



WELCOME TO STRESS-LESS NEWSLETTER #1 - MAY 2021

What is STRESS-LESS about?

STRESS-LESS is a 2-year project funded by the European Commission - Erasmus+ KA2 Programme. It involves 5 partners in 5 different countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain and UK.

The STRESS-LESS project will provide up-to-date figures on how the new digital stress is being dealt with and, above all, provide solutions for small (also micro) and medium-sized companies (SME).

Within the project will be developed new training content about prevention and management of digital stress. It will be applicable in work-based settings or in "home-office" settings for SMEs, their staff, managers and trainers/mentors. The programmes will be available via web portal and mobile app. The innovative digital training tools will help users to learn how to prevent and manage digital stress and to develop the habits and discipline required for this (how to cope with digital stress). They will help SME staff and other learners will be healthier, less stressed, easier to communicate with, suffer less from depression and burn-out.

The partnership consortium consists of 5 organizations that have previous experience and knowledge in the areas of stress research, health, well-being and education. The online modules developed are evaluated by SMEs in each partner country through online surveys, personal training courses, workshops and expert interviews (based on grounded theory) and all project results are published in a scientific (STRESS-LESS) report.

What's new on the project?

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Second Partners' meeting

On March 22nd and 23rd, the project's partners held online their Second Partner Meeting.

The meeting represented an opportunity for partners to discuss the activities so far undertaken and to outline together the next steps to follow in order to develop the project's intellectual outputs.

Thanks to all partners' contributions, the meeting was characterized by a fruitful exchange, further enriched by the comparison between the different realities and experiences from the partnership's countries.

Desk Researches Summary

Stress is a constant companion in today's world and digital stress is the one that affects us the most according to the reports of the four partner countries: Germany, Austria, Spain and Bulgaria. These four came up with some findings about their definition of digital stress and the stress factors, their status and existing measures. The increasing progress of digitalisation opens up many possibilities and opportunities. Unfortunately, many companies push the downside into the background. Digital stress is omnipresent, and companies must aim to develop a sustainable and forward-looking strategy to prevent stress from taking over.

Compared to the other countries, SMEs in Germany are most concerned with the topic of digital stress. Numerous foundations, health insurance companies, associations and entrepreneurs deal already with this topic. Despite the large scale of awareness raising, current activities are not sufficient. Much attention must be paid to the five technostress creators that are defined by Tarafdar. They are called: techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-uncertainty, techno-complexity and techno-insecurity. Most SMEs of Germany address only one of the five technostress creators, the so-called techno-invasion. According to Germany, it is not enough to take action at one level. Helpful measures and guidelines must be put in place at all levels to protect employees from the serious consequences of digital stress. These consequences not only have a negative impact on the individual but also on the organisation, as employees are no longer fully capable of working. Similar results are obtained in Spain, which classifies digital stress into three categories: Techno-anxiety, Techno-fatigue and ICT. These identified results can be assigned to the super categories of technostress creators. Techno-anxiety, which can be categorised as techno-uncertainty. Techno-fatigue, which can be categorised as techno-overload and ICT can be put into the category of techno-invasion. According to Austria, the technostress creators can be further divided into three further categories: technology, organisation and people (=TOP). Digital stress also needs to be addressed on these three levels in order to reduce employee stress levels as much as possible.

All of the countries agree with the statement: The higher the digital stress the more common are problems for individuals such as emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction and health problems. At the level of the organisation, it is noticeable that digital stress leads to a decreasing climate of innovation, increased absenteeism and lower productivity.

To follow up on that, the studies of the Austrian professor Rene Riedl in particular have provided valuable insights into digital stress. Germany also participated in the study and some similarities to the stress factors were found. The most important stress factors include the disturbed work-life balance, the pressure in everyday work and the lack of usefulness of digital tools. In addition, Bulgaria has similar results and says that occupational stress is a response to imbalance between demands on the individual and the resources he or she has to deal with those demands. In particular, SMEs have a lack in dealing with digital stress due to their lack of knowledge and in most SMEs, they were left alone with these problems. This makes it even harder to find a valuable balance between work and private life. Bulgaria and Spain also see a huge lack of awareness. For this reason, executives and managers in particular should be trained on the consequences and changes in leadership imposed by digitalisation. Especially Spanish legislations point out a clear responsibility of the employer to prevent possible risks.

All partners analysed that the corona pandemic led to an increase in the use of technologies which cause digital stress. According to a survey carried out in Germany the usage of smartphone during work has increased by 17%, the use of telephone and video conferences has even increased by 100% during the corona pandemic. The partners have identified that companies need a holistic concept to ensure that working with digital technologies can become a model for success.

Legislation from government takes in most of the countries much time and in some cases, it is not well overthought. Austrian, Bulgarian and German legal systems lack clear legal regulations on working hours, occupational safety and data protection when working with digital technologies and in home office. There are hardly any regulations that do justice to the complexity of modern work on the company level. In Spain, there are regulations for remote work since October 2020 in comparison to Austria where they need a lot of time to come up with some adequate regulations. Besides the regulations from the country, the employer is responsible for prevention measures to cope better with stress. For instance, he or she can do this by offering some training activities in the area of stress management for employees. These trainings or programs should include topics such as stress factors, strategies for dealing with stress that consists of methods and techniques. It should be noted that there is no generalizable solution that is equally suitable for all companies. A proper programme must therefore be flexible enough to be adapted by each organisation.

If there are no appropriate measures from the company side, there is a bunch of apps at the two major providers: Apple and Google. Unfortunately, the current apps are limited in their function as they only focus on mediation and relaxation, which are in the realm of techno-overload. To make a big step towards a solution, all five technostress generators need to be addressed.

As the pandemic is still ongoing, it is difficult to assess the further impact of digital stress on some SMEs. It is definitely clear that the ongoing pandemic and the continuous advancement in technologies will lead to a particular increase in digital stress. As there is no generalizable solution, companies and especially the employers must figure out how to best support their employees and help them to reduce their stress level. Moreover, this can only be led in the right direction if employers also attend training courses that teach them about modern leadership of the future.

* Tarafdar M., Q. Tu, B. S. Ragu-Nathan and T. Ragu-Nathan (2007). "The impact of technostress on role stress and productivity." *Journal of Management Information Systems* 24(1): 301-328



What's next?

We are currently working on a survey of how both employees and managing directors of SMEs view the current situation.

In this survey, which will take place in all partner countries, we want to find out how much "digital stress" has changed since the pandemic compared to working life before. We also asked participants to assess the situation after the pandemic.

We also wanted to collect data on how people cope in the home office: How can work and possible childcare obligations be reconciled? How isolated do people feel? How do they deal with the situation as a whole and what counter-strategies do they develop?

We are very excited about the results, which we will share with you soon!

Partnership



BFM / Germany - coordinator
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Hafelekar / Austria
www.hafelekar.at



Happiness Academy / Bulgaria
www.happinessacademy.eu



Consultoria de Innovacion Social / Spain
www.cis-es.org



Horizon Software Solutions / UK
www.horizont.co.uk

Keep in touch with our upcoming activities by visiting the project website

www.stress-less-project.eu



Follow us on LinkedIn:

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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