HOW DO PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS EXPERIENCE TECHNOSTRESS? VOICES OF PR PRACTITIONERS IN A HYPERCONNECTED WORLD

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Abstract

This research examined the lived experience of public relations (PR) practitioners who use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones and laptops for work purposes, not only during the regular work day but also after hours and on weekends. Through the voices of the practitioners themselves, experiences of stress, work-life balance, satisfaction, and other factors were studied. This research followed a critical approach focused on the hyperconnected, hypermodern society in which everything is socially accelerated. Research questions examined the experience of technostress of public relations practitioners, the strategies practitioners used to resist or emancipate themselves from the constant call of technology for work purposes, and what this means for PR practitioners and the practice of PR. Practitioner views on the right to disconnect were also probed and this research was able to gather reflections from practitioners on their experience of working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mixed methods consisted of an online survey (*N*=123) with PR practitioners followed by interviews (*N*=25) with a sub-set of survey respondents. This study found that PR practitioners appreciated the flexibility that remote and hybrid forms of work have brought to the workplace. However, the range of strategies applied by practitioners to get relief or free themselves from the constant call of connection was limited in many cases. Practitioners felt better resourcing, better support and role modelling from senior leadership, stronger boundaries, as well as a shared understanding of what constituted a crisis needing communications support outside of regular working hours would support practitioners. These findings contribute to public relations scholarship by focusing on the voices of PR practitioners in Canada and the experiences they face with ICTs and their work.

Keywords: public relations; technostress; ICTs; information and communication technologies; right to disconnect.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my grandchildren Avery, Lily and Violet, all of whom were born in 2024, only months before this thesis was completed. To any future grandchildren that may arrive, this message applies to them too. I have truly experienced that learning is a lifelong endeavour and that there is no time limit to the calling that has been placed upon one's heart. You are the future so simply strive, always and forever, to be the person God meant you to be.

Tables

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction

"Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral" (Kranzberg, 1986, p. 545).

1.1 Context

Various tools and ways to convey information and communicate have existed since the dawn of humanity. One can imagine that in the distant past, rocks banged together may have been used to carry sounds, and that various sounds or cadences likely had meaning. Perhaps a blade of grass was brought to a mother's mouth to create a noise that would beckon her children from the fields for a meal. As humans developed the ability to fashion their own tools, using fire and other elements, implements began to be created of various sorts. These tools were likely the prehistoric precursors to the technologies we have today that allow us to do, to learn, to communicate, to share and to grow. Along with other forms of non-verbal communication such as vocalizations and gestures, there came the development of what is widely considered one of the first broad forms of non-verbal communication, prehistoric cave drawings describing various life scenes as identified by Neal (1963), in their work on communication from the stone age to the space age.

As the world moved through various major periods in history, tools were created specifically for use in the workplace to enhance productivity. The work tools office and knowledge workers used in the late 19th century and much of the 20th century were for the most part static instruments, relegated largely to the workplace. This meant there were no tools in use that might have created the sense of a permanent connection to the "office" unless one was physically "in" the office.

As noted by Duxbury and Smart (2011) "the typewriter stayed on the desk when its user went home, the office telephone was physically tied to its spot by a cable and computers were too heavy to be carried anywhere" (p. 269). Even earlier models of typewriters were heavy and took a while to be embraced by writers and business people accustomed to writing longhand or dictating their letters and other writings to stenographers. Mark Twain, who was one of the early adopters of the typewriter towards the end of the latter part of the 19th century, tried a couple of times to use it, expressing frustration, and tried to give it away several times. In his first typewritten letter to his brother in 1874 (all in caps, because early machines did not have the ability to handle both upper and lower case), he said in part:

> I am trying to get the hand of this new F (sic) fangled writing machine, but am not making a shining success of it. However this is the first attempt I ever have made, & yet I perceive that I shall soon & easily acquire a fine facility in its use […] The machine costs 125 dollars. The machine has several virtues. I believe it will print faster than I can write. One may lean back in his chair & work it. It piles an awful stack of words on one page. It don't muss things or scatter ink blots around. Of course it saves paper (Clemens, 1874).

