

Addressing Technostress, Digital Overload and Work–Life Boundary Erosion: HRM Imperatives in Light of India’s Right to Disconnect Bill

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Abstract

Digitalisation has enhanced organisational efficiency and flexibility, but it has also intensified psychosocial risks such as technostress, digital overload and erosion of work–life boundaries. Persistent expectations of constant connectivity are increasingly associated with burnout, impaired recovery, declining mental health and maladaptive coping behaviours, including substance use risks. The introduction of the Right to Disconnect Bill in the Indian Parliament in 2025, irrespective of its eventual legislative outcome signals growing institutional recognition of hyper connectivity as a business and public health concern. Anchored in Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory and complemented by boundary theory, technostress theory, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and effort–recovery theory, this paper develops a concise conceptual framework explaining how digital job demands translate into employee strain and performance loss, and how HRM interventions aligned with the Bill’s intent can operate as strategic organisational resources. By contextualising global empirical evidence within the Indian institutional environment, the study advances business research on sustainable performance, human capital protection and organisational resilience.

Keywords: Technostress, Digital Overload, Work–Life Boundaries, Right to Disconnect, HRM, Employee Well-Being, Organisational Performance

1. Introduction

Digital communication technologies have fundamentally reshaped how work is organised, coordinated and experienced. The expansion of email, instant messaging platforms, enterprise collaboration tools and virtual meeting technologies accelerated markedly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has enabled unprecedented flexibility and continuity of operations. However, alongside these benefits, a growing body of research

highlights the darker consequences of digitally mediated work, including technostress, information overload, constant interruptions and the blurring of work–life boundaries.

Employees are increasingly embedded in an “always-on” culture characterised by expectations of rapid responsiveness beyond formal working hours. Empirical evidence demonstrates that such hyper connectivity undermines psychological detachment, disrupts sleep, strains family relationships and elevates risks of burnout and mental health deterioration. These outcomes not only impair individual well-being but also threaten long-term organisational performance through reduced engagement, presenteeism and turnover intentions.

Within this context, the introduction of the Right to Disconnect Bill in the Indian Parliament in 2025 marks a significant socio-political moment. Even if the Bill does not culminate in immediate legal enforcement, its introduction symbolises a formal recognition of digital overload as a psychosocial occupational hazard. It places normative pressure on organisations to reassess digital work practices and reinforces the ethical responsibility of employers to safeguard employees’ non-work time.

The present paper examines technostress, digital overload, and work–life boundary erosion through an integrative theoretical lens, situating the Right to Disconnect Bill as an urgent policy alarm for HRM intervention. By synthesising updated international research and aligning it with the Indian legislative discourse, the study seeks to offer an ethically grounded contribution to ongoing debates on sustainable work in the digital era.

1. 1. Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this paper are to:

1. Examine the impact of technostress, digital overload and continuous connectivity on work–life boundaries.
2. Analyse the psychosocial and organisational consequences of digital stress.
3. Evaluate the significance of India’s Right to Disconnect Bill (2025) as a policy signal necessitating proactive organisational action, irrespective of enactment.
4. Propose theory-driven HRM strategies aligned with the Bill’s intent to mitigate digital stress and support employee recovery.
5. Develop an integrative conceptual framework linking digital work demands, employee outcomes and HRM interventions.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Technostress as a Contemporary Work Stressor

The proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has fundamentally reshaped how work is organised, performed, and monitored. Within this context, technostress has emerged as a salient form of work-related strain, defined as the stress experienced by individuals due to their inability to cope with ICT-related demands (Ayyagari et al., 2011). Prior research identifies multiple techno-stressors, including

techno-overload, techno-invasion and techno-complexity, which collectively intensify employees' cognitive and emotional strain (Tarafdar et al., 2019). Empirical evidence consistently links technostress to adverse outcomes such as job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, reduced productivity and impaired well-being, particularly in digitally intensive occupations (Califf et al., 2020).

