stress... which is a normal reaction to changes in our environment. Taking account of these changes produces a state of alarm characterized by an increase in our vigilance which heightens our ability to respond. This state of alarm is then transformed into a state of resistance which allows us to cope with the stimuli in our environment in the most appropriate way. The problem arises when this state of resistance is prolonged, and especially when our brain receives no indication that the stressful episode is over. And this is one of the risks of continuous digital solicitation! So let's learn to value the actions we accomplish to avoid becoming fixated on everything we still have to do!

Step back and adopt a spectator's perspective... in order to re-assess your emotions in a more objective and tranquil manner. When we have experienced an emotionally intense situation, we tend to remain 'stuck' on it and this often prevents us from moving on because the resources used to process this emotional information are no longer available to help us reason and/or move forward. Without seeking to ignore our emotions or their effects on our state of mind, the idea is simply to limit their impact by trying to process them in a more detached manner. A good way to do this is to try replaying the stressful scene in your mind one more time but from a spectator's perspective. This will require you to make slight modifications to the information-processing loops associated with this episode, which as a result, will lose some of its emotional intensity. You can then move on.



DEALING WITH DIGITAL OVERLOAD
03.Emotional resources management

If (more information)
then (more emotions)

So >>> Emotional zapping

Fatigue – Irritability – Burn-Out

With digital technology, the «end of stress» signal no longer reaches the brain

- >>> **Practice anti-stress exercises**
- >>> **Remain in control of your time**
- >>> **Write things down and communicate them**

04

Technical resource management

Focal points

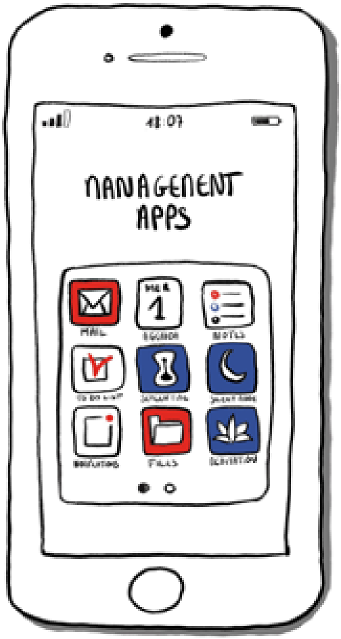
Most digital tools are initially designed to make users' lives easier by allowing for the automation of many tedious and/or repetitive activities.

In this context, they simplify the production and circulation of information... However, in practice, and especially at work, these tools have been introduced and upgraded without anyone ever taking the time to consider how a 'normally constituted' human being would cope with all these technical demands. Which digital tool should you use? When? How can we make it our own, **adapt it to our own ways of working and to our own particular objectives**? We should be asking ourselves all these (excellent) questions before embarking blindly on the use of digital technologies!

In the field..., there are enormous variations in how well these technologies are used.

A given tool may be used wisely, efficiently, and probably comfortably by certain people, whereas colleagues, due to lack of expertise, may waste time and energy on trying to use the same tool in a haphazard manner, sometimes causing risks, stress and, in all cases, losses of productivity. Familiarizing yourself with digital tools and **setting their parameters for a given activity** is therefore extremely important to the smooth running of a company.

What you are saying ... is do I really have to master my IT tools? Yes, otherwise, they will end up mastering you! «I spend time testing new apps; I try them out, I switch apps, I seek out advice, I try to get the best out of the product. If it doesn't work for me, I change and try another one,» explains J., co-founder of an online retail company. «But,» he adds, «once I find a real gem, I stick with it.» **According to the executives interviewed, the best tool is the one that offers the best centralization and customization capacities:** the Google suite seems to be the preferred option (Gmail, Google Calendar). Many entrepreneurs even make the mastery of these management tools a critical staff recruitment criterion. Some of them set tests on software to assess candidates' organizational abilities.

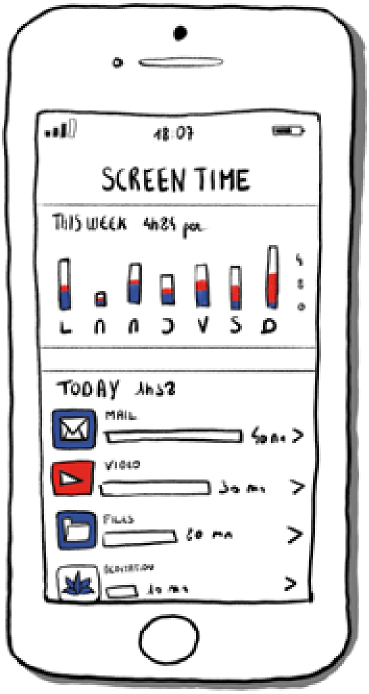


How can we cope?

Reflection

>>> Reflecting on your own mode of practice

Conduct an audit of your own practices and develop an awareness of your strengths and weaknesses in the use of digital tools (see the quiz at the end of this handbook). Consider installing one of the tools that run in the background and produce statistics on digital activities: which software, which sites, which apps? By installing them on all your personal devices (smartphone, personal computer, workstation in the company), and by taking a month or so to monitor your uses, you will develop a pretty clear idea of your relationship with digital technology. Here is one tool among others: RescueTime.


18:07
SCREEN TIME
THIS WEEK 4h24
L
M
M
J
V
S
D
TODAY 1h52
MAIL
VIDEO
30 mn
FILES
20 mn

Optimization of uses

>>> Configuration of your own tools

Choosing tools – The right tool at the right time! Build up your own toolbox (check out our list of software, extensions, and applications at the end of this handbook). Follow a few simple tips: adopt common tools for all your devices, limit their number to what is strictly necessary, and opt for customizable tools with uncluttered interfaces for centralizing activities. If this software is not authorized in your company, negotiate with the IT department: it will be aware of the strategic importance of such practices.

PICK
YOUR
TOOL

Appropriation: At driving school, we are taught to adapt our driving position to suit our morphology: we adjust our seat, the steering wheel, and the mirrors. The same principle applies to the Web: you should adapt your browser before you start surfing. Most of the current browsers integrate an extension platform, some of which now play a vital role. Ad blockers help protect your personal data, but by deleting ads, they also free up space on the web page: our attention is no longer drawn to banners flashing in the corner of the browser (AdBlock, AdBlock Edge, Ghostery, etc.). Other extensions reconfigure the page to improve your reading experience. Finally, depending on the services you use, you can add extensions for to-do lists, favorites, note-taking, etc.

How can digital tools help us?

Test, approve, optimize

To-do lists:

- > RememberTheMilk
- > Wunderlist
- > Todoist
- > Any.do

Note managers

- > Evernote
- > Google Keep
- > Bookmark Manager
- > Diigo, Delicious, Pearltrees

Time segmentations

The Pomodoro® method is based on the idea that 25 minutes is the optimal period for productivity. The first step is to identify the activities to be carried out over the coming day (reflection), and then divide them into 25-minute tasks. The second step is to time yourself (there are legions of timers for iOS, Chrome, Windows, Linux, etc.): every 25 minutes, you take a 5-minute break.