Within a few short months, however, Twain (who signed his correspondence Samuel Clemens) wrote manufacturer Remington and Sons to tell them he did not even want people to know he owned a typewriter because so many people were writing him to ask about it and his use of it. He was also frustrated that typewriters could only type in capital letters and had keys that stuck, among other inconveniences. And while he eventually picked the typewriter back up some 30 years later, he always had a bit of a love-hate relationship with it, even as he started producing novels on one. "I will now claim," he said, "until dispossessed, that I was the first person in the world to apply the type machine to literature" (Twain, 1875).

I would argue that it likely wasn't until the creation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as defined by UNESCO (2009) as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information" (p. 120) that the opportunity arose for work to truly inhabit private spaces and life. UNESCO's definition of ICTs is quite broad and includes:

> computers, the Internet (websites, blogs and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players, and storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, visio/video-conferencing, etc.). (UNESCO, 2009, p. 120)

ICTs can be very useful for staying in touch with others, writing and responding to messages, doing work, seeking information, and can be used anytime and anywhere. Researchers have identified that ICTs can be useful tools because they free managers from the being tied to the office to do work (Ladner, 2008), that the flexibility to respond anywhere may increase employees' sense of control over their work and reduce work-life conflict. They are useful tools that can improve productivity (Duxbury & Smart, 2011) and allow people to do their work wherever they please and even address some personal life concerns in the workplace (Shumate & Fulk, 2004), although ICT use has been linked to greater work/life boundary permeability, particularly for women (Chesley, 2005) and can create more role conflict for employees between their work and life roles, particularly in those cases where work and home are co-located (Shumate & Fulk, 2004). While people use ICTs in their personal lives or private sphere, they also make extensive use of them in their work lives in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). The ability of these devices to travel from one sphere to another with their users makes it increasingly difficult to separate the two spheres and the boundaries between them. According to Popma (2013) there are no longer boundaries but rather an «estompement» or trampling of such boundaries (p. 15). ICTs have also been called an electronic leash (Carayol et al., 2017). They have been said to bring on technostress (Weil & Rosen, 1997) a form of stress related to ICTs which was originally defined by (Brod, 1984) as "the disease that results when the delicate balance between people and computers is violated" (p. xi).

As a particular form of stress, technostress has been defined as stress that is a product of the interaction between humans and computers. Psychotherapist Craig Brod's (1984) book *Technostress: The Human Cost of the Computer Revolution* defined technostress as a new kind of disease, "a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with the new computer technologies in a healthy manner" (p. 16). He felt that technostress manifested either as a "struggle to accept" computer technology, or in a form of "overidentification with" computer technology (Brod, 1982). Brod's is considered the seminal definition of technostress, quoted in virtually all research and publications on technostress to this day. Among other things Brod said overidentification with technology leads to a "technocentered" state in which high-performing individuals enter into a form of symbiotic (and one can presume, unhealthy) relationship with the machine (Brod, 1984, p. 17).

ICTs have long been considered a two-edged or double-edged sword. On the one hand, people use ICTs such as smartphones and laptops anywhere and at any time. This allows workers to transcend the usual notions of space and time. ICTs can enhance productivity and flexibility with the ability to respond and resolve issues quickly; people can also work on many tasks at once. Conversely ICTs can be viewed as a form of management and productivity control over workers, a place where "many employees are not able to escape workplace controls at the end of the day" (Duxbury & Smart, p. 270). As these authors note, work is not confined to the office or office hours when the tools that facilitate work, such as smartphones and laptop computers, remain with users around the clock. As Weil and Rosen (1997) reflected on the topic of technostress "Technology may do something for us, but it is also doing something to us. What it is doing is causing us Technostress" (p. 5).

1.2 Research focus

This research was conducted with an occupation that makes significant use of ICTs in their work: public relations (PR) practitioners. These practitioners are responsible for the reputation of organizations and for relationships with key stakeholders. Their work spans a number of functions that potentially may require response at any time of day such as in crisis response, reputation management, social media, issues management, media relations and even internal communications. Through this research, I examined in the first instance what the technostress experience of using ICTs such as smartphones, laptops, tablets and other technological devices for work is like for public relations practitioners in the 21st century, in particular the experience of being connected and potentially available to do work anytime. This thesis also inquired about the ways in which public relations practitioners resist (Mumby, 2005; Putnam & Mumby, 2014) or otherwise emancipate themselves (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992) from these experiences in order to find or restore a sense of control or balance in their lives. Finally, I looked at what these experiences revealed about public relations practice and practitioners in the digital age.

In this work, I found kinship with scholars who studied the lived experience of public relations practitioners and generally decried the lack of study in this area.