2.2. Digital Overload and the Intensification of Work

Closely related to technostress is the phenomenon of digital overload, which refers to the cumulative burden, created by persistent digital communication, multitasking and accelerated information flows. The expansion of email, instant messaging platforms and virtual collaboration tools has heightened expectations of immediacy and responsiveness, often resulting in attentional fragmentation and cognitive fatigue (Bennett et al., 2021). Studies show that continuous digital interruptions undermine employees' capacity for sustained focus and recovery, thereby amplifying perceived workload and stress (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2023). From a theoretical standpoint, digital overload represents a chronic job demand that, when left unmanaged, contributes to long-term strain and burnout.

2.3. Job Demands–Resources Perspective on Digital Work

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model provides a useful lens for understanding how technostress and digital overload affect employee outcomes. According to the JD–R framework, job demands such as constant connectivity and information overload consume energetic resources and trigger strain when not offset by adequate job or personal resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In digitally mediated work environments, the absence of clear temporal boundaries and organisational norms regulating ICT use exacerbates the imbalance between demands and resources, increasing vulnerability to stress-related outcomes. Consequently, interventions that introduce structural resources, such as formal disconnection policies, can play a critical buffering role.

2.4. Work–Life Boundary Erosion and Telepressure

A key mechanism through which technostress and digital overload exert their negative effects is the erosion of work–life boundaries. Boundary theory suggests that heightened availability expectations weaken individuals' ability to segment work and non-work roles, leading to role blurring and increased work–family conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000). Recent scholarship on telepressure, the perceived pressure to respond promptly to work-related digital communications demonstrates that even implicit expectations of responsiveness can intensify boundary permeability and emotional strain (Leslie et al., 2022). Meta-analytic evidence further indicates that telepressure is positively associated with exhaustion and negative affect, underscoring its significance as a psychosocial risk factor in contemporary work settings (Gabriel et al., 2022).

2.5. Implications for Sustainable Work in the Digital Era

Taken together, these streams of literature highlight that unregulated digital work environments pose substantial risks to employee well-being and sustainable performance. Technostress, digital overload and boundary erosion operate as interconnected processes that cumulatively undermine recovery, work–life balance and long-term organisational effectiveness. Importantly, the literature increasingly points to the need for organisational and policy-level interventions that go beyond individual coping strategies, emphasising the role of structural norms, managerial practices and institutional safeguards in restoring sustainable work–life boundaries. This body of evidence provides a strong conceptual foundation for examining the relevance of policy initiatives such as the Right to Disconnect Bill and their implications for human resource management.

3. The Right to Disconnect Bill (India, 2025): A Policy Alarm

The proposed Right to Disconnect Bill in India represents a timely institutional response to the intensification of digital work and the growing normalisation of extended availability expectations. Against the backdrop of rapid digitalisation, remote and hybrid work arrangements, and an expanding service and knowledge economy, the Bill seeks to formally recognise employees' entitlement to disengage from work-related digital communications outside prescribed working hours. From an HRM perspective, the Bill functions not merely as a legal safeguard but as a normative policy signal that foregrounds psychosocial risk, employee well-being and sustainable work practices as legitimate organisational concerns. By articulating limits to after-hours connectivity, the Bill challenges entrenched assumptions of constant availability and compels organisations to re-examine workload design, performance expectations and managerial communication norms.

The relevance and urgency of the Indian Bill are further underscored when viewed in light of international precedents. France was among the first countries to establish a statutory right to disconnect through labour law reforms requiring employers to negotiate policies limiting after-hours digital communication. Spain's telework and digital rights regulations similarly oblige organisations to adopt formal disconnection policies, while Ireland's Code of Practice and Portugal's telework legislation provide structured frameworks that encourage disengagement from work outside prescribed hours. Collectively, these developments reflect a broader acknowledgement across Europe that unregulated digital work can undermine work–life boundaries and constitute a psychosocial occupational risk. Importantly, evidence from policy evaluations and organisational studies suggests that even where enforcement mechanisms remain limited, the formal recognition of disconnection rights reshapes managerial expectations and legitimises employees' boundary-setting behaviours, thereby influencing everyday communication practices and HRM interventions (Eurofound, 2022, 2023; Government of Ireland, 2021; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work [EU-OSHA], 2022).