After four 25-minute periods, you take a 25-minute break, and then start again. In the evening, you can count how many «Pomodorii» you have completed… and celebrate your achievements! However, the Pomodoro method does not take account of any interruptions during a timed period…

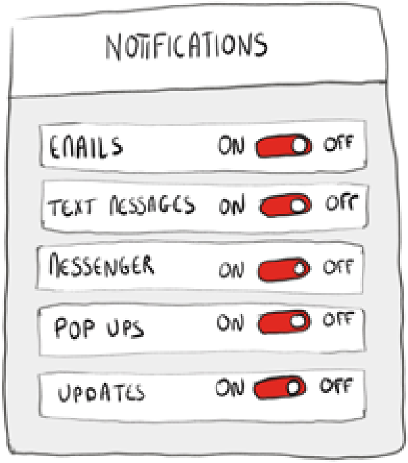
Forest is based on a similar approach. This game is a smartphone app in which you promise not to use your phone. During your ‘absence’, a tree grows. If you turn on your device before your set time, the tree dies. Success is rewarded with first one tree, then two, etc… The goal of the game is to have the densest forest.

TIMER
25:00
45:33
LEFT

Notification blocks cause distractions

In their latest versions, operating systems (for computers or smartphones) and browsers feature increasingly active notification centers. Messages suddenly appear – in the form of pop-ups, notification blocks, or other types of visual effects – to inform you about antivirus updates, world news, social media notifications, commercial solicitations, or unread message pop-ups.

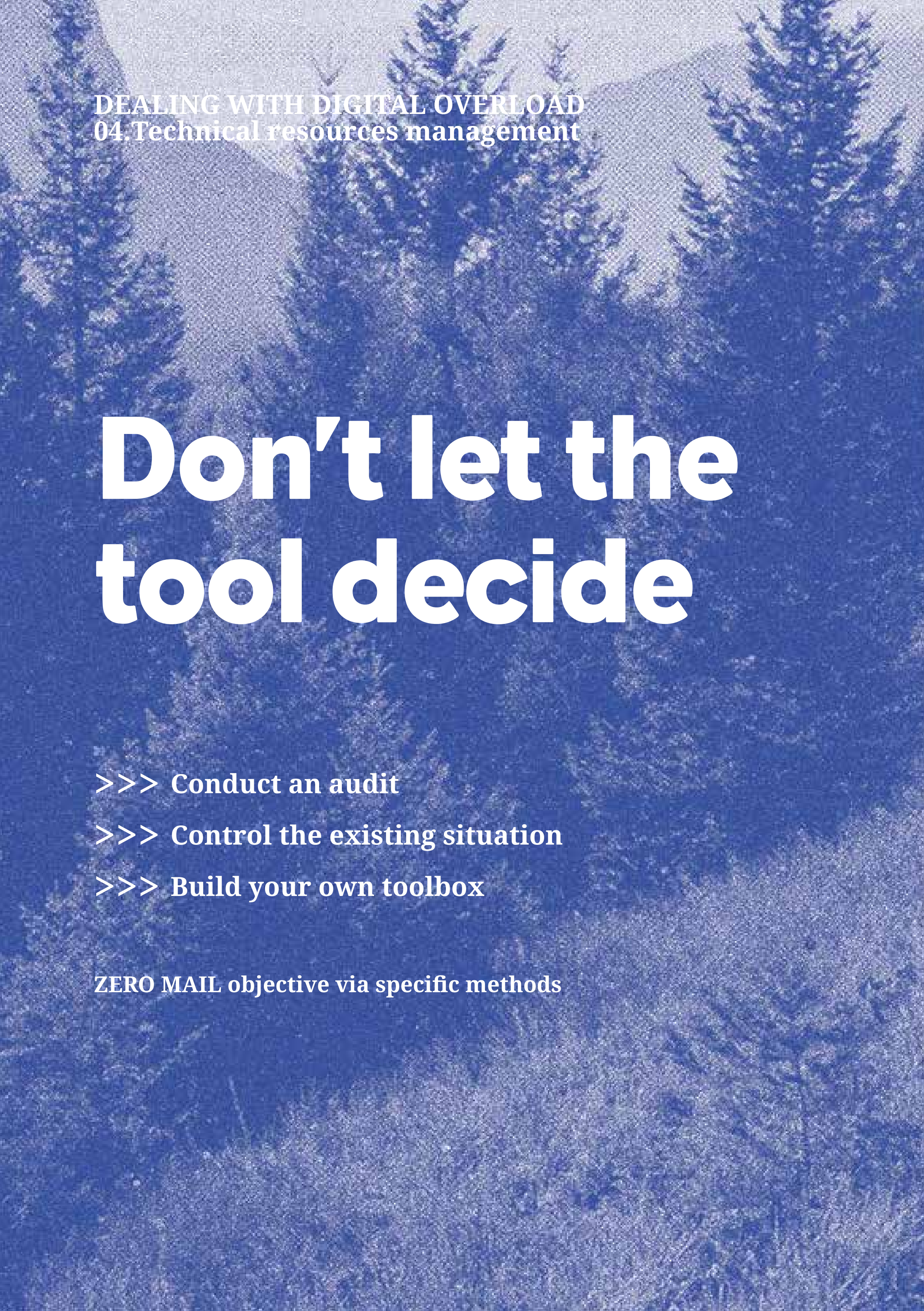
All these messages disrupt our attention: when immersed in an activity, these sudden intrusions plunge us into a different context, and it can be difficult to ignore them and return to our previous activity. However, you can take control of notification centers: in the settings and on the Web, you can find ways to shut down these systems completely or partially.


NOTIFICATIONS
EMAILS ON OFF
TEXT MESSAGES ON OFF
MESSENGER ON OFF
POP UPS ON OFF
UPDATES ON OFF

Focus On...

The zero-email target: how many emails do you receive per day? How many of them are really important, and create real added value? How many lead to concrete actions? Or are a waste of time? How many of them do you answer? Within what period of time? Are any unopened emails left in your inbox in the evening? Our interviews and the findings of several similar surveys have enabled us to identify a sure-fire productivity lever: learning how to manage and empty your inbox. The zero-email objective allows us to de-clutter our line of activity: quick responses are favored, delegation is embraced, messages are archived and easily accessible. Instructions for use.
Diagnosis: Google Mail users can try out an add-on service that provides inbound/outbound and message-processing statistics (Gmail Meter).
Implementation: Aware of the productivity problems generated by excessive numbers of emails, Google provides an alternative version of Gmail, focused on the Zero Mail objective: inbox.google.com/. The Sortd extension can also transform Gmail using the GTD method.

Should you adopt the Google suite? There is no denying it, the tools offered by Google are effective. It is up to you and your organization to decide whether it is expedient to entrust your workflow to a foreign firm that already has a monopoly in many digital fields. This question also applies to Microsoft and Outlook. Having said that, we advise you to take a closer look at the many advantages of the Mail service: automatic filter to the folder tree, very good anti-spam engine, customizable labels, and inbox. Therefore, by combining spaces and labels, you can transform your inbox into a to-do list. Extensions to improve Gmail or Inox are available for both Chrome and Firefox, in line with the Zero Mail or GTD principle.