For example, Shen and Fussell Sisco (2015) talked about the lack of research into how public relations practitioners compose with ICTs, particularly with respect to social media.

> […] emphasis has been put more on social media's impact on organizations that public relations practitioners represent, little has been done to shed light on social media's (and

> ICT overall) impact on public relations practitioners themselves. As managers and champions of the new communication technologies, public relations practitioners' own lives are largely transformed as well (Shen & Fussell Sisco, 2015, p. 1).

1.3 Research Problem

Studies have shown that public relations practitioners have difficulty with work-life balance, leading to stress, as a result of having to use ICTs outside of regular working hours (Aldoory et al., 2008; Gilkerson et al, 2018; Wright et al., 2014). Practitioners feel that they are "always on" (Gilkerson et al., 2018). Researchers have tended to look at this problem through a work-life balance lens almost exclusively (Aldoory et al., 2008; Jin, et al., 2014; Shen et al., 2015), where work-life balance was defined as "efforts by male and female employed persons who juggle various, personal, home and work responsibilities" (Aldoory et al., 2008, p. 2). Researchers have also taken a more psychological approach to studying the issue, drawn from the literature on coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and have tended to consider this issue from a feminist lens in relation to women, in which women are in the majority of public relations practitioners, clustered in more junior roles (Aldoory et al., 2008). While this may be the case – a Canadian Public Relations Society member survey (CPRS, 2017) found that more than two-thirds of respondents were women – I suggest that technostress affects both men and women in PR. Another North American survey (Meng et al., 2021), showed respondents more equally balanced between men and women. The survey statistics noted, however, that while 69% of practitioners in a junior role were women, only about 40% today attained the most senior ranks in public relations practice.

Technostress is a concept that has been well established and researched, with its own quantitative survey instruments (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008, Tarafdar et al.,2007). There has been a significant increase, it would appear, in publications on the impact of technostress on workers in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly as it relates to work from home (Spagnoli et al., 2020; Penado Abilleira et al., 2021). However, while there has been some research on the impact of technology in PR, there has been very little research on technostress in PR specifically, as will be seen in chapter 2. There was a need for research about practitioners and the practice that added to the literature on ICTs, the public relations literature in studying this issue critically[1] and in relation to technostress, and in particular there was a need for research that focused on the voice of PR practitioners. This research filled a gap in the public relations literature and was particularly timely in the context of current discussions on topics such as hybrid workplaces, work-life balance and the right to disconnect. It also provided some important information about what the impact of ICTs is not only on practitioners, but also on the practice and on its role in society.

1.4 Statement of Purpose

My intention in this work was to give voice to the experience of PR practitioners in their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones, laptops, desktops, and tablets to do their work; to recognize them as experts in their experience; and to bring forward their views on what this has meant to them and to public relations practice. Ultimately my wish was to contribute to scholarly discourse in public relations and foster conversation and best practices within the PR professional and academic education and research communities. My desire was to do so via the lens of technostress as the recognized quantitative measure of stress that comes from technologies, and to learn more about the strategies

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[1] A critical approach begins from the premise that power is not equally distributed and can focus on how people free or emancipate themselves from the contraints the inequalities power bring.

practitioners used with their ICTs to mitigate the impacts of technology on them, something that had not been done in any systematic way in relation to public relations work. It did not mean that I did not also examine other concepts – such as work-life balance, stress in general, job satisfaction and a more recent subject of interest – the right to disconnect. What it did mean is that I approached this study with the idea that technostress was a construct worthy of study in relation to the public relations occupation because it specifically focused on the relationship between technology and workers and technology and occupational practices, something other constructs that have examined public relations work generally had not done in quite the same way.

I also wanted to gather evidence and link this study to the impact of hyperconnectivity on practitioners via ICTs. The concept of hyperconnectivity has been ascribed to Canadian researchers Quan-Haase & Wellman (2005) who referred to the use of multiple means of communications within an organization including e-mail, Internet, face-to-face, and instant messaging. They defined hyperconnectivity as “the instant availability of people for communication anywhere and anytime” essentially facilitated in some form by computer-mediated communication (p. 215). Nicole Aubert (2008) noted that the problem with hyperconnectivity is that it creates an environment of instantaneity in which everything seems urgent. The purpose of this research was therefore to shed a light on and better understand what this experience looked like in day-to-day life for PR practitioners.

