



Managing Constant Connectivity: A Cross-National Comparison of Employee Experiences

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Abstract

Work in organizations is shaped by the interaction between technical and social systems. An effective sociotechnical system aligns with the organization's values and culture as technological systems evolve. Misalignment between these systems can lead to unintended behaviours among organizational members. This study adopts a sociotechnical systems perspective to understand and compare the experiences of knowledge workers in Australia and India. Open-ended survey questions yielded 393 responses (N), with 196 (n₁) from Australia and 197 (n₂) from India. Five themes emerged through reflexive thematic analysis: the psychological impact of availability expectations, digital disengagement as coping, perceived control, learning and adaptation, and sociotechnical conditions shaping work experiences. Conservation of Resources theory was used to interpret employee experiences of constant connectivity and technology-related overload and stress as outcomes of an imbalance between technical and social systems. The findings highlight cross-country similarities and differences in the sources and experiences of constant connectivity and the strategies employees use to manage its effects. Drawing on these findings, the study develops three theoretical propositions concerning: (1) how sociotechnical conditions shape connectivity and availability expectations; (2) how constant connectivity depletes employees' personal resources; and (3) how individual and organizational resources help mitigate these effects. The study concludes with theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research, including richer qualitative methods and further consideration of policies such as the right to disconnect.

Keywords: constant connectivity, cross-country study, employee experience, sociotechnical system approach, techno-overload

1. Introduction

The use of digital technologies and devices has normalised remote and hybrid work in today's organisational context (Gong et al., 2023). This has significantly affected individuals within the organisation, as the social system (comprising people, roles, norms, values, and structure) is expected to learn new technologies and adapt to the technical system (tools, infrastructure, devices, processes, etc.) introduced within the organisation (Ali et al., 2024; Tamang et al., 2026). Alignment between the social and technical systems is believed to support the achievement of common organisational goals (Lu et al., 2025). However, misalignment between these systems may lead to unintended consequences of technology use and unsustainable work practices among users (Clegg, 2000). In digital work contexts, such misalignment may give rise to unintended behavioural adaptations (Phillips et al., 2025), including extended technology use and constant connectivity driven by normative expectations (Leppäkumpu & Sivunen, 2024). In this study, constant connectivity refers to employees' availability for work via digital devices, facilitating 24/7 connectedness and blurring the boundary between work and home (Buchler et al., 2020).

Expectations of organisational availability, as well as individual motivation to connect with work beyond work hours, are strongly associated with extended work hours and higher workloads (Schlachter et al., 2018). The forms of connectivity, whether self-initiated or organisationally driven, may have different impacts on individual well-being (Li et al., 2025). Several studies indicate that after-hours connectivity to work may yield short-term benefits but has negative long-term impacts (Baek et al., 2024; Magni et al., 2023). Research on after-hours connectivity has evolved considerably over the past decade, particularly in relation to employee well-being (Schlachter et al., 2018; Schoellbauer et al., 2023; Thörel et al., 2022). However, much of this work implicitly assumes that the experience of constant connectivity is universal. Employees are situated within cultural, organisational, and infrastructural environments that shape expectations of availability and the extent of technology use (Farivar et al., 2024; Richardson & Benbunan-Fich, 2011).

Nevertheless, most empirical studies have been conducted within single-country settings (Becker et al., 2021; Dettmers et al., 2016; Li et al., 2025), limiting our understanding of how employees in different national contexts experience and respond to connectivity expectations. Furthermore, prior research has focused largely on outcomes (Ferguson et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2023), with comparatively less attention to how employees interpret, negotiate, and organise their work under conditions of constant connectivity. As a result, there is limited understanding of how employees in different contexts experience and interpret constant connectivity. To address this concern, the present study adopts a cross-country comparative approach to examine employee experiences of constant connectivity in Australia and India.

