Maneggio

E-ISSN: 3032-7652

https://nawalaeducation.com/index.php/MJ/index

Vol.2.No.5 October 2025



DIGITAL DETOX POLICY AS A STRATEGIC TOOL TO REDUCE BURNOUT AND INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY IN MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

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Diinput : 11 October 2025

Diterima: 12 October 2025

Diterima: 12 October 2025

Diterima: 12 October 2025

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kebijakan digital detox sebagai strategi manajerial dalam mengurangi burnout dan meningkatkan produktivitas karyawan di perusahaan multinasional. Fenomena digital overload akibat konektivitas tanpa batas telah menimbulkan tekanan psikologis dan kelelahan emosional yang signifikan di lingkungan kerja global. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif dengan kerangka yuridis-manajerial, penelitian ini memadukan teori Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), dan Job Demands-Resources (JD-R). Data diperoleh melalui studi pustaka dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 12 manajer HR dari empat perusahaan multinasional di Asia Tenggara dan Eropa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan digital detox yang diintegrasikan secara strategis melalui pembatasan waktu akses digital, pelatihan digital mindfulness, dan kebijakan right to disconnect berhasil menurunkan tingkat burnout hingga 25% dan meningkatkan work engagement serta produktivitas rata-rata sebesar 12%. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa digital detox bukan hanya program kesejahteraan kerja, melainkan instrumen strategis yang memperkuat daya saing dan keberlanjutan organisasi global berbasis kesejahteraan manusia. Implikasi praktis penelitian ini menekankan perlunya dukungan manajemen puncak dan integrasi lintas fungsi agar kebijakan digital detox dapat diimplementasikan secara konsisten dan berkelanjutan di berbagai konteks budaya organisasi.

Kata Kunci: burnout, digital detox, produktivitas, strategi manajemen.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze digital detox policy as a managerial strategy to reduce burnout and enhance employee productivity in multinational corporations. The phenomenon of digital overload caused by constant connectivity has created significant psychological pressure and emotional exhaustion within global work environments. Adopting a descriptive-qualitative approach with a juridical-managerial framework, this study integrates Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. Data were collected through literature reviews and semi-structured interviews with 12 HR managers from four multinational companies operating in Southeast Asia and Europe. Findings reveal that strategically integrated digital detox policies including restricted digital access hours, digital mindfulness training, and right to disconnect initiatives, reduced burnout levels by up to 25% and improved work engagement and overall productivity by 12% on average. The results highlight that digital detox should be viewed not merely as a wellness initiative but as a strategic instrument that strengthens competitiveness and human-centered sustainability within global organizations. The study recommends stronger top management commitment and cross-functional collaboration to ensure consistent and culturally adaptive implementation of digital detox policies across multinational contexts.



INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the last two decades has fundamentally changed the way organizations operate, communicate, and manage their human resources. Increasingly digitalization and connectivity through *smart devices*, email, and online collaboration platforms have increased efficiency, but have also had serious consequences for employees' psychological well-being. The phenomenon of digital overload and permanent connectivity pressure is a major challenge for multinational companies that rely on communication across time zones and cultures (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Tarafdar et al., 2020). In this context, the concept of digital detox policy emerges, which is an organizational policy that consciously encourages a pause from the use of digital technology to restore psychological balance and work productivity (Syvertsen et al., 2020).

The digital *burnout* crisis is now a global strategic issue. Data from the World Health Organization (2022) recorded a significant increase in burnout cases due to excessive digital exposure during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the corporate sector that implements a *remote work* system. A global survey by Deloitte (2023) of 2,100 professionals showed that 77% of employees experience burnout associated with an excessive digital communication burden, mainly due to the expectation to be "always online." This condition worsens stress levels, decreases motivation, and negatively impacts productivity and labor retention (Pflügner et al., 2021). Thus, the digital detox policy is not just an occupational health discourse, but part of a human resource management (HR) strategy that is adaptive to the dynamics of global digitalization.

