

WORK BEYOND HOURS: THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT

5

Divyansh Singh

Abstract

This chapter examines the growing relevance of digital boundaries in modern professional life. With increasing competition, evolving work expectations, and continuous digital communication, employees often feel pressured to remain available beyond their official working hours. Inspired by the Right to Disconnect Bill proposed in the Indian Parliament, this chapter examines the need for clearer limits on professional communication. It discusses the relevance of this idea in contemporary workplaces across different professions. Rather than merely describing the concept, the chapter considers how it operates in real-world situations by examining both employee and employer perspectives. It explores issues related to responsibility, performance, communication expectations, and the challenge of balancing flexibility with fairness at work. Using a conceptual and analytical approach, the discussion examines how workplace structures, cultural pressures, and digital habits contribute to constant availability and influence focus, mental well-being, and long-term professional development. It also highlights the role of structured communication practices and clear boundaries in improving productivity, reducing stress, and supporting stable work environments. In addition, the chapter emphasizes the importance of rest and skill development as essential elements of sustainable performance. The chapter concludes that effective work is not determined by extended working hours, but by clarity,

Divyansh Singh

Student, School of Engineering and Technology, Sushant University,
Gurugram, Haryana

Email: divyanshkumarindia@gmail.com

Publisher: Anu Books, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31995/book.ab365.j326.ch.5>

Book: The Human Dimension of Success: Skills and Employability

balance, and responsible practices, presenting this approach as a practical path towards healthier and more efficient professional environments.

Keywords:

Right to Disconnect, Digital Burnout, Work-Life Balance, Workplace Culture, Digital Communication

Introduction

“When work has no clear end, rest begins to feel like a luxury instead of a necessity.”

Digital communication has transformed the way work is experienced in everyday life. Emails, messaging platforms, and mobile devices have made it possible for professional communication to continue beyond fixed working hours. As a result, the boundary between work and personal time is no longer clearly defined or consistently observed.

This concern is reflected in the Right to Disconnect Bill proposed in the Indian Parliament, which highlights the need for clearer limits on after-hours communication and the importance of protecting personal time.

In many workplaces, staying connected has gradually become an expectation rather than a choice. Availability is often associated with commitment, performance, and job security, leading many employees to feel the need to remain accessible even after completing their official working hours.

This chapter examines this growing pattern and its relevance in contemporary professional life. It explores why the pressure to stay connected exists, how it affects both individuals and organizations, and where practical limits can be established.

Rather than simply defining the concept, the chapter focuses on its role in real workplace situations. It considers both the opportunities and challenges associated with digital connectivity, while examining the perspectives of employees and employers to understand how balanced digital boundaries can be developed.

Literature Review

Recent studies on the right to disconnect highlight its growing

importance in digital work environments. With the rise of constant communication through emails and messages, many researchers have examined how continuous connectivity affects employee well-being and productivity. Pansu (2018) studied the French right-to-disconnect law and found that employees responded positively when given the option to disengage from work after official hours. The study showed that such policies help employees feel more in control of their time; however, their effectiveness depends largely on workplace culture.

Similarly, Varela-Castro et al. (2022) highlighted that disconnecting from work improves productivity, creativity, and overall performance, indicating that rest directly supports better work results. Dima and Högback (2020), through their study involving employees, found that the right to disconnect reduces stress and supports a healthier balance between work and personal life. Their findings suggest that when employees are able to rest properly, they return to work with better focus and improved efficiency.

Overall, existing research indicates that the right to disconnect contributes significantly to employee well-being and workplace productivity, particularly in modern digital and remote work settings.

Work Expectations and Professional Balance

Work expectations have changed considerably with the growth of digital communication and increasing competition. In earlier work structures, responsibilities were generally limited to defined working hours. Today, however, responsiveness and availability are often expected beyond those limits. In many industries, employees are assessed not only by the quality of their work but also by how quickly they respond, creating pressure to remain continuously accessible.

Consequently, working beyond official hours can gradually become a habit rather than an actual requirement. While additional work may occasionally be necessary because of deadlines or coordination needs, it should not become a routine expectation. When this occurs regularly, employees may feel that their personal time is not being respected, which can eventually affect motivation and the quality of their work.