1.5 Study significance

Public relations practitioners were an interesting occupation to study because they are expected to be “at the forefront of ICTs” (Shen & Fussell Sisco, 2015). The nature of their work in communication implies heavy use of ICTs such as computers, smartphones, tablets and other devices (Mukherjee & Mahiwal, 2019). The reason this is significant for the practice and the profession are many: first, public relations is an occupation where as noted, the majority of practitioners continue to be women, and despite advances, studies continue to show that in addition to any paid work they do, women also continue to bear significant responsibilities within their families. I would argue this means work-life balance continues to be an issue for many practitioners, one that has likely been exacerbated by hyperconnectivity.

It is also an occupation where work is increasingly not confined to regular hours of work because the proliferation of social media and the 24/7 communication environment – something that did not exist to the same extent 10 years ago – means that practitioners need to stay on top of issues of interest for their clients and organizations or may be required to act upon those issues regardless of time of day. This was documented most recently through an online survey with 2,000 PR practitioners by Muck Rack (2024) with 51% indicating they worked extra hours at least 1-2 times per week and another 19% indicating this was the case 3-4 times a week. This invariably entails the intrusion of work into what was once exclusively protected as personal time. Globalization has meant that communications can move anywhere, anytime. Public relations executives or managers, media relations specialists, those involved in managing crises, social media presence, or client issues may be reachable anytime. I would argue that in addition to the stress of being potentially called to respond at all hours of the day and night as a result of this, practitioners also live with the role of being experts in all manners of communication for their organizations. Whether it’s learning and applying the latest social media tools; adjusting to changing media environments; communicating new policies or building relationships with stakeholders, communicators are often at the forefront of organizational communications.

This is also an occupational group that is significantly tied to building relationships with stakeholders in areas such as issues management and crisis communications (McKie & Sriramesh, 2017) communications that are increasingly technology enabled (Pavlik & Institute for PR, 2008) and that in in the 21st Century are not entirely compatible with a predictable schedule, with practitioners feeling like they are always on (Muck Rack, 2024; Bilowol et al., 2024). Public relations practitioners are also expected to understand, manage and advise on a host of existing and emerging social media platforms in service to their clients. I argue this means PR practitioners have to learn while they compose with these tools, which in itself is likely a source of technostress. Thus it is valuable to know how practitioners compose with these technologies, and what the impact is on them. It is valuable to know what PR practitioners' experience is, since they, more than anyone, I would argue, feel organizationally what it can mean to function in a hyperconnected metaverse.

Fourth, leading PR theorists say public relations needs to be part of strategic management, a player at the table when organizational decisions are made in order to most effectively manage relationships with various audiences (Grunig, 2013). This means that in order to be able to advise business leaders, public relations practitioners need to not only understand their own practice, but also the business of an organization and how communications can support it. I argue that this may make them particularly vulnerable to information overload, which is one of the key aspects of technostress (Brod, 1984; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Tarafdar et al., 2007). One can understand in a way why so much more is written about topics in PR like media management, engagement, strategic communications, stakeholder relations, or social media about public relations, because the domain of practitioners is so vast and there is much that can be learned about the various functions in public relations. That said, it would seem that much of the research in public relations largely focuses on the various things practitioners do to build knowledge on how the practice is enacted, as opposed to what the practice does to practitioners in their lives and their roles in society. My thinking about this is that practitioners tend to construct an identity that involves helping others or the organizations they serve – advising on organizational problems, managing the reputation of leadership and the organizations they lead, putting out organizational "fires" on social media, balancing organizational goals with the needs of the publics they serve, and so on. Research in the past has shown that practitioners tend to wear this role as a form of "badge of courage" (Aldoory et al., 2008), one in which they are less likely to raise concerns about hours of work, stress or other outcomes of modern society. For the most part, the practice is also regulated only in limited ways.

Unlike lawyers who are all members of the bar and are accountable in the same way to ethical standards, informal references on the internet suggest only five per cent of public relations practitioners in Canada or the United States are accredited, with the Public Relations Society of America's member directory reportedly suggesting that about 19 per cent of its members are accredited (Burfeind, n.d.). Brazil is one of only a handful of countries in the world that has legalized public relations as a profession or require any form of accreditation to practice (Molleda & Athaydes, 2003; Museum of PR, personal communication, 2024). Indeed, in response