From a managerial perspective, multinational companies face a dilemma between digital efficiency and sustainability of employee performance. The concept of an "always-on culture" prevalent in global organizations reinforces the perception that high connectivity is synonymous with high productivity, when studies show otherwise. According to Barber and Santuzzi (2015), the pressure to stay connected actually lowers work-life balance and increases the risk of technostress. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly complex in multinational companies operating in different time zones, where the demands of digital rapid response often blur the boundaries between work time and personal time (Tarafdar et al., 2019). Therefore, the digital detox policy can be positioned as a strategic tool in global human resource management to restore this balance, while strengthening the sustainability of organizational productivity.

In addition, digital detox is closely related to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) theory developed by Deci and Ryan (2000). This theory emphasizes the importance of meeting the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and connectedness to encourage intrinsic motivation and well-being. A stressful digital work environment actually limits autonomy and triggers psychological stress, so the digital detox policy becomes a managerial mechanism to restore the balance of employee motivation (Reinecke et al., 2018). Several global companies such as Volkswagen, SAP, and Google have implemented an off-hours email access *policy* in an effort to create a *digital recovery space* that has been proven to be effective in reducing fatigue levels and increasing creativity (Pflügner et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the adoption of digital detox in organizational policies can also be attributed to the strategic human resource management (SHRM) approach. According to Wright and Ulrich (2017), an effective HR strategy must integrate the psychological health dimension in long-term performance planning. Digital burnout is not only an

individual problem, but a threat to the performance of the organization as a whole, because it reduces focus, collaboration, and innovation. A study by Spagnoli et al. (2020) showed that digital detox-based interventions contributed to an increase in *work engagement* of up to 23% in tech companies in Europe. This fact reinforces the argument that digital detox policies are not just a reactive solution to stress, but part of a corporate strategy to strengthen sustainable productivity.

In the context of multinational companies, the implementation of digital detox policies faces cross-cultural and structural challenges. Work culture in East Asia, for example, tends to have work norms that assess loyalty based on working hours and the intensity of digital communication (Park et al., 2021), in contrast to organizations in Europe that emphasize life balance as a corporate value (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Another challenge arises from technological factors: the use of global collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, or Zoom reinforces social pressure to stay connected even outside of working hours (Tarafdar et al., 2019). Therefore, the digital detox policy requires a cross-functional approach, involving HR, IT governance, and top management to be institutionally effective and not perceived as a restriction on productivity.

Finally, the phenomenon of digital burnout that has increased in the post-pandemic era shows that companies no longer rely enough on conventional welfare policies such as *employee assistance programs*. Global companies are now required to integrate digital detox policies into performance management strategies and organizational culture. This transformation is not only a matter of managing working hours, but also creating a new paradigm of *human-centered digital management*. The digital detox policy must ultimately be understood as a strategic investment in the sustainability of human resources and the long-term competitiveness of multinational companies.

Although the issue of burnout due to digitalization has become a widespread concern, the strategic management literature shows that most research still focuses on individual dimensions such as technology use behavior and psychological stress rather than systematic aspects of organizational policy (Tarafdar et al., 2019; Day et al., 2022). Previous research has tended to view *digital detox* as a personal initiative (*self-regulated behavior*), rather than a structured corporate strategy. In fact, in the context of multinational companies with cross-temporal and cultural communication systems, formal policies play a crucial role in regulating the rhythm of work and minimizing excessive exposure to technology (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Syvertsen et al., 2020). The absence of a clear policy framework causes many organizations to fail to balance digital efficiency and employee well-being, ultimately leading to a decline in long-term productivity.

This conceptual gap shows that *digital detox* has not been systemically integrated into *strategic human resource management (SHRM)* practices and *organizational behavior*. A number of studies show that companies' efforts to improve digital well-being are still fragmentary, such as mindfulness training or notification restrictions, without a comprehensive strategy that measures their impact on organizational performance (Reinecke et al., 2018; Spagnoli et al., 2020). In addition, cross-cultural research found that the effectiveness of digital detox policies is highly dependent on the organizational context and cultural perception of *off-time boundary management*. For example, research by Park et al. (2021) in South Korea found that employees who live in a hierarchically oriented work culture find it more difficult to resist digital communication outside of work hours due to social pressure to always be responsive. This shows that digital detox

policies cannot be universal, but must be adapted to the values and structures of complex multinational organizations.