Understanding this issue requires considering both employee and employer perspectives. Employees need time for rest and personal responsibilities, while organizations depend on timely responses and a degree of flexibility when situations require it. Maintaining balance therefore depends on clear expectations regarding working hours, response timelines, and circumstances that genuinely demand immediate attention.

The challenge becomes even more noticeable in work-from-anywhere settings. Since work is carried out through digital devices, separating professional and personal spaces becomes more difficult, making it harder to disconnect mentally. As a result, working hours may gradually extend, and even informal communication can carry an expectation of response.

Individuals can address this by setting fixed working hours, taking short breaks between tasks, and avoiding late-hour work unless it is genuinely necessary. Organizations can support these efforts by assigning tasks in advance, establishing clear deadlines, and limiting non-essential communication after working hours.

When expectations are clearly communicated and responsibilities are managed effectively by both sides, work can remain productive without creating constant pressure.

Understanding Boundaries Across Different Professions

Some professions require a higher level of availability because of the responsibilities involved. In fields such as healthcare, emergency services, and hospitality, immediate responses are often necessary, making complete disconnection difficult to implement. In these settings, digital boundaries are usually maintained through structured shifts, clear role allocation, and well-defined responsibilities rather than through total disconnection from work.

Defining urgency can also be challenging within corporate environments. Employees and employers do not always view tasks in the same way. A task that appears non-essential to one person may be considered important by another. Without a shared understanding of priorities, misunderstandings can arise, leading to confusion, missed deadlines, and unnecessary pressure.

At the same time, constant availability is not a sustainable approach. If urgent and non-urgent tasks are not clearly distinguished, employees may begin to treat most requests as requiring immediate attention. Over time, occasional demands can gradually develop into regular expectations. Conversely, excessive flexibility may result in delays in completing important responsibilities, affecting both deadlines and overall work quality.

Effective boundaries therefore depend on clear workplace practices. Defined response timelines, planned task allocation, and transparent communication of availability help create realistic expectations. When these practices are followed consistently, work can continue smoothly without placing employees under constant pressure.

Workplace Differences Across Countries

The challenge of constant digital connectivity exists across different work environments, but its impact and management vary based on the local conditions.

In some countries, organizations follow structured communication practices, including defined response timelines and limits on after-hours communication. Such approaches encourage work to be completed within designated working hours rather than extending into personal time.

Workplace conditions in India, however, are often shaped by high levels of competition and concerns about job security. As a result, employees may remain available beyond official working hours in order to meet expectations and maintain stability.

Because of these differences, digital boundaries cannot be implemented in the same manner everywhere. They need to be adapted to specific work environments and role requirements. Clear guidelines that reflect local conditions help support both productivity and employee well-being.

Balancing Expectations Between Employees and Employers

Work in modern organizations depends on a balance between demand and supply. Employers create demand through tasks, deadlines, and expectations, while employees contribute their effort,

skills, and time to meet those requirements. Maintaining this balance is essential for the smooth functioning of any organization.

Managers often worry that limiting after-hours communication could slow progress or delay urgent work. This concern is understandable because they are responsible for coordination, deadlines, and overall team performance. At the same time, employees may feel pressure to remain available in order to respond to these demands and ensure that work is completed efficiently.

When urgent work arises beyond regular hours, clarity becomes important for both sides. From a managerial perspective, urgency should be limited to situations that genuinely require immediate attention. Employees, on the other hand, may need to respond when circumstances truly demand it, particularly when their expertise is necessary to resolve an issue or complete a task.

At the same time, not every task requires an immediate response. Clear planning during working hours can significantly reduce the need for late-hour communication. Assigning responsibilities in advance and establishing realistic timelines helps employees understand what is expected of them, allowing work to be completed within defined hours and with less pressure.

Effective coordination ultimately depends on mutual understanding. When managers communicate and plan clearly, and employees respond responsibly, work can progress efficiently without creating constant pressure.

Focus, Mental Load, and Work Efficiency

Modern work environments are heavily influenced by continuous digital communication. Emails, messages, and notifications arriving throughout the day can divide attention and interrupt tasks, making sustained focus difficult. As a result, work often becomes fragmented, causing even simple tasks to take longer than necessary.