Don't let the tool decide

>>> Conduct an audit

>>> Control the existing situation

>>> Build your own toolbox

ZERO MAIL objective via specific methods

05

Volume & flow management

Focal points

Managing the flows of information disseminated – and especially received – by the various digital channels available to individuals, combined with the management of cognitive resources, is the major difficulty associated with the use of digital tools.

The main risk is of being completely overwhelmed by the amount of information to be processed, which triggers a reactive mode of behavior that reduces cognitive performance and heightens the feeling of being unable to cope. Whenever possible, preference must therefore be given to adopting proactive behaviors which basically consist in **seeking the right information at the right time.** Finally, the amount of information received should not be confused with its relevance and the degree of analysis that it requires. Indeed, digital tools tend to put all data on an equal footing, irrespective of their importance or urgency and whether they have a purely informative role or require a long and complex response from us. Once again, learning how to set aside peaceful moments to facilitate the processing of complex information under optimal conditions is guaranteed to improve your efficiency.

In the field..., while some people suffer from being seemingly almost permanently ‘swamped’ by vast and almost uninterrupted information flows, others feel excluded and depreciated by any reduction in these flows that could cause them to question their importance at the heart of things…
In these circumstances, social networks and the different notifications provided by digital tools allow them to fill a ‘void’. But beware! This can soon become very invasive when the pace of ‘useful’ information picks up again! **The ability to prioritize and make choices ‘mindfully’ is particularly useful.**

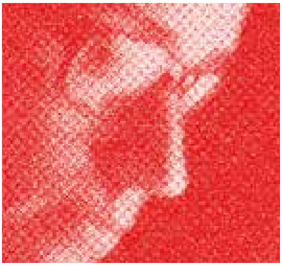
What you are saying … is that in order to cope under the best possible conditions, it is possible to compartmentalize activities and, in particular, to assign a specific ‘digital channel’ to a particular type of contact person. Text messages for family, email for colleagues, and phone calls for clients.

B. has turned his home into a digital communications agency: «When my son, on the other side of my office door, wants to talk to me, he texts me. I answer him when I’ve finished my work. We’ve put this system in place, and it works. And with my clients, it’s the same: they are always in a hurry, but I’ve decided to take my time answering them. And I explain to them – I even teach them – not to be in a hurry, to learn how to wait, and to put the pressure they are exerting into perspective.»

How can we cope?

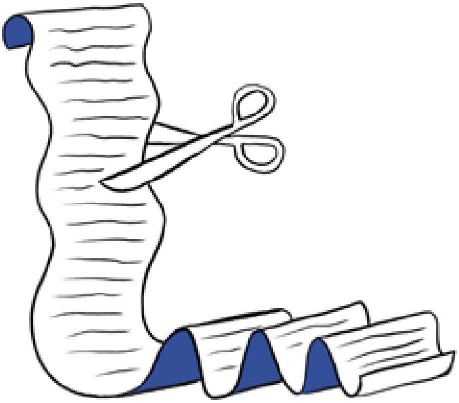
Production

>>> Limit yourself



Control the quality of information disseminated, and check that what you are seeking to disseminate is of interest to all your recipients. If not, resist the urge to send it! Putting people in 'copy' is the typical example of this practice. Do messages sent 'for information only' really have a chance of being processed correctly, or are they only sent to cover yourself and avoid being blamed for anything afterwards?

Be reasonable! Of course it is important to feel at the heart of things, and to be in tune with your colleagues… but producing information for its own sake has its specific drawbacks, including the tendency to tire out your contacts. In short, preference should be given to brief and clearly structured messages rather than lengthy texts, which should be reserved for tools other than emails and/or professional exchanges.



Is this the right time? Important information can go unnoticed if it is not disseminated at the right time or through the right channels. What is my contact's preferred means of communication? When can I reach him/her easily? These are just two of the questions you should ask yourself before pressing 'Send'! And these are questions that you should put to your contacts in advance.

The amount of information received should not be confused with its relevance and the degree of analysis that it requires.

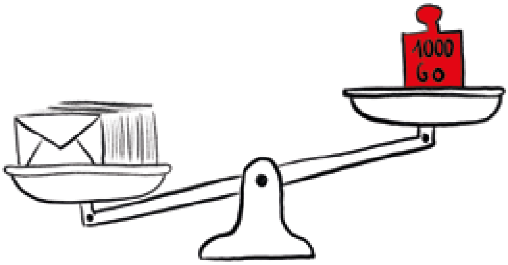
Reception

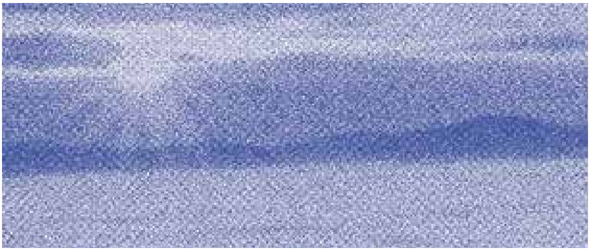
>>> Do not rush

Asynchronous nature = just because information flows never stop does not mean that we should be constantly monitoring them. On the contrary, the fact that the information is stored by our messaging systems, for example, should give us time to reflect, and the ability to choose what we consider to be the most appropriate time.

Banish 'push' notifications... the world is unlikely to stop turning if you don't respond immediately! And don't make a rod for your own back by accepting automatic notifications associated with your applications (see the section on controlling your tools)!

Don't judge information by the volume received. Indeed, regardless of the distraction that its arrival causes, the quantity of information received is not necessarily representative of the quantity of information to be processed. Sorting through it quickly is sometimes a simple way to make life easier.





Avoid spreading yourself too thinly, by setting aside time slots for processing and retrieving specific types of information. Reserve one time slot for customers, another for in-house administration, etc.

Focus On...

The foolproof way to receive less email ... is to simply send less! It may be obvious, but it works! The biggest recipients of emails (including those who suffer terribly from them!) are the people who send the most! The ratio is generally 1:1, i.e. one email sent = 1 email received. So let's start by taking responsibility for ourselves as transmitters of information before blaming our messaging tools, which in the end only send what we want them to!

Professional life / personal life... learning to turn off in the evenings and weekends, or more precisely at times when you have decided to devote yourself to something other than work, is an effective way to avoid feeling swamped by digital information. To take this a step further, and especially in the context of managerial relationships, check the times when you disseminate information. Of course, digital tools allow us to work anywhere and at any time, but receiving information during periods reserved for rest can be perceived as being put under pressure by employees, even when this is absolutely not the manager's intention. Therefore, choose convenient times (Monday mornings, for example) for sending messages that you may have written at the weekend. If necessary, explain that anything you may send at weekends does not require a response from employees during their rest periods.