1.1 Motivation for the Study

The motivation to study employee experience of constant connectivity can be understood in two parts. First, research on connectivity to work continues to evolve within the organisational behaviour literature. However, constant connectivity as a norm in many organisations got established only after the COVID-19 pandemic (Gong et al., 2023). A growing number of studies have investigated the impact of after-hours connectivity or technology use outside of work hours on employee well-being (van Zoonen et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). After reviewing past studies, it was found that there is no cross-national qualitative evidence on employees' experience of constant connectivity (Khalid et al., 2022). The cross-national study will enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the influence and importance of the social system on the use of varying levels of infrastructural and technological systems for

connectivity, and how the two systems can align and optimise to achieve the common organisational goal. Additionally, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) will be used to understand employees' experiences resulting from system misalignments. Second, using the sociotechnical systems (STS) approach to understand the employee experience of constant connectivity would be a unique contribution, as past studies have largely used job demands–resources theory (Hynes & Koc, 2024; Van Fossen et al., 2023), conservation of resources theory (van Zoonen et al., 2023), boundary theory (Baek et al., 2024), and self-determination theory (Ten Brummelhuis et al., 2021).

1.2 Research Gaps

Based on the review of the recent studies, several gaps were identified. First, less is known about employees' experiences of constant connectivity across different organisational contexts and cultural settings (Farivar et al., 2024). This gap offers an opportunity to examine how employees in diverse organisational and cultural contexts, with varying levels of infrastructural and technological support, design processes and procedures to achieve organisational goals (Davis et al., 2014), and how they respond to and experience constant connectivity. According to the Global Digitalisation Index (GDI) 2024, Australia ranks 10th and India 48th in terms of ICT maturity and economic development (Huawei, 2024). India is a developing economy that has witnessed substantial growth in its IT sector, with no law on the right to disconnect. On the other hand, Australia is a developed economy, with a law on the right to disconnect effective from August 2024. The right to disconnect allows employees to reasonably refuse work-related contact outside of working hours. Therefore, a cross-country study between Australia and India is timely and would address the above research gap.

Second, Leppäkumpu and Sivunen (2024) suggest that understanding how sensemaking around connectivity expectations and work–life boundary management is shaped by emerging hybrid forms of work is necessary. Further, Magni et al. (2023) highlight the need to consider the cognitive mechanisms through which mobile intrusion affects individuals' well-being. Third, expectations and norms around availability (Thörel et al., 2022) may influence whether boundary work tactics translate into improved recovery and well-being (Reinke et al., 2024). However, limited attention has been given to employee perceptions of digital work contexts. In this respect, further inquiry remains warranted (Ruiner et al., 2023).

1.3 Theoretical Background

First, this study adopts a socio-technical systems (STS) perspective (Davis et al., 2014) to understand how employees experience constant connectivity in two countries with differing cultural norms, physical and technological infrastructures, and organisational processes and procedures, and how they approach their organisational goals. Second, the COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) is used to examine how misalignment between social and technical systems leads to loss of resources among employees, contributing to techno-overload and stress. This study views constant connectivity and technology-related stress as outcomes of an imbalance in which the technical system is over-optimised relative to the social system. The sociotechnical systems (STS) approach is a broad framing tool that emphasises a collaborative design of organisational systems, including technical and social systems, for maximum success (Du et al., 2024).

This perspective highlights the interdependence of people, processes and procedures, organisational goals, culture, technology, and the physical environment (Davis et al., 2014). Within STS, the technical system comprises digital tools (such as smartphones and laptops), supporting infrastructures (including Internet access, VPNs, and cloud platforms), and formal mechanisms embedded in technology (notification defaults, escalation ladder) that enable

constant connectivity (Cherns, 1987; Davis et al., 2014). Likewise, the social system refers to the human, organisational, and cultural arrangements that shape how technologies are used. This includes people, roles, relationships, norms, culture, hierarchy, power dynamics, and technological maturity.

Davis et al. (2014) emphasise the interdependence of the six components of the STS and how they can work together to create a functional sociotechnical system. A holistic approach is therefore required, as changes in one part of the system often necessitate adjustments in other parts (Clegg & Shepherd, 2007). This points us to the aspect of work outcomes that depends on the proper optimisation of social and technical systems. Availability expectations can come from supervisors, clients, or peers, and may be driven by subjective or organisational norms (Belkin et al., 2020; Day et al., 2012). Such expectations may push individuals to trade off non-work time for work purposes (Schlachter et al., 2018) and increase technology-related overload, as work pressure can affect an individual's self-regulation and autonomy (Becker et al., 2021; Smollan et al., 2024). Constant connectivity can also contribute to techno-overload and work device anxiety (WDA), as longer working hours, increasingly complex technologies, and continuous streams of messages and emails across devices may lead to loss of resources (Christian & Ellis, 2011; Schmitt et al., 2021).