Repeated shifts in attention also make deep thinking more difficult. Rather than concentrating on one task, individuals frequently move between activities, reducing both efficiency and the overall quality of their work.

Many workplaces continue to associate longer working hours with better performance. In reality, extended hours without adequate rest often reduce concentration, increase mistakes, and slow task completion. Constant activity and interruptions can lower productivity instead of improving it.

Meaningful results depend more on focused effort and proper recovery than on continuous activity. When interruptions are minimized and tasks are managed within clear working hours, individuals can concentrate more effectively and perform their work better. Practical measures such as reducing unnecessary meetings, avoiding continuous back-to-back tasks, and taking short breaks during long work sessions help maintain focus and reduce mental fatigue.

When individuals are given time to recover mentally, they are better able to think clearly, manage responsibilities efficiently, and sustain consistent performance throughout the day.

Sleep as a Factor in Work Performance

Sleep plays an important role in both performance and emotional stability. Late-night digital activity keeps the mind engaged when it should be preparing for rest. Maximum output with less effort is possible when the mind and body are adequately rested. The quality of sleep directly affects a person's focus, energy, and productivity on the following day. A healthy body supports a healthy mind, and together they contribute to consistent performance.

Research suggests that adults who receive around seven to eight hours of quality sleep demonstrate better concentration, higher energy levels, and stronger decision-making abilities. Despite this, many people begin their day by immediately checking their phones for alarms, messages, notifications, or digital updates. This early exposure to screens can reduce mental clarity and increase distractions from the beginning of the day.

Over time, poor sleep, combined with habits such as immediately checking phones and prolonged screen exposure, can affect concentration, memory, and decision-making. These effects influence both work quality and overall well-being. When individuals

disconnect properly and maintain healthy sleep routines, mental recovery improves, leading to clearer thinking and more effective work performance.

Therefore, healthy sleep is not optional; it is necessary for consistent and sustainable performance.

Time for Growth and Skill Development

In today's professional environment, simply having a job is no longer enough. Continuous learning and skill development have become increasingly important. Employees often need time beyond working hours to strengthen their knowledge and remain relevant in their fields. However, when work regularly extends late into the evening, finding time for personal growth becomes far more difficult.

This creates a limitation. If individuals spend most of their time responding to work demands, they may find it difficult to develop the new skills required for long-term career stability.

The issue is not limited to rest alone; it also affects long-term professional growth. When there is little time available for learning and self-improvement, short-term performance can come at the cost of future opportunities and development.

For this reason, maintaining balance is essential. Professional responsibilities require effort and commitment, but individuals also need time to learn, develop new skills, and take care of their well-being.

Using Technology for Better Work Management

Technology can contribute to better work management when supported by clear and structured practices. Tools such as shared calendars, task management platforms, and status indicators help teams understand availability and plan their work more effectively.

Shared calendars enable teams to schedule meetings, track deadlines, and organize tasks in advance. This allows both managers and employees to understand what needs to be completed and when, reducing the need for last-minute coordination. Likewise, task management tools help assign responsibilities clearly while ensuring that work is distributed and monitored efficiently.

For employees, these tools provide better organization, help manage workloads, and reduce confusion. Employers, in turn, gain improved visibility into progress and can coordinate work more effectively without relying on constant communication.

When used consistently, these technologies help teams remain aligned, reduce unnecessary pressure, and support a more structured and efficient workflow.

Practical Ways to Manage Disconnection

While policies and formal rules are important, everyday work experiences are often shaped by the small decisions made by individuals and teams. Managing boundaries is not simply about stopping work; it also involves handling communication and expectations in a balanced manner.

Simple actions can often reduce unnecessary pressure. For instance, if a message is received during personal time, responding later based on individual convenience may be appropriate. Clear communication regarding availability also helps coworkers avoid confusion and encourages mutual understanding.

Workplaces can support these efforts by promoting healthier work habits. Some organizations encourage short breaks between extended work sessions or reduce unnecessary meetings to help employees manage stress more effectively. Such practices help maintain energy levels and reduce mental fatigue.