The less I send, the less I receive

>>> Eliminate push notifications

>>> Opt for the asynchronous mode

>>> Associate a contact person with a specific means of communication

06

Relationship management

Focal points

In the context of an institution in general, or a particular company, the question of how to manage digital demands cannot be resolved solely at the individual level.

While individuals can establish rules of best practice – including those proposed in this document – at their own level, for themselves and their direct contacts, they cannot decide everything! Individuals are dependent on the context in which they operate, and on the sometimes-implicit rules that govern the quality and quantity of the interactions they are supposed to maintain with their digital environment.

Whatever the situation, a common risk is failing to **make the rules governing the use of digital tools sufficiently clear,** and letting individuals impose their own constraints concerning the exhaustiveness of processing, response times, etc., which will be detrimental to performance in the long term.

In teleworking situations, making your rules for working at home very clear to other family members also fosters a more tranquil atmosphere and a more satisfying teleworking experience.

In the field, the rules are not very clearly defined. Consequently, by default, a manager's message will almost always be treated as information that is both urgent and important, when quite often, in fact, it is neither.

The 'boss' will frequently be simply seeking to inform, and the information will be disseminated without any particular expectations regarding the employees' performance of the task in question… In this situation, the idea of managers setting an example is particularly important, to facilitate the sorting of the available information and reduce risks of digital overload.

What you are saying … is that deadlines and pressure can also be imposed by factors outside the company. In the case of service companies, in particular, there is a feeling of being obliged to accommodate the client’s requirements.

Nevertheless, like your family and staff, you can educate your clients and managers, and establish a set of best practices.

As always, the easiest way to do this is to **clarify how everyone will operate and negotiate ways of communicating collectively.** Managers of large and small firms in the public and private sectors have reported using a similar method: organizing meetings in which each team member describes how he or she operates. This person works in the evening, so do not be surprised if you get emails from her after midnight. That person is an early riser: he always answers early in the morning. In both cases, once they have been clarified, these habits and preferences are no longer perceived as manifestations of overzealousness but rather as modes of personal, and often family-oriented organization. One employee says that she loves email while another one hates it: he prefers text messages. Yet another admits that in his former job, his colleagues exchanged via Facebook Messenger, and he finds it convenient. Another shares useful tips she uses in Outlook. In the end, everyone learns how to communicate with the rest of the team. **A charter can be implemented, in which teams can sometimes agree on their working times, channels and methods.** An editorial charter may also be produced for email headings: «for information», «to be read later», «genuinely urgent», for «X or Y».

How can we cope?

Standards

>>> Clarify

Adapt: start by assuming that no two human brains function in exactly the same manner, and then work on the principle that a human brain does not function in the same way, nor at the same pace, as a computer! Any desire to model our ways of working on machines would therefore be illusory! On the other hand, the opposite is possible :)

Efficiency slots: digital tools disseminate and sometimes produce information continuously, but we are not available around the clock! And when we are available, we are not always efficient! The beauty of digital tools is that they give us access to the information we need at times when we can efficiently use it, even when these times fall well outside our 'official' working times. The danger stems from thinking that we can and should always be efficient. The management of working time must therefore be adapted to preserve the flexibility of digital technology while counteracting its invasive tendencies!

At home, rules must also apply to different family members. If you have young children, why not ask them to help write the «Family Teleworking Rules», or make «Do not disturb», «Video conference in progress», «Available if needed», or «It's break time!» signs, for example?

SILENT MODE

Individual adaptation: the rules must therefore establish a framework but accommodate specific ways of working.

Limits should be set on the dissemination of information in order to minimize this invasiveness, but not on production, in order to allow individuals to keep working at their times of optimal efficiency. This improves employees' productivity by enabling them to accomplish their tasks at the best times in terms of their concentration.

Management

>>> Notion of exemplarity

Notion of time frames: information produced during periods that do not coincide with employees' periods of availability should be sent at a later time or date.

Trust people and use all the 'powers' of digital tools to foster individual autonomy within the firm. Accept that people work elsewhere and at different times, outside those that give an illusory feeling of control over their productivity!

Ask employees to commit to objectives but not to a predetermined way of achieving them (time spent, working hours, etc.)

Be confident in your organizational ability to meet the demands, and be willing to ask for help and support when success is not forthcoming.

Be aware of what you are doing at any given time (mindfulness). The management structure must set aside times for reflection and analysis or online availability. In return, managers must accept that employees are not constantly available to respond to their solicitations (delays in answering emails, text messages, etc.)

Beware of perceived harassment: information disseminated by the line management is generally associated with a higher-than-normal emotional (or at least attentional) burden. Its processing therefore takes a greater toll on employees and can easily be perceived as invasive even when it is produced without any ill intent.

At home too, parents can set an example and turn off their phones when spending time with their children, at the family table, or in the evening. When teleworking, a people-oriented approach to household management is essential!

How can digital tools help us?

Filtering social networks.

The managers interviewed, irrespective of their position, are experienced LinkedIn users. This network, like others, proposes newsletters based on personal links and newsgroup memberships. Users can choose the exact frequency at which the web service sends them summaries. The same goes for Google Alerts, Medium, TheConversation or Twitter Essentials.

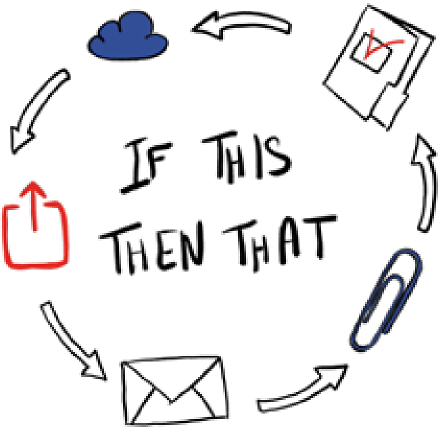
On networks such as Facebook and Twitter, precise settings can be used to prioritize accounts: with or without notification, with or without retweets. We must learn how to clean up our timelines on these media. And what's more, we can do this tactfully, without breaking our personal ties.

Automation between web services.

Automation between web services. IFTTT – «if this then that» – was the first strategy of this kind: if such and such an event is happening on the Web, then I get such and such a task done. This system has been grafted onto a number of web services (Cloud, news, social networks, connected objects, CRM, marketplace, etc.), and interconnects them: an attachment in an email? Saved to the Cloud.

A new subscriber? Automatic transmission of welcome messages. With Flow, Microsoft also proposes to automate certain information flows within organizations. Some start-ups adopt dynamic automation strategies based on the Slack platform. However, it is important to follow the advice we have given before: is such automation relevant? Will it become inconvenient for me or one of my staff?

Will it be beneficial for me to adopt it to such an extent? And for my company's economy to become dependent upon it? As ever, it is a question of using digital technology rationally.