In this study, techno-overload is understood as a condition in which digital technologies pressure individuals to work faster and longer while managing higher information loads and multiple applications (Tarafdar et al., 2010), and WDA is an adverse emotional response marked by unease and, in some cases, fear (Sánchez-Prieto et al., 2016). WDA is defined as the tension that arises from anticipating negative consequences of work device use, influenced by behavioural, physiological, and experiential factors (Wilson et al., 2023). Therefore, an employee's experience of constant connectivity could directly influence their well-being, which refers to a person's mental, physical, and general health, as well as the sense of fulfilment derived from work and non-work domains (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Based on the above theoretical background and gaps identified in the literature, the following is the research question and the objective of the study:

1.4 Research Question

How do employees in Australia and India experience and make sense of availability expectations, techno-overload, and opportunities for learning and adopting emerging technologies?

1.5 Research Objectives

- a) To qualitatively explore whether availability expectations vary across Australia and India.
- b) To examine how employees experience and manage techno-overload in Australia and India.
- c) To explore opportunities for employees to learn and adopt emerging technologies in Australia and India.

2. Method

Primarily, this study involves a cross-national comparison of employee experiences, conducted through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). Six theory-informed qualitative questions were designed to understand and compare the experiences of knowledge workers in Australia and India who work in environments where constant connectivity, facilitated by digital devices, is the norm. The purpose of using open-ended survey questions

was to allow for anonymity, enable cross-national samples, and make them suitable for reflective and experiential phenomena, such as constant connectivity. This method also provides a less intrusive alternative to one-to-one interviews and overcomes the limitations of closed-ended surveys in capturing the diversity of employees' experiences.

Further, an open-ended survey has been a standard approach in management research for collecting unrestricted data from respondents (Lee Cunningham et al., 2023; Valls et al., 2018). The questions primarily focused on uncovering the employee's experience with organisational expectations of availability, the impact of techno-overload, stress, and how they cope with it. The questions also explored employees' opportunities to learn and acquire new technical skills, job schedule autonomy, and the challenges they face due to constant connectivity. These aspects were incorporated into the survey questions, which were guided by the qualitative framework of the six components of the social-technical systems approach: people, infrastructure, technology, culture (a pattern or system of beliefs and values), processes/procedures, and goal (Davis et al., 2014).

The following are the six open-ended questions developed for this study:

1. a) Is there an expectation of availability (after-hours, weekend, holidays) through your office laptop or mobile device and a demand for immediate responses to your work? b) If so, does this expectation make you feel overloaded, stressed, and anxious?
2. a) How often do you feel overwhelmed due to excessive use of your office laptop or mobile device? b) How do you deal with such situations?
3. Has the feeling of overload and stress led to anxiety related to your laptop or mobile device, and has it affected your well-being (e.g., burnout, poor performance, low work motivation, and low social or peer engagement)? If yes, please explain.
4. Do you have opportunities in your job role to change your work preferences in order to learn and adopt emerging technologies, such as acquiring new technical skills?
5. In your job role, to what extent are you able to change your work routines?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share? For example, any other challenges you face at work and outside work due to constant connectivity and excessive use of your office laptop or mobile device.

2.1 Data Collection

The Data were collected with the help of an online panel research company, Researchify Pty Ltd, focusing on knowledge workers in Australia and India. Ethical approvals were obtained for the study. The selection of participants was based on predefined criteria for voluntarily registered participants. The criteria were as follows: (1) respondents used laptops, mobile devices, or other digital tools for work purposes; (2) were of working age as defined by the law of the respective country; and (3) had been working in their current organisation for at least the past six months. These criteria, along with assumptions for national median age and gender composition, were applied to ensure adequate representation of key characteristics of the target population.