Flexibility should also be used responsibly. Not every task can be postponed, particularly when urgent situations arise. The objective is not to avoid work but to manage it in a way that remains fair to both employees and organizations.

Changing Work and Career Expectations

Concerns about job security remain one of the key reasons individuals stay constantly available. Many employees feel the need to demonstrate their value through consistent effort and responsiveness. Staying busy, replying quickly, and working beyond official hours are often viewed as ways to maintain stability and reduce the risk of being replaced.

For many years, success was closely associated with long working hours and visible effort. Today, that perspective is gradually changing. Increasingly, professionals recognize that continuous work does not always produce better outcomes. In many cases, it can reduce clarity, slow learning, and negatively affect decision-making.

There is also greater awareness that a successful career depends not only on immediate performance but also on long-term growth and stability. This includes adapting to change, developing new skills, and remaining relevant in evolving industries. When all available time is spent meeting work demands, opportunities for personal growth may become limited.

As a result, success is now viewed in a broader and more balanced way. It depends not only on the amount of time spent working but also on how effectively that time is used, how well individuals manage their energy, continue learning, develop new skills, and invest in their overall growth.

This shift does not diminish the value of hard work. Instead, it redefines it. Work is no longer measured only by presence and availability but also by focus, sustainability, and meaningful contributions over time.

Conclusion: Moving Towards Sustainable Work Culture

The concept of the right to disconnect reflects more than just a policy discussion; it signals a broader shift in how work is understood. For years, dedication was often measured through constant availability, but this assumption is now being questioned.

Healthy economies depend on healthy workers. When individuals are able to rest properly, they return with clearer thinking, stronger focus and better judgment. In this way, protecting personal time supports productivity rather than reducing it.

The objective is not to reduce commitment but to create a structure in which effort remains sustainable and clearly defined. This encourages both organizations and individuals to reconsider how work is managed, communicated, and evaluated.

A balanced work culture becomes stronger when effort is

recognized in meaningful ways. Appreciation from leadership, fair recognition of additional work, and measures such as compensatory leave or flexible scheduling help employees feel valued. At the same time, acknowledging personal responsibilities, including family commitments, helps ensure that workplace expectations remain realistic and practical.

For this shift to be effective, changes must occur in both daily work practices and the way expectations are set. Clear communication, responsible leadership, and mutual respect are essential.

Sustainable careers are built on balance rather than exhaustion. Respecting personal time allows individuals to perform effectively without constant pressure, making work productive and meaningful in the long run.

“Rest is not a break from work; it is a part of doing it well.”

References

1. Derks, Daantje, and Arnold B. Bakker. “Smartphone Use, Work–Home Interference, and Burnout.” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2014, Pg. **74–84**.
2. Dima, Luminita, and Andreas Högbäck. “Work-Life Balance and the Right to Disconnect.” 2020.
3. Eurofound. *Right to Disconnect: Exploring Company Practices*. Publications Office of the European Union, 2021.
4. France Ministry of Labour. *The Right to Disconnect Law*. Government of France, 2017.
5. Gryn, Dmytro V., et al. *The Development and Implementation of the Right to Disconnect in Different Jurisdictions*. Bialystok Legal Studies, 2025.
6. Harvard Business Review. “Stop the Always-On Work Culture.” *Harvard Business Review*, 2020.
7. International Labour Organization. *Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World*. ILO, 2022.

8. Pansu, Pierre. "The Right to Disconnect in France: A Legal Framework for Work-Life Balance." *European Labour Law Journal*, 2018.
9. Pfeffer, Jeffrey. *Dying for a Paycheck: How Modern Management Harms Employee Health*. Harper Business, 2018.
10. Sule, Supriya. *The Right to Disconnect Bill*, 2019. Rajya Sabha, 2019.
11. Sule, Supriya. *The Right to Disconnect Bill*, 2025. Lok Sabha, 2025.
12. Varela-Castro, Laura, et al. "Impact of the Right to Disconnect on Productivity and Well-being." 2022.
13. World Economic Forum. *Global Workforce Trends and the Rise of the Mobile Worker*. WEF Publishing, 2023.
14. World Health Organization. *Mental Health in the Workplace*. WHO, 2022.