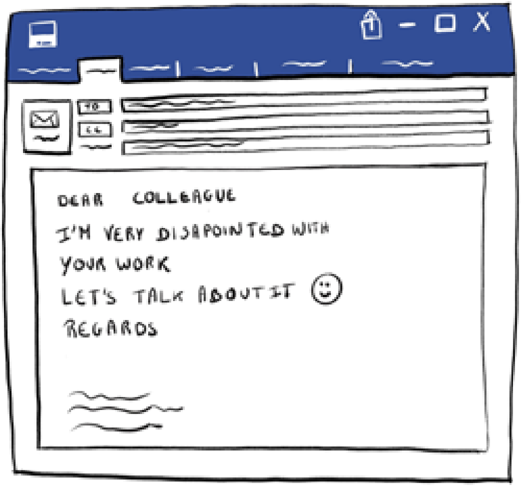


Putting a :) into emails.

Putting a :) into emails. As we have mentioned, you need to take time with your responses and take advantage of the asynchronous nature of certain digital tools (in Gmail, the Boomerang extension allows people who work outside conventional hours to set the time they want to send an email). You are unaware of the context – especially the emotional context – in which the message you are reading was composed.

Similarly, your correspondent will be unaware of your state of mind. As always in communication, what matters is the reader's interpretation, and the risks of misunderstanding a sentence or a word. Although we cannot eliminate all risks of misinterpretation, we can put our emails into context.

With your team, you may choose to mention, in the body of the message, where and when you are writing, and the mood you are in (if you are grumpy, a smiley can minimize any negative effects). In short, clarify the conditions in which your messages are produced and will be received.

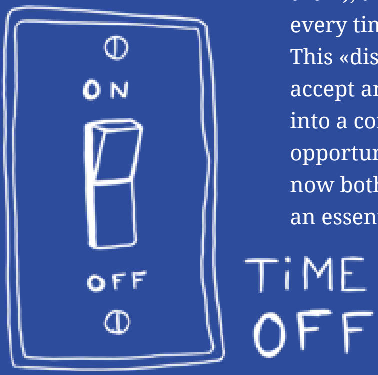


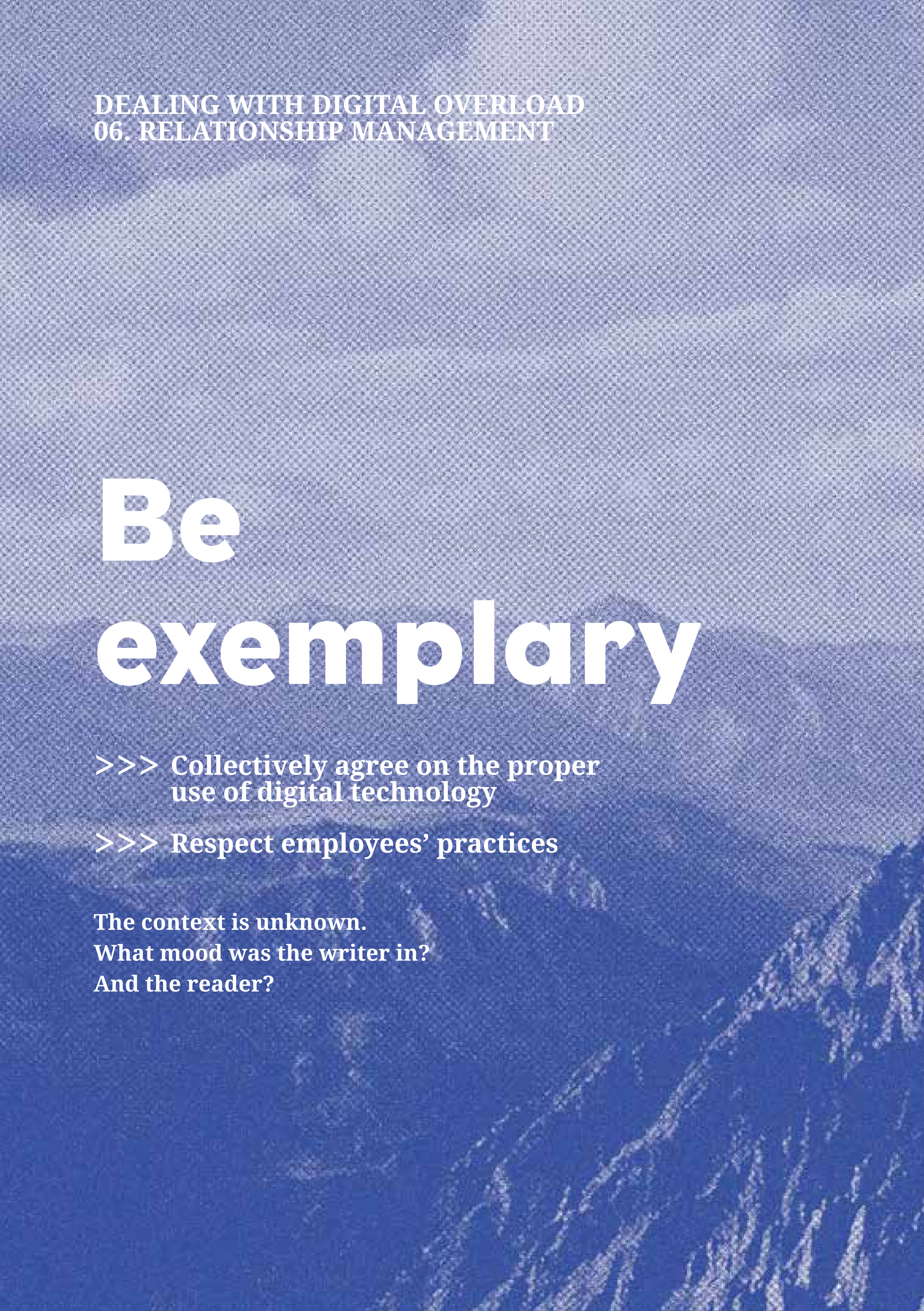
DEAR COLLEAGUE
I'M VERY DISAPPOINTED WITH
YOUR WORK
LET'S TALK ABOUT IT ☺
REGARDS

Focus On…

Admitting to your dependency on digital technology… (not being fooled). Admit that you cannot live without it. Do not try to fight it.

When private information enters the professional sphere. And vice versa. It is illusory to believe that employees leave their personal problems outside their workplace, and that they do not take their professional concerns home with them. The same applies to political or societal issues: we talk about them both in the workplace and at home, just as we may talk about children when at work, or about our colleagues – some of them friends – to our families. Our minds are preoccupied with current activities: business projects, our loved ones' health, our holidays, or upcoming deadlines. We pay attention to all these things, sometimes in spite of the context. Not everyone is capable of compartmentalizing their fields of activity, and not all of the activities we carry out on a daily basis allow for this type of compartmentalization. In this respect, digital technology acts as a precipitate: it allows us to stay in touch with those who do not share the same context and to whom we want to pay our attention (at the risk of disturbing them), and at the same time it introduces disruptions every time someone close to us comes to our attention. This «dispersion regime» is a social fact that we must accept and assimilate: a shortcoming that can be turned into a competency, a dependency that can become an opportunity. The ability to deal with these interruptions is now both a professional and a personal competency, and an essential skill in a teleworking context.