Initially, 252 Australian knowledge workers were contacted between October and November 2024. Of these, 20 responses were excluded because they were not sufficiently comprehensible for analysis, 15 participants were excluded because they were employed on a part-time basis, and 21 participants were excluded because they had less than six months of experience in their current organisation. Following these exclusions, a total of 196 responses were retained for the study. 50.0% of this sample were female, with a median age of 42.15 years (SD: 11.44) as shown in Table 1. The largest chunk of respondents was from the software and IT sector (18.50%), followed by healthcare (16.50%), consultancy (9.00%), education (9.00%), and the

remainder from other sectors. Later, between May and June 2025, 287 invites were sent to Indian knowledge workers. Of these, 26 responses were excluded because they were not sufficiently comprehensible for analysis, 35 participants were excluded because they were employed on a part-time basis, and 29 participants were excluded because they had less than six months of experience in their current organisation. Finally, 197 complete responses from Indian knowledge workers were included. 44.16% of this sample were female, with a median age of 34.51 years ($SD = 8.83$), as shown in Table 2. 98.99% of the participants held at least a bachelor's degree. Software and IT (61.80%), banking and finance (20.60%), engineering (6.03%), health care (5.02%), consultancy (4.02%), and the education sector (2.51%).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Australian respondents

Age Group (Years)	Frequency (f)	Midpoint (x)	fx	$(x - \bar{x})^2$	$f(x - \bar{x})^2$	CF
18–28	19	23	437	402.56	7,648.55	19
29–43	88	36	3168	49.90	4,390.93	107
44–59	68	51.5	3502	71.17	4,839.55	175
60–67	21	63.5	1333.5	417.64	8,770.42	196
Total (N)	196					
N/2	98	Lower bound of the median class				28.5
Mean	43.06	Cumulative frequency (CF) before the median class				19
SD	11.44	Frequency of the median class				88
Median	42.15	Class width				15

Source: Authors' own data. Note: The mean and standard deviation were calculated using class midpoints due to unequal class intervals. The age groups correspond to Generation Z, X and Y as per the Pew Research report. The official retirement age in Australia is 67, so the upper age limit is taken as 67.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for Indian respondents

Age Group (Years)	Frequency (f)	Midpoint (x)	fx	$(x - \bar{x})^2$	$f(x - \bar{x})^2$	CF
18–28	50	23	1150	140.61	7,030.45	50
29–43	121	36	4356	1.30	157.84	171
44–59	24	51.5	1236	276.96	6,647.05	195
60–65	2	62.5	125	764.09	1,528.17	197
Total (N)	197					
N/2	98.5	Lower bound of the median class				28.5
Mean	34.86	Cumulative frequency before the median class				50
SD	8.83	Frequency of the median class				121
Median	34.51	Class width				15

Source: Authors' own data. Note: The official retirement age in India is 60, but for University Professors it is 65; therefore, the upper age limit was set at 65.

2.2 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), informed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), which enables the interpretation of employee experience within a social

constructionist philosophy (Van Vliet et al., 2025). Social constructionism argues that meanings about the world emerge through shared social interactions, relationships, and discourse (Schultheiss & Wallace, 2012). Therefore, the analysis and findings presented in this study focus specifically on experiences of constant connectivity and how they manage technology-related overload. RTA involves familiarisation with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, reviewing and refining themes, and producing an interpretive account (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

At the initial stage of analysis, we read all 393 responses from participants across the two countries in full to develop a comprehensive understanding of the data and its context. Initial codes were generated using short labels or phrases that captured meaningful aspects of participants' experiences. We then compared the codes, identifying similarities and differences in meaning, and grouped related codes into broader categories. These categories were progressively reviewed and consolidated into themes representing salient patterns across the dataset. We acknowledge that our disciplinary backgrounds in human resource management, organisational research, and public health, as well as our shared Indian heritage, may have influenced our interpretation of participants' responses. We therefore reflected critically on our assumptions, discussed emerging codes and themes, and revisited interpretations against the original responses to ensure that the findings remained grounded in the data.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researchers revisited the original responses after developing the initial themes to assess whether the themes adequately reflected the data and examined divergent responses that did not align with the emerging themes. Themes were subsequently named, reviewed, and refined throughout the writing of the findings to ensure that they accurately represented participants' responses. This iterative approach is consistent with the principles of reflexive thematic analysis, in which theme development is an interpretive and recursive process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Microsoft Excel was used to systematically record and organise the codes, themes, and supporting participant quotations. In total, 65 initial codes were developed and consolidated into five final themes. To enhance transparency, illustrative participant quotations are presented alongside the findings, while Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix provide examples of the coding structure, including selected codes and supporting quotations for each theme across the two countries.

