

TECHNOLOGY TRAPS

It could be time to start inviting our brains along to the party.



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As life and work become busier, faster and evermore complex, our reliance on technology escalates which leads to concerns that we are outsourcing our thinking too much.

Maybe, however, perhaps it reflects a natural progression in our brain's evolution as we rewire our thinking to adapt to our brave new world. Digital natives have little difficulty in assimilating new technologies, so does it matter that we no longer do the mental math to divide up that restaurant bill? The calculator is quick, efficient and less likely to make a mistake.

We have long been information gatherers. Whatever you studied, doing so helped you forge a career path with knowledge that distinguished you from others. The internet has turned us into a society of armchair experts who, with a quick Google search, can debate the finer nuances of what was previously your domain alone.

While technology lessens our need to "know", or even to remember, the modern workplace is crying out for more innovation, creativity and flexible thinking to solve problems and make decisions quickly. This is where our capacity for imagination and creating insight sets us apart. The human brain remains (for the moment at least) the captain of our conscious and deliberate thought, and far outstrips what technology can deliver.

There are three areas where tech-

nology can trip us up...

1. Shrinking attention span

Technology is brilliantly designed to distract us and, being the curious creatures we are, we want to ensure we're not missing out. Unfortunately, as our level of distractibility increases, we become less adept at focusing. We rarely give tasks our full and undivided attention. The result? We skim and grab headlines but fail to dig deeper to gather the full gist of a story. The remedy is to unplug regularly from technology (even for just 30 minutes at a time) to rebuild focus, reduce stress and perform at a higher level.

2. Increasing sleep debt

Spending hours in front of a screen hyper-stimulates the brain, making it harder to switch off. Sleep deprivation is not just a cognitive menace, it's potentially deadly. Mental fatigue leads to more errors and affects memory, recall and emotional regulation. It's not just tired two-year-olds who are grumpy and less focussed. As well as that, the blue light emitted by our computers, tablets and smartphones has been shown to interfere with the brain's ability to secrete melatonin and prepare us for sleep. The good news is there are apps such as F.lux and Twilight that convert those screen emissions to a non-sleep disturbing yellow, and the latest IOS systems include Nightshift to help us gain some much-needed shut-eye.

3. Invisibility cloak

It is easy to hide behind the safety of a screen to send a message we feel socially awkward to convey in person. It saves us the emotional pain of having to deal with the recipient of the message who may now know the relationship is over, that your Facebook status is now single or that you're extremely angry.

The problem is that we acquire our social intelligence from having to deal with difficult situations face-to-face. It is easier to deny wrongdoing or lie using social media. While acknowledging fault and taking responsibility can feel horrible, it is an essential component to developing coping strategies for when things go wrong. Real human connection develops in "real" time and can't be substituted using technology alone.

Technology may not be dumbing us down, but is changing the way we think. As we hurtle into the 21st century, it is better to be asking how we can switch our thinking from what we "know" to asking how something can be done better using both our brains and technology. ■

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