Be exemplary

- >>> **Collectively agree on the proper use of digital technology**
- >>> **Respect employees’ practices**

**The context is unknown.
What mood was the writer in?
And the reader?**

Quiz: my relationship with digital technology

Me and my everyday digital environment

In my daily work environment, I sometimes have the opportunity to isolate myself

In my daily work environment, I am constantly interacting.

In my daily work environment, I have easy access to a quiet place to be alone.

On a typical day, my average uninterrupted work sequence lasts about 1 to 2 hours.

On a typical day, I don't really have an uninterrupted work sequence.

During my workday, I can take recreational breaks during my formal breaks.

There are no agreed conventions on the use of digital technologies in my company.

I sometimes receive too many requests to manage at the same time.

I generally feel comfortable handling all the requests that come my way.

I have to stay connected all the time to avoid missing anything.

There are no agreed conventions on the use of digital technologies in my company.

I always feel like I can't handle the volume of information I have to process.

In my work environment, I am able to manage my digital environment as I wish.

On a typical day, my average uninterrupted work sequence lasts about 30 minutes (between 15 and 45 min).

I can switch off outside of my work time.

In my work environment, organizational constraints require me to follow procedures that do not necessarily suit me.

I can easily switch off when I decide to do so.

It is hard to take recreational breaks during my workday.

There are no agreed conventions on the use of digital technologies in my company.

In my work environment, organizational constraints require me to follow procedures for everyone's benefit.

I can take recreational breaks when I need them during my workday.

Results

If your answers are mostly blue

>>> virtuous practices.

You seem to have taken stock of the risks linked to digital overload and you manage quite easily to set aside sufficiently long and frequent periods of concentration.
A calm and serene environment may also give you long moments of tranquility which are conducive to reflection and in-depth work.
In any case, to maintain your intellectual efficiency, keep up these good practices and continue to choose when you are exposed to digital information!

If your answers are mostly grey

>>> practices requiring adaptation.

Your feeling of control over digital information seems to depend on the context in which you operate. You sometimes manage to set aside periods without too many digital demands, which help keep you focused, while at other times, you feeal that imposed constraints prevent you from organizing your time as you see fit!
Under these conditions, the constraints linked to the organization of your professional activity or to your own way of working expose you to excessive amounts of information. Digital tools become invasive and probably make you feel like you are lagging behind.
To restore your intellectual comfort and efficiency in all situations, start by asking yourself about the differences between phases of work in which you have satisfactory control over the information to be processed, and phases in which information poses you more problems.
In any case, assume that to be comfortable in the digital world, it is essential for you to ‘create’ interruption-free moments for yourself. At work, the ideal situation is to set aside 25 minutes of peace in which you can make take care of key issues. During this time, you should switch off all potential sources of stimulation: email, text messages, social networks, etc.
Between each period of intense concentration, reward yourself with a regenerating, five-minute break and plan times during the day dedicated to retrieving the digital information you require for your work (e.g. 3 or 4 email collections).

If your answers are mostly red

>>> practices requiring in-depth modification

Constraints linked to the organization of your professional activity or to your own ways of working expose you almost constantly to excessive amounts of information. Far from seeing digital tools as an aid, you find some of them threatening because they interrupt your daily activities with untimely interruptions that prevent you from concentrating properly. You may also feel that you are always lagging behind in your work due to the rapid and unlimited accumulation of digital data.
If you feel this way, here are a few strategies to help you master certain aspects of your digital tools, regain control, and become more efficient in your various activities.
The first thing to do is admit that you can no longer process digital information exhaustively. The quantity of data in circulation and the speed of their transmission are far beyond the processing capacity of the human brain, especially in terms of its ability to manage several items of information simultaneously!
Next, work on the principle that in order to be efficient, you must absolutely ‘create’ interruption-free moments. At work, the ideal situation is to set aside 25 minutes of peace in which you can take care of key issues. During this time, you should switch off all potential sources of stimulation: email, text messages, social networks, etc. If this duration seems totally unrealistic, start off more modestly with periods of 5/10 minutes, which you can gradually increase.
Between each period of intense concentration, reward yourself with a regenerating break (between 2 and 5 min according to the duration of your allotted concentration time), and plan times during the day dedicated to retrieving the digital information you require for your work (e.g. 3 or 4 email collections).

To help you

List of digital tools

Mail

Based on Google Mail

Inbox settings, Software overlay

- sortd, inbox

Statistics

- Gmail Report

Other software overlays

- SaneBox
  www.sanebox.com
- Mailstrom
  mailstrom.co
- Boomerang: allows to delay the sending of mails (Gmail, Outlook)
  www.baydin.com

Browers

Chrome

Extensions

- StayFocusd, reduces time spent on unnecessary sites
  chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/stayfocusd/laankejkbhbdhmipfmgcngdelahlfoji?hl=fr
- NoMoreTabs, allows you to limit the number of tabs simultaneously open in your browser

Firefox

Settings

- Notifications
- Reading mode

Extensions

- LeechBlock, customizable blacklist of time-consuming sites
  addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/leechblock/

Ad blockers

In addition to protecting your personal data, ad blockers allow web pages to load faster and banish all advertising space from the page, for disruption-free web viewing.

- AdBlock Plus, uBlock Origin, AdBlock Edge

Password manager

- Dashlane
- KeePass
- LastPass

Tasks management

To do list

- Todoist
- Wunderlist
- RememberTheMilk
- Google Keep
- Any.do
- TickTick

GTD Method

Pomodoro Method

Numerous applications and extensions are available for all systems.

- The official website pomodorotechnique.com/
- The entry fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technique_Pomodoro

Other methods and applications

Social networks

Notifications

Other applications

Screen and window management

- MinimOther
- Tiling Window Manager

Distraction-free

- Focus, heyfocus.com (Mac)
- Freedom, freedom.to (IOS, Mac, Win)
- Text editors in distraction-free mode (optimized notepad, no interface): Q10, FocusWriter

Airplane mode

- SelfControl, selfcontrolapp.com/ (mac)

Coach

- Mind the time: the time spent on a page or a website is shown in a tab, addons.mozilla.org/fr/firefox/addon/mind-the-time/
- RescueTime: provides statistics on digital routines (Win, Mac, Linux, Android, Chrome, Firefox)
- TimeSink: provides statistics on routine digital tasks, manytricks.com/timesink/ (mac)
- BeLimitLess (Chrome): provides statistics and goals for your routine digital tasks.
- TimeWarp (Chrome): an anti-procrastination tool, chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/timewarp/mmmhadpnjmok-jbmgamifipkjddhlfkhi

Other

- Forest: a «game» in which you manage a forest. A tree only grows if you abstain from using your smartphone, www.forestapp.cc/ (iOS, Android, Windows Phone, Firefox, Chrome)
- Zencast and meditation timer audiodharma.org/series/213/talk/2908/

Quiz: Digital tool audit

What do people use digital technologies for?

>>> Install RescueTime on all your compatible devices, define activities according to how productive you consider them to be, and keep working as normal: at the end of the day (week, month), you'll see a breakdown of how your digital time is spent.