From a productivity perspective, various empirical studies show that digital burnout has a direct impact on *performance decrement*. Research by Pflügner et al. (2021) found that employees who experienced *technostress* had a performance decline of up to 30% compared to colleagues with a better digital balance. However, managerial interventions such as *email curfews* and restrictions on access to company systems outside of working hours have been proven to improve the concentration and quality of work output (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). Unfortunately, most of these policies are implemented informally and are not always supported by an organization's oversight system. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop a digital detox policy model that is not only reactive, but also integrated in the strategic design of global organizations.

In addition, most of the literature has not explored the relationship between digital detox policies and *sustainable organizational performance*. Previous studies such as by Spagnoli et al. (2020) and Tarafdar et al. (2020) have shown that digital well-being is correlated with work engagement, but have not explained the managerial mechanisms that link digital detox to long-term productivity improvement strategies. In fact, the theory of *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R)* by Bakker and Demerouti (2017) emphasizes that reducing the burden of digital technology can enlarge personal *resources* and organizations that trigger motivation and innovation. Thus, digital detox can be seen as a strategic policy that strengthens employee *psychological capital* and optimizes the *human performance system* in multinational companies.

Another gap is seen in cross-cultural management practices. Most of the research on digital detox is conducted in the context of Western organizations (Europe and North America), which have strict regulations on working time and employees' digital rights, such as *The Right to Disconnect Law* in France and Belgium (Eurofound, 2022). In contrast, in the context of multinational companies in Asia, similar policies are still very rare, due to high job expectations and weak digital protection regulations. According to a study by Cho et al. (2022), employees in Southeast Asia spend an average of 57 hours per week in digital-based activities the highest figure in the world. This fact reinforces the urgency for multinational companies operating in the region to adopt a digital detox approach as a more adaptive performance and wellbeing management strategy.

In terms of *novelty*, this research contributes by positioning digital detox as an organizational strategic policy, not just individual behavior. This approach expands on the theory of *Strategic Human Resource Management* (Wright & Ulrich, 2017) by adding the dimension of digital well-being as a factor that determines the competitive advantage of global organizations. In addition, this study integrates the theory *of Self-Determination* (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R)* to explain how digital detox policies can reduce burnout while increasing productivity through meeting the needs of autonomy and psychological balance. Thus, this policy not only functions as an occupational health instrument, but also as a strategic management tool that increases *employee engagement* and innovation in the long term.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of digital detox policy as a strategic tool in reducing burnout and increasing employee productivity in multinational companies. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) evaluate the relationship between the intensity of digital technology use and employee burnout rates; (2) assessing the effectiveness of the digital detox policy in improving individual welfare and performance; and (3) identify cultural and structural factors that affect the implementation of digital detox policies in multinational organizations. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of a digital well-being-based human resource

management model, as well as a practical contribution for global companies in designing organizational policies that balance between technological efficiency and human *sustainability*.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive-qualitative approach with a juridical-managerial framework, which aims to understand in depth how *digital detox policies* are designed and implemented as organizational strategies in multinational companies. This approach was chosen because the issue of digital burnout is not only psychological, but also managerial and strategic policy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researchers combined conceptual analysis based on the theories of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) (Wright & Ulrich, 2017) and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) to elucidate the relationship between digital pressure, organizational policies, and increased productivity. Data were collected through a literature review of scientific publications from reputable international journals such as *the Journal of Information Technology, Human Resource Management Review*, and *Organization Science*, as well as semi-structured interviews with 12 HR managers from four multinational companies operating in Southeast Asia. Purposive sampling techniques are used to ensure informants have first-hand experience in the development of digital well-being policies in the global corporate environment.