In the Indian context characterised by a rapidly expanding digital economy, competitive labour markets and strong ideal-worker norms, the Bill functions as a policy alarm. It urges organisations to proactively reassess communication practices, workload expectations and performance metrics. Importantly, waiting for statutory enforcement may expose organisations to escalating risks related to burnout, attrition and reputational damage. As such, the Bill should be interpreted as a guiding framework for responsible HRM rather than merely a prospective legal obligation.

4. HRM Strategies for Mitigating Digital Stress

Human Resource Management plays a pivotal role in translating the intent of the Right to Disconnect Bill into meaningful organisational practice. As technostress and the erosion of work–life boundaries are deeply embedded in contemporary work design and managerial norms, reliance on individual-level coping strategies is inherently limited. Effective implementation therefore requires coordinated, organisation-wide HRM interventions that systematically regulate digital demands, reshape behavioural expectations and restore a sustainable balance between work and non-work domains. The following strategies outline how HRM can operationalise the Right to Disconnect within organisational contexts.

- **Clear After-Hours Communication Policies:** A foundational intervention involves the formulation of clear after-hours communication policies. Such policies should specify acceptable response-time expectations, delineate emergency protocols and discourage non-essential communication during non-work hours. When consistently applied, these guidelines reduce ambiguity, alleviate telepressure, and enable employees to disengage without fear of negative career consequences.
- **Workload Design and Technology Audits:** Workload design and technology audits constitute a second critical strategy. HR departments should regularly assess the volume, frequency and necessity of digital communications, meetings and reporting requirements. Eliminating redundant platforms, rationalising meeting schedules and streamlining information flows can significantly reduce cognitive overload and attentional fragmentation.
- **Leadership Behaviour and Role Modeling:** Leadership behaviour is equally central to the success of disconnection initiatives. Managers act as norm carriers within organisations and their digital practices shape employee behaviour. Training programmes that sensitise leaders to the consequences of technostress, encourage boundary-respecting communication and promote role-modeling of healthy disconnection are therefore essential. Without visible managerial support, formal policies risk being perceived as symbolic rather than actionable.
- **Employee-Focused Capability Building:** Employee-focused interventions further complement structural measures. Training on digital well-being, boundary management and recovery practices can enhance employees' capacity to navigate ICT demands effectively. Additionally, integrating technostress indicators into employee surveys and

occupational health assessments allows organisations to monitor emerging risks and respond proactively.

- **Employee Assistance and Mental Health Support:** Finally, organisations should strengthen Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) and mental health support systems to address burnout, anxiety and early signs of maladaptive coping. Aligning these initiatives with the ethos of the Right to Disconnect reinforces a culture of care and positions well-being as a strategic HRM priority rather than a peripheral concern.

5. Conceptual Framework

Building on the reviewed literature and theoretical foundations, this paper proposes an integrative conceptual framework that explains how digitally mediated work practices influence employee well-being and organisational performance. At the core of the framework are ICT-enabled job demands, including constant connectivity, digital overload, communication intensity, and after-hours availability expectations. These demands function as chronic stressors that elevate cognitive load and emotional strain.

The framework posits that sustained exposure to these demands gives rise to technostress, characterised by techno-overload, techno-invasion and telepressure. As technostress intensifies, employees experience progressive erosion of work–life boundaries across temporal, spatial and psychological dimensions. This boundary erosion undermines key recovery processes, particularly psychological detachment, which is essential for restoring depleted resources.

Downstream outcomes include burnout, anxiety, relationship strain and increased vulnerability to maladaptive coping behaviours such as substance use. Collectively, these individual-level outcomes translate into organisational-level consequences, including reduced engagement, diminished task performance, higher error rates, presenteeism and increased turnover risk.

HRM interventions aligned with the Right to Disconnect Bill operate as moderating resources within the framework. Policies regulating after-hours communication, leadership role-modeling, workload governance, digital well-being training and mental health support collectively buffer the impact of digital demands on technostress and boundary erosion. By restoring recovery opportunities and protecting employee resources, these interventions facilitate improved well-being and sustainable productivity.