>>> Install GMail Meter (or Bells&Whistles for Outlook – fee charged) and monitor your incoming/outgoing email statistics.

Digital activity statistics

☐ I can't or don't know how to

☐ I'm struggling

☐ I've done it

Web navigation

>>> Is your web navigation optimized?
>>> Are you in control of your browser?
>>> Do you know how to install extensions?
>>> How many browsers do you use?

Adopt the comfort reading mode

☐ I can't or don't know how to

☐ I'm struggling

☐ I've done it

Protect your personal data, and your bandwidth: install an ad blocker

☐ I can't or don't know how to

☐ I'm struggling

☐ I've done it

Not forgetting security issues...

>>> How many passwords do you use per day?

Free up your memory by entrusting authentication to a secure management tool

☐ I can’t or don’t know how to

☐ I’m struggling

☐ I’ve done it

Checking subscriptions, notifications and contacts

>>> When was the last time you updated your address book on your various socio-digital networks and in your Contacts app? Do you read all the newsletters you subscribe to?

Check your subscriptions

☐ I can’t or don’t know how to

☐ I’m struggling

☐ I’ve done it

Categorize your contacts

☐ I can’t or don’t know how to

☐ I’m struggling

☐ I’ve done it

Check your notification settings

☐ I can’t or don’t know how to

☐ I’m struggling

☐ I’ve done it

E-mails

>>> Do you end the day with a completely empty mailbox?

>>> What are your incoming/outgoing, and important/unnecessary email ratios?

Filter your incoming emails (keywords, redirection, etc...)

☐ I can't or don't know how to

☐ I'm struggling

☐ I've done it

Transform your emails into actions

☐ I can't or don't know how to

☐ I'm struggling

☐ I've done it

Manage your daily to-do list

☐ I can't or don't know how to

☐ I'm struggling

☐ I've done it

Results

If you've done it

>>> virtuous practices

By carefully considering their features and defining rules for their use, you are in control of your digital tools. You therefore take sufficient time to learn how to set up your tools in order to get the most out of them. You sometimes go so far as to consider the most appropriate ways to exchange information via your communication tools. When shared with your entourage, this facilitates your management of digital information.

If you're struggling

flexible practice

Your degree of control over digital tools seems to depend on both the tools concerned and the context in which you use them. In other words, any rules for their use and best practices that you manage to implement may become unworkable under stressful or emergency conditions.
In this situation, you resort to using the basic functions of your digital tools without bothering to set them up to make your life easier. You could therefore save time and energy by making your best practices standard procedure, and by extending your reflection to include exchanges and collective uses of digital tools with your contacts. The goal is to define shared rules for structuring information in order to save time on its processing, especially during periods of intense activity.

If you can't or don't know how to

>>> practices in need of improvement

You have probably never really taken the time to check out the hidden features of your digital tools. Although you master the basic functions sufficiently well to use them efficiently on a routine basis, busier periods will certainly cause you to adopt an emergency management mode which may give you the impression of expending considerable energy on chasing after information in a somewhat inefficient manner.
You should therefore learn how to step back and dispel this sense of urgency, especially when you are being overwhelmed by information flows. The fact that digital data arrives quickly does not mean that it is always urgent! Regain control, and take responsibility for your actions as a sender. The more information you send, the more you will receive, so be reasonable and choose what you send and to whom you send it very carefully!

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Gaël Allain holds a PhD in Cognitive Psychology. He specializes in mental ecology and the management of cognitive skills.
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As a research fellow for the Chair of «Talents in Digital Transformation» at Grenoble Ecole de Management (GEM), Gaël Allain conducts research on digital overload in companies. Gaël Allain is the author of practical books on cognitive resource management: «Penser mieux, Travailler moins» («Think Better, Work Less») and «Je retiens ce que je veux quand je veux» («I Choose Remember What I Want When I Want»), published by Eyrolles. In December 2015, Gaël Allain founded and assumed the scientific leadership of a start-up called «My Mental Energy Pro».

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Caroline Cuny holds a PhD in Cognitive Psychology. She is a professor at Grenoble Ecole de Management and a research fellow for the Chairs of «Digital Organization and Society» and «Economic Peace». After conducting fundamental research in the field of cognition, she worked for an American multinational (consumer goods) for three years before returning to a teaching and research career at Grenoble Ecole de Management. Her research focuses on human psychology in consumption and occupational situations. She is a specialist in implicit (non-conscious) and psycho-physiological measurements of behavior (eye-tracking, consumer neuroscience). Her research has been published in Information & Management, Marketing Letters, Psychology & Marketing, and the Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology.

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Aurélia Dumas holds a PhD in Information and Communication Sciences from the Research Group on Communication Issues (GRESEC) at the Université Grenoble Alpes. She studies mobilization and emotional regulation mechanisms in organizational management, and more specifically in the occupational health promotion, prevention, and safety field. She teaches at IUT2 in Grenoble, France, where she focuses on organizational and professional communication.

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Fabienne Martin-Juchat

Fabienne Martin-Juchat is a University Professor of Information and Communication Sciences at the Université Grenoble Alpes, where she is a member of the Research Group on Communication Issues (GRESEC). She is also the coordinator for the promotion of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) on the university's presidential team. Fabienne Martin-Juchat studies practices with a view to proposing a framework for devising new modes of physical and affective cooperation in relationships with technology. She designs innovative systems to enable communities to co-produce new knowledge, and is particularly interested in the conditions for knowledge transfer between HSS researchers and actors in the socio-economic world.

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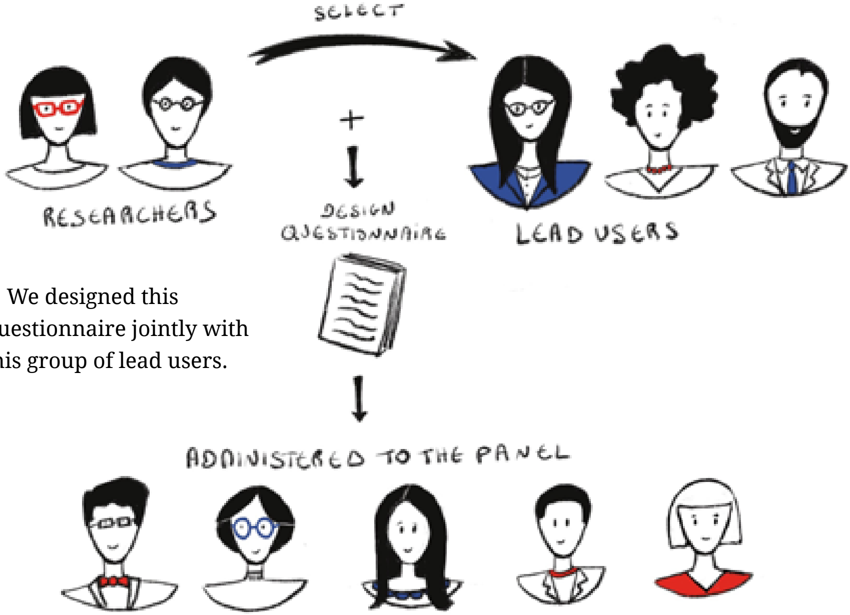
Julien Pierre

Julien Pierre is a Research Professor of Information and Communication Sciences. He is a member of the committee of experts associated with the Chair since its creation. He is a former doctoral student of Fabienne Martin-Juchat, and has also taught at GEM and Grenoble Alpes University. Julien Pierre is currently an Associate Professor at Audencia Business School (Nantes); his main research field concerns the relationship between emotions and digital technologies. He is also working on the roll-out of methods to help companies address future problems.