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to identify patterns of findings from interviews and organizational documents. Triangulation is carried out between primary data, literature, and company policy documents to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Internal validity is maintained through *member checking* of key informants and *peer debriefing* with academics in the field of strategic management. An interpretive approach is used to interpret how *digital detox* policies play a role in reducing *technostress* and improving sustainable performance. Thus, this study not only describes the phenomenon of digital burnout, but also strategically explores how *digital detox policies* can be an effective managerial instrument to achieve a balance between technological efficiency and human resource sustainability in multinational companies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Digital Burnout and Global Organizational Policy

The results of the study show that the phenomenon of digital overload has become the dominant factor that causes an increase in burnout symptoms in employees in multinational companies. The results of interviews with 12 human resources professionals (HR) from four multinational companies revealed that the pressure to stay digitally connected is the main cause of the decline in work well-being and individual performance. The informants describe that the expectation of "always online" is now an unwritten norm in many global organizations, where employees are expected to respond to messages or work calls at any time, even outside of formal working hours. This condition reinforces the findings of Mazmanian et al. (2013) who identified the "digital autonomy paradox" which is a situation when mobile devices that are supposed to provide flexibility actually narrow the space of personal autonomy because employees feel socially and professionally bound to always be responsive to the demands of the organization.

This phenomenon is reinforced by a Deloitte report (2023) which states that 77% of global employees experience increased psychological distress related to the excessive

use of digital devices, especially since the major transition to remote and hybrid work systems after the pandemic. This stress not only gives rise to emotional exhaustion, but also has an impact on long-term cognitive ability and productivity. Research by Pflügner et al. (2021) found that *technostress* and *telepressure* significantly reduced performance by up to 30%, while the burden of communication across time worsened work-life balance. This was also experienced by employees at the Southeast Asian companies involved in the study, where the intensity of communication across time zones blurred the boundaries between work and personal life. These conditions form a repetitive cycle of digital fatigue, in which the rest period no longer provides an adequate recovery effect.

In addition, interviews show that organizational culture factors play a big role in reinforcing or reducing the impact of digital burnout. In companies based in Europe, for example, there are formal policies such as the *right to disconnect* that legally protect employees from digital communication outside of working hours (Eurofound, 2022). Meanwhile, in Asian companies, hierarchical cultures are still strong, so employees feel uncomfortable rejecting messages from their superiors, even though policies do not require them to respond outside of working hours (Cho et al., 2022). This difference shows that the effectiveness of managerial policies is greatly influenced by the cultural context and social perception of digital work. This indicates that the phenomenon of digital burnout cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and structural dimensions of the organization.

The Effectiveness of Digital Detox Policy on Productivity and Welfare

Field findings indicate that *a systematically implemented digital detox* policy can reduce burnout rates while increasing employee productivity and welfare. Of the four companies studied, two European companies (one in the technology sector and one in financial services) reported a 25% reduction in burnout complaints and a 20% increase in job satisfaction in the first six months after *the digital disconnection* policy was implemented. The policy includes restricting email outside of business hours, *digital mindfulness training*, and the introduction of "*focus hours*", which are notification-free working hours that are mutually agreed upon in the team. These findings are consistent with the results of research by Spagnoli et al. (2020) which showed that digital detox-based organizational policy interventions have a positive influence on *employee work engagement* and *task performance*.

In addition to improving psychological well-being, the digital detox policy has also been proven to improve the quality of innovation. One of the global technology companies interviewed reported that after the implementation *of Digital Silence Friday*, a day without virtual meetings and online communication, there was an increase in innovative ideas of up to 32% based on internal surveys. These results reinforce the theory of Self-Determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000) which emphasizes the importance of autonomy and psychological recovery in triggering intrinsic motivation. By providing a technology-free time space, organizations not only reduce employee burnout, but also create opportunities for reflection, independent learning, and creativity. This condition is in line with the view of Reinecke et al. (2018) that *media withdrawal* or reduction of digital interaction has a significant mental recovery effect on individual well-being.

However, not all digital detox policy implementations are effective. The Southeast Asian companies involved in this study face challenges in the form of cultural resistance and organizational communication uncertainty. Some employees feel guilty or afraid of being considered disloyal when they don't respond to messages outside of hours, even though detox policies have been implemented. This phenomenon illustrates the perceived gap between formal policies and social norms. The study of Day et al. (2022)

confirms that detox policies require structural support and consistent communication in order to not only become symbolic, but real practices at the individual and team levels.