Data adequacy was assessed based on the breadth, relevance, and variation of the responses in relation to the research questions. The dataset offered diverse perspectives, recurring patterns, and divergent experiences across the two countries. This approach is consistent with prior research demonstrating the use of open-ended survey responses as qualitative data for thematic analysis (Lee Cunningham et al., 2023; Valls et al., 2018).

3. Findings

In this section, we present the study's findings on employees' experience of constant connectivity in Australia and India. The result is analysed with consideration of differences in social norms, potential differences in technological maturity, prevailing expectations, and technological infrastructure in Australia and India. The themes derived from the structured open-ended survey questionnaires are: the psychological impact of availability expectations, digital disengagement as coping, perceived control, learning and adaptation, and sociotechnical conditions that shape work experiences.

3.1 Psychological Impact of Availability Expectations

One of the most common themes that emerged from the open-ended qualitative responses was the psychological impact of availability expectations. The respondents emphasised the possible

negative effects of excessive use of digital devices and the requirement of constant connectivity (**technology**). This is further supported by the fact that they are unable to completely relax at times, and the way the always-on culture has created a sense of overload (**Culture**).

One of the Australian respondents describes, “it’s common for IT managers to feel overwhelmed, especially when there’s constant use of devices for work, even after hours. If you’re frequently needed for troubleshooting, system monitoring, or unexpected crises, the constant “on-call” mode can pile up and feel quite draining.”

This testimony is supported by some of the findings from past studies, which indicate that excessive use of work devices beyond work hours can lead to emotional exhaustion, affecting sleep quality and hindering work-life balance (Belkin et al., 2020; Lanaj, Johnson, & Barnes, 2014; Magni et al., 2023). While reviewing the responses, it was noted that the codes derived from the Australian and Indian data exhibited slight differences. The frequency of mentions of having limited family time and unspoken expectations (**culture**) was observed in the Indian data. It is possible that this is because India has a tradition of living in joint families, and due to its high-context culture, expectations are often communicated or established indirectly through norms.

One of the Indian respondents describes, “Yes, there is often an unspoken expectation to be available outside of regular working hours, including weekends and holidays, especially through mobile devices. This constant pressure to respond immediately can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious, making it difficult to fully disconnect and recharge. It affects work-life balance and sometimes causes stress even during personal or family time.”

3.2 Digital Disengagement as Coping

Many organisations have employee-friendly policies, such as no emails after hours and non-mandatory responses to official communication. Apart from organisational efforts, individual employees also have their own coping strategies (**processes**) to mitigate the negative effects of constant connectivity. It was noted that individuals turn off their handheld devices, take work breaks, engage in digital detox, invest in boundary management, seek support from peers and superiors and make an effort to identify the source of their stress (**people**).

One of the Australian respondents describes, “When feeling overwhelmed by excessive use of my office devices, I manage it by setting clear boundaries, taking regular breaks, and practising mindfulness to recharge.”

While most of the codes generated from the responses were very similar in both the Australian and Indian data, with only a subtle difference. The frequency of the use of meditation as a coping mechanism for overload was higher in the case of the Indian participants (**culture**). It may be possible because meditation and performing yoga are very common in the Indian population. There were also a few extreme cases where participants mentioned taking medicine to overcome stress as a result of the digital devices.

One of the Indian respondents describes, “The constant notifications and the pressure to respond immediately can make it difficult to mentally disconnect from work, leading to stress and anxiety. To manage such situations, I also make it a point to take regular breaks, prioritise tasks effectively, and engage in activities like reading or going for a walk to decompress and regain focus. These small steps help me maintain a healthier balance between work and personal life.”

3.3 Perceived Control

The pervasive use of digital devices in white-collar jobs and the remote availability of office resources in today's organisations have provided some degree of control over when, where, and how to do a job (**technology**). This is also reflected in the participants' responses, which highlight job flexibility, confidence in their stress management abilities, and their skills to balance work and personal life effectively.