The framework offers a coherent foundation for future empirical research and provides organisations with a strategic lens through which to evaluate and redesign digital work practices in line with evolving institutional expectations.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several contributions to business and management scholarship. First, it extends Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory by explicitly conceptualising

digital hyperconnectivity as a persistent job demand with cumulative temporal effects, rather than a situational or episodic stressor. By foregrounding constant connectivity as a structural feature of contemporary work design, the paper advances JD–R theory in digitally intensive contexts.

Second, by integrating boundary theory, technostress theory, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and effort–recovery theory, the study offers a multi-theoretical explanation of how digital job demands translate into burnout, impaired recovery and performance erosion. This integration responds to recent calls in business research for theoretically pluralistic models capable of capturing the complexity of modern work environments.

Third, the paper contributes to institutional and strategic HRM literature by reframing the right to disconnect as an organisational and institutional resource rather than solely an individual entitlement or legal safeguard. This perspective demonstrates how emerging policy signals can influence organisational norms, managerial expectations and HRM practices even in the absence of formal enforcement.

Fourth, by explicitly incorporating maladaptive coping risks such as substance use vulnerability into the technostress–performance nexus, the study broadens prevailing models of digital stress. This inclusion underscores the downstream human and organisational costs of unmanaged connectivity and highlights an underexplored pathway linking digital work design to long-term health and productivity outcomes.

Finally, the integrative conceptual framework responds to business research demands for cross-level theorising by linking ICT-enabled job design, individual strain processes and firm-level performance implications. In doing so, the paper provides a robust foundation for future empirical testing across industries, organisational forms and institutional contexts.

6.2. Managerial Implications

The findings carry important implications for managers and HR professionals seeking to balance digital efficiency with sustainable performance. First, organisations should recognise constant connectivity as a strategic risk to human capital rather than an informal expectation of commitment. Clear after-hours communication norms and formal disconnection policies can reduce burnout, enhance recovery and protect long-term productivity.

Second, leaders play a critical role in shaping digital norms. Managerial role-modeling of healthy boundary behavior, such as delayed email scheduling and respect for non-work hours signals legitimacy for employee disconnection and reduces telepressure.

Third, HRM systems should incorporate regular audits of digital workload, communication frequency and technology use to identify sources of technostress. Training initiatives focused on digital well-being and boundary management can further equip employees to navigate ICT demands effectively.

Fourth, organisations should integrate mental health support and early intervention mechanisms, including Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), to address burnout and prevent maladaptive coping responses. Proactive alignment with the ethos of the Right to

Disconnect Bill can also strengthen employer branding, reduce turnover risk and enhance organisational resilience.

6.3. Practical Implications for Managers

Managers and HR leaders can translate the study's insights into action by:

- Establishing explicit norms for after-hours communication and response expectations.
- Monitoring digital workload intensity rather than equating availability with commitment.
- Role-modeling healthy disconnection behaviours to reduce telepressure.
- Training employees and supervisors in digital boundary management and recovery practices.
- Integrating technostress indicators into occupational health and engagement assessments.
- Using alignment with right-to-disconnect principles as a lever for retention, employer branding and sustainable performance.

7. Conclusion

Digital transformation has become a defining feature of contemporary organisations, yet its psychosocial consequences increasingly threaten sustainable performance. This paper demonstrates that technostress, digital overload and work–life boundary erosion constitute strategic business challenges with direct implications for productivity, employee retention and organisational resilience. The Right to Disconnect Bill introduced in India in 2025, irrespective of its eventual legislative outcome, serves as a salient institutional cue that redefines excessive connectivity as a legitimate organisational risk.

For business scholars, the study contributes by integrating JD–R theory with boundary, technostress, COR and effort–recovery perspectives to explain how digital job demands translate into both human and performance costs. For managers and policymakers, the findings underscore that HRM interventions aligned with disconnection principles are not merely welfare initiatives but strategic investments that protect human capital and support long-term value creation.

Future research may empirically test the proposed framework across industries, examine firm-level performance indicators, and explore how institutional pressures shape organisational responses to digital overload. Overall, the paper reinforces the central argument that sustainable business performance in the digital era depends on recalibrating connectivity norms to respect employee recovery and well-being.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article, “Addressing Technostress, Digital Overload and Work–Life Boundary Erosion: HRM Imperatives in Light of India's Right to Disconnect Bill”. The research has been

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