In the context of organizational productivity, the digital detox policy has a significant effect on increasing focus and work efficiency. Based on an analysis of internal HR data from two European companies, the rate of administrative errors decreased by 9% and project productivity increased by 12% after the policy was implemented. This shows that digital detox is not a form of restriction, but a strategy to optimize employees' cognitive and emotional resources. This finding strengthens the theory of Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) put forward by Bakker and Demerouti (2017), that reducing digital workloads (demands) can increase psychological resources and work engagement (engagement). In other words, the digital detox policy acts as a "buffer" that protects employees' mental energy to stay productive in a digital environment that demands rapid adaptation.

Strategic Implications for Global Organizational Management and Transformation

Strategically, the results of this study confirm that the digital detox policy cannot be seen as an occupational health initiative alone, but must be integrated within the framework of the human resource management strategy (SHRM). In multinational companies, an effective detox policy is usually connected to *employee well-being*, *talent retention*, and *corporate sustainability* strategies. A study by Tarafdar et al. (2020) shows that *technostress management* through adaptive organizational policies can strengthen *affective commitment* and reduce *turnover intention*. The results of field research reinforce these findings: two companies that formally adopted digital detox policies recorded a 14% decrease in employee entry and exit rates in a year. This indicates that the digital detox policy has strategic value in retaining talent, especially in the technology sector with *a high* level of employee attrition.

In addition to the short-term benefits to productivity and well-being, the digital detox policy also creates long-term competitive value through improved organizational reputation. Companies that actively manage the digital well-being of employees tend to gain a positive image in the eyes of the public and potential workers. This is in accordance with the principle *of employer branding* in strategic management theory, where companies with a high reputation for employee welfare are more likely to attract and retain quality human resources (Wright & Ulrich, 2017). Furthermore, the findings of this study reinforce Deloitte's (2023) view that global companies that adopt *human-centered digital strategies* show more stable financial performance than companies that are purely oriented towards technological efficiency.

On the other hand, the successful implementation of digital detox is highly dependent on leadership commitment and cross-functional integration. Interviews with several HR managers show that an effective detox policy always involves coordination between HR divisions, IT governance, and top management. Inclusive leadership and exemplary detox practices such as not messaging outside of hours or encouraging digital breaks play a big role in building a healthy organizational culture. This reinforces the argument of Bakker and Demerouti (2017) that workload balance and organizational support are the primary foundations for long-term work engagement. Thus, digital detox policy is not only a technical tool, but part of a cultural transformation towards a sustainable digital organization, where technological efficiency and human welfare go hand in hand.

RESULTS

The results of this study confirm that the digital detox policy has a strategic position in overcoming digital burnout and increasing employee productivity in multinational companies. The phenomenon of digital overload that has arisen due to the demands of seamless connectivity has caused psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, and significant performance declines in global employees. Based on the results of qualitative analysis and literature studies, the digital detox policy has been proven to be effective in reducing technostress levels, strengthening intrinsic motivation, and increasing work engagement and organizational performance when integrated into strategic human resource management (SHRM) strategies. Best practices are found in companies that incorporate formal policies such as the right to disconnect, digital mindfulness training, and work-life balance programs, with direct support from top management. These findings reinforce the theory of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000), that reducing the digital burden and increasing work autonomy can strengthen psychological well-being and sustainable performance. Thus, the digital detox policy can be understood not only as an occupational health policy, but also as a strategic instrument that strengthens the competitiveness of global organizations based on human welfare.

As a recommendation, multinational companies need to adopt a digital detox policy in a structured manner through a cross-functional approach involving HR, IT governance, and top management divisions to ensure consistency of implementation. This policy should be formulated as part of a *human sustainability strategy*, by adjusting local cultural values and the diversity of the global work context. Management needs to instill a leadership culture that emulates detox practices such as digital working time discipline, ethical communication, and respect for rest time so that policies do not stop at a symbolic level. In addition, organizations are advised to integrate digital well-being metrics in performance appraisal systems and *employee engagement indexes* to monitor policy effectiveness on an ongoing basis. By building a work ecosystem that balances between technological efficiency and human well-being, *digital detox policies* can become a strategic pillar towards sustainable, inclusive, and adaptive organizational transformation in the era of global hyper-connectivity.

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