One of the Australian respondents describes, "While I've experienced occasional stress due to work, it hasn't led to significant anxiety or negatively impacted my overall well-being. I maintain a healthy work-life balance and prioritize self-care to prevent burnout."

The employees understand the degree of control they have over their work routines and acknowledge the absence of absolute control (**process or procedure**). The codes generated for this theme across the two countries were very similar, and a slight difference observed in the Indian participants was the tendency to express their high job engagement attitude.

One of the Indian respondents describes, "In my job role, I have a moderate level of flexibility to change my work routines. While certain tasks are fixed and deadline-driven, I am often able to adjust my schedule, prioritise tasks differently, and explore more efficient methods to improve productivity and adapt to new challenges."

3.4 Learning and Adaptation

Technology continues to evolve, and it is essential that it does so in alignment with societal needs. However, in the real world, there appears to be a significant misalignment between the speed at which technology has evolved and continues to evolve, which necessitates that people constantly learn and update their technical skills (Jaiswal, Arun, & Varma, 2023). Therefore, organisations periodically conduct training programs (**processes/procedures**), supporting their employees in acquiring the latest technical skills and in effectively using software and platforms (**infrastructure**).

One of the Australian respondents describes, "My company offers various training programs and encourages employees to explore new technologies, so I have opportunities to upskill and stay updated with industry trends."

Similarly, no stark differences in the codes within this theme were observed from the Indian responses.

One of the Indian respondents describes, "Yes, my job role provides opportunities to change work preferences and explore new learning avenues. I am encouraged to participate in workshops, online courses, and team projects that involve the adoption of emerging technologies. This helps me stay updated and continuously acquire new technical skills relevant to industry demands."

3.5 Sociotechnical Conditions Shaping Work Experience

The interaction between social and technical systems creates sociotechnical conditions that shape the work experience. The experience of an always-on culture, resulting from constant connectedness and extended work hours, was found to be the most common code. Furthermore, the connectivity paradox was also observed, as participants felt stressed due to work spill-over, while also reporting an improvement in productivity (in terms of achieving their **goals**). This aligns with the findings from past studies, which have found that the autonomy paradox, resulting from after-hours connectivity, can have both positive and negative impacts on well-being and performance (ten Brummelhuis et al., 2021; van Zoonen et al., 2023).

One of the Australian respondents describes, “I think there is a grey area, on one hand it is stressful as it means we take our work home if we use devices, but on the other hand it has helped a lot with productivity”.

The difference in codes within this theme was the guilt or anxiety associated with the fear of missing out, which was observed among Indian participants but not among Australian respondents. Secondly, Australia is a developed country, and India is also rapidly developing, but there can be infrastructural differences between these countries. According to the Global Digitalisation Index (GDI) 2024, Australia ranks 10th and India 48th in terms of ICT maturity and economic development (Huawei, 2024). Evidently, the Australian participants did not mention any infrastructural issues in the work-from-home situation, whereas the Indian participants did (**infrastructure**).

One of the Indian respondents describes, “... There's also a sense of guilt or anxiety when I try to take time off, fearing that I might miss something important or fall behind. Outside of work, this always-on mindset reduces my ability to be present in the moment, impacting my overall well-being and personal fulfilment....”

Another respondent says, “...sometimes I feel disconnected through poor wifi in my hometown.”

4. Discussion

The main objectives of this study were a) to qualitatively explore whether availability expectations vary across Australia and India, b) to examine how employees experience and manage techno-overload in Australia and India, and c) to explore opportunities for employees to learn and adopt emerging technologies in Australia and India. Based on the 393 qualitative open-ended responses from Australia and India, a reflexive thematic analysis was conducted. Based on 65 codes, five themes were generated: 1) the psychological impact of availability expectations, 2) digital disengagement as coping, 3) perceived control, 4) learning and adaptation, and 5) sociotechnical conditions that shape work experience. In the next section, we discuss the study's cross-country insights and propositions, its theoretical and practical implications, and its limitations, followed by directions for future research.