Methodology

Interview methodology

1, Through our network, we identified people with several assets (lead users) who possess a high level of responsibility (business creators), deal with high-intensity information flows, adopt a highly disciplined approach to the management of these flows, and reflect upon their practices and the key aspects of our problem.



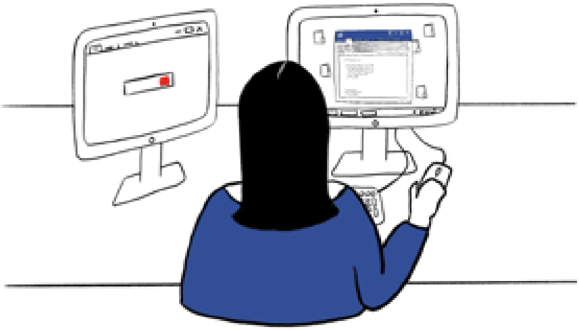
2, We designed this questionnaire jointly with this group of lead users.

3, We used it as the basis for the interviews with our panels (consultants, start-up founders, top managers in SMEs, intermediate-sized enterprises, major groups, and senior civil servants)

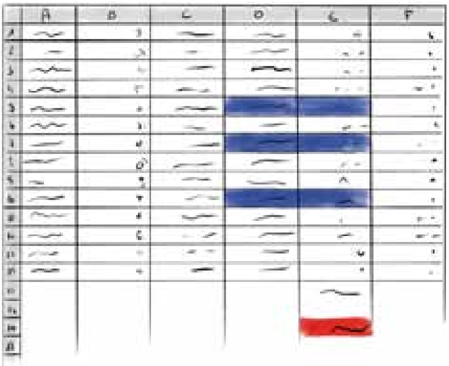
In the end, we administered this questionnaire to 29 workers in situations of digital overload and sought to understand how they dealt with it.

Dual-task measurement methodology

The measurements of occupational overload were carried out directly at the participants' workplaces, with data collected over a period of approximately one hour. The subjects were instructed to carry out their main activity and assign it the highest priority. In addition, they were asked to perform a secondary task that involved moving an orange cursor slowly away from the center of the screen to the left or right.



The researchers noted the exact times of the participants' activities and the interruptions they suffered, and automatically recorded the movements and repositioning of the cursor on the computer The measurement of the level of overload was therefore represented by the frequency and delay in repositioning the cursor in the middle of the screen (secondary task) according to the phases of activity observed (main task).



Notes

GRENOBLE ECOLE DE MANAGEMENT

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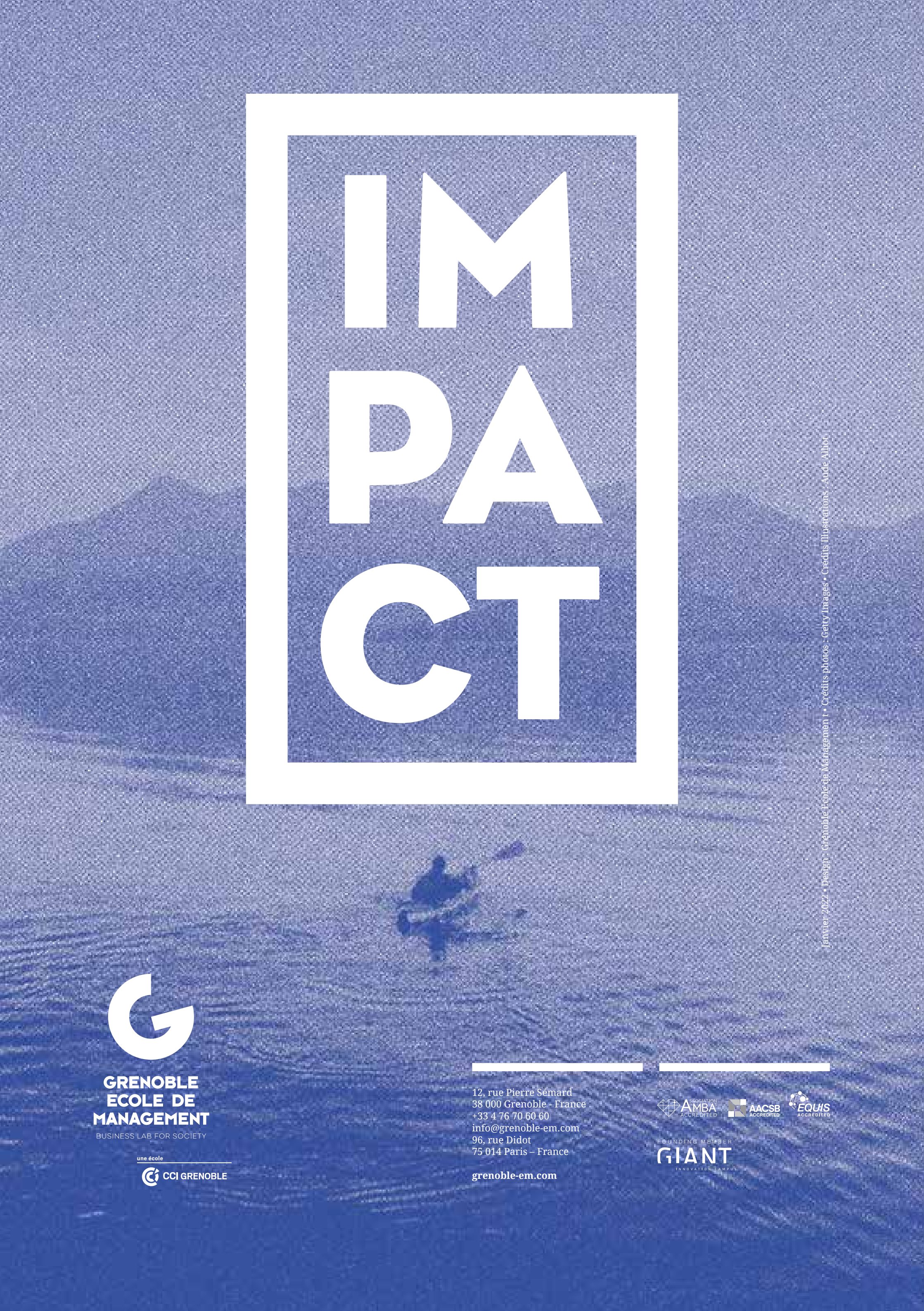
recherche.grenoble-em.com/transformation-numerique



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