4.1 Cross-country insights and propositions

The findings suggest that constant connectivity is shaped by the interaction between technical and social elements of the work system. Participants in both Australia and India described digital technologies as enabling flexibility and productivity while simultaneously creating expectations of continued availability and work–life spill-over. However, the sources of these pressures differed across contexts. Australian participants more frequently associated connectivity demands with technology-related work requirements, such as troubleshooting, system monitoring, and working from home, whereas Indian participants more frequently described unspoken expectations of after-hours availability and the intrusion of work into family and personal time. This finding extends Sociotechnical Systems (STS) theory by suggesting that the consequences of digitalisation emerge not from technology alone but from how technological capabilities interact with social expectations and work practices. Accordingly, we propose **P1: Interactions among the social and technical components of the work system shape employees' experiences of constant connectivity and expectations of availability.**

The findings further indicate that constant connectivity can have psychological consequences by limiting employees' ability to detach from work and recover personal resources. Participants in both countries described stress, overload, and difficulty fully relaxing, although Indian

participants more frequently referred to guilt, anxiety, fear of missing out, and reduced family time, while Australian participants emphasised feeling drained by continuous device use and work-related demands. These findings extend Conservation of Resources (COR) theory by illustrating how persistent digital connectivity can function as a resource-depleting demand that extends beyond formal working hours and interferes with recovery. Thus, we propose: **P2: Constant connectivity depletes employees' personal resources by reducing opportunities for psychological detachment and recovery, thereby increasing psychological strain.**

The findings also demonstrate that employees and organisations actively mobilise resources to manage the demands associated with constant connectivity. Employees in both countries described strategies such as taking breaks, setting boundaries, disconnecting from devices, and engaging in restorative activities, although Indian participants more frequently mentioned meditation, while Australian participants emphasised boundary-setting and mindfulness. Participants also described perceived control over work routines and organisational opportunities for training and upskilling as resources that enabled them to manage and adapt to changing digital demands. These findings extend COR theory by highlighting that resource regulation occurs through both individual coping practices and organisationally provided resources. Accordingly, we propose: **P3: Employees and organisations mitigate the resource-depleting effects of constant connectivity through resource-regulating practices, including digital disengagement, perceived control, and organisational learning opportunities.**

4.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study has several valuable theoretical implications. First, our study underscores the psychological experience of availability expectations among knowledge workers in Australia and India, with Indian participants particularly highlighting unspoken expectations and their effects on family and personal time. Second, while many coping strategies were similar across both countries, subtle differences were observed, such as mindfulness and meditation being more prevalent among Indian respondents. Third, this study contributes to the STS framework by illustrating the interdependence among its six components and how their interaction shapes employees' experiences of digital connectivity (Davis et al., 2014). The findings further extend COR by explaining how persistent connectivity can deplete personal resources and how employees mobilise resources to manage these demands. Fourth, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse on the right to disconnect by highlighting how formal regulations and informal expectations of availability may shape employees' experiences across national contexts.

This study also has several implications for practitioners. First, the expectations of constant availability and excessive use of digital devices can negatively affect individuals (Dettmers, 2017). Therefore, organisations may introduce rules that make after-hours availability or immediate responses to official communication non-mandatory in countries where there are no laws on the right to disconnect. Second, individuals should be encouraged to take regular breaks, engage in activities that reduce stress, and develop suitable coping strategies. Third, individuals who voluntarily engage in after-hours connectivity should be allowed to work at their convenience without creating implicit expectations for others and while complying with relevant laws. Fourth, employers should provide opportunities for relevant training programs and adequate infrastructure for both office-based and work-from-home arrangements.

4.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Like any study, this research has certain limitations, and its findings should be interpreted in light of these constraints. First, a few responses to the open-ended survey questions were

limited to “yes” or “no,” whereas the majority consisted of full-sentence responses. This may have constrained our interpretation in cases where responses were brief. However, given the relatively large sample size ($N = 393$), this limitation is likely to have been partially mitigated. Second, it was noted that the Australian respondents had provided relatively shorter responses than their Indian peers. Future studies may employ interviews or focus groups to have richer data on employee experience. Third, the research questions were developed jointly by the research team. Future studies could additionally seek review from independent experts, including academics and practitioners, to further enhance the validity of the questions. Fourth, limited research exists on the employee experience following the implementation of right-to-disconnect laws in many countries, including France, Spain, and Australia (Hopkins, 2024). Future research could explore this avenue. Lastly, studies on technology/ICT use and constant connectivity have been mostly driven by theories such as JDR, COR, boundary theory, and self-determination theory, as these theories may provide a framework for investigating motivational and boundary management processes (Hu et al., 2021). However, the STS theory may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between the technical and social systems. Therefore, future research should focus on the theoretical framework of STS to identify ways to better align the two systems.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore employees’ experiences of managing constant connectivity by examining cross-country similarities and differences between Australia and India in relation to availability expectations, techno-overload, and opportunities to learn and adapt to emerging technologies. Drawing on the sociotechnical systems (STS) and Conservation of Resources (COR) perspectives, a reflexive thematic analysis of 393 responses generated five themes: the psychological impact of availability expectations, digital disengagement as coping, perceived control, learning and adaptation, and sociotechnical conditions shaping work experiences. The findings showed that while employees in both countries experienced connectivity-related demands and adopted coping strategies, the sources and manifestations of these experiences varied across contexts.

The study contributes theoretically by highlighting the interdependence of the six STS components and explaining how sociotechnical conditions shape connectivity demands, persistent connectivity depletes personal resources, and individual and organisational resources support employees in managing these demands. Three theoretical propositions were developed from these findings. Future research could build on this study using richer qualitative data from interviews and focus groups and further examine how national and cultural contexts shape experiences of constant connectivity. This study provides a foundation for further research on digital work, constant connectivity, and sociotechnical systems.

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Ethical declaration

This study has been approved by the institutional ethics committee of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur and the Research Ethics Office, Curtin University, Australia. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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Appendix

Table A1. Examples of key themes and codes derived from the Australian data

Themes	Code	Quotes
1) Psychological impact of availability expectations	stress, lack of relaxation time, exhaustion, after-hour availability expectations	<i>it's common for IT managers to feel overwhelmed, especially when there's constant use of devices for work, even after hours. The constant "on-call" mode can pile up and feel quite draining.</i>
2) Digital disengagement as coping	individual coping strategy, digital detox	<i>i feel overwhelmed at least a couple of times a month and what i do is exercise and meditate and take a break from devices</i>
3) Perceived control	high job control, work-life balance, flexibility	<i>I have some flexibility in managing my daily tasks and choosing the tools I use to complete them. I have the luxury of doing things in my own time frame</i>
4) Sociotechnical learning and adaptation	learning opportunities, skill upgradation, new technology adaptation	<i>My company offers various training programs and encourages employees to explore new technologies, so I have opportunities to upskill and stay updated with industry trends.</i>
5) Sociotechnical conditions shaping work experience	connectivity paradox, stress, higher productivity, always-on, constant connectedness	<i>i think there is a grey area, on one hand it is stressful as it means we take our work home if we use devices, but on the other hand it has helped a lot with productivity</i>

Source(s): Created by authors

Table A2. Examples of key themes and codes derived from the Indian samples

Themes	Code	Quotes
1) Psychological impact of availability expectations	after-hour availability expectations, stress, poor work-life balance	<i>Yes, there is often an unspoken expectation to be available outside of regular working hours. It affects work-life balance and sometimes causes stress even during personal or family time.</i>
2) Digital disengagement as coping	work breaks, individual coping strategy, work-life balance, meditation, yoga	<i>...I also make it a point to take regular breaks, prioritize tasks effectively, and engage in activities like reading or going for a walk to decompress and regain focus.....I have started meditation, which has helped me to overcome.</i>
3) Perceived control	self-control, Managing screen time, low work stress, high job engagement	<i>No, laptop or mobile-device has not affected me as I take care of screen time....No, I never pressurize my work. I do my job only due to my willingness.</i>
4) Sociotechnical learning and adaptation	learning opportunities, skill upgradation, new technology adaptation	<i>I am encouraged to participate in workshops, online courses, and team projects that involve the adoption of emerging technologies.</i>
5) Sociotechnical conditions shaping work experience	blurred work-home boundaries, low psychological detachment, poor well-being, poor infrastructure, work-from-home	<i>I often find it difficult to disconnect after work hours, which affects my ability to relax and recharge. This leads to mental fatigue, disturbed sleep patterns... Sometimes I feel disconnected through poor wifi in my hometown.</i>

Source(s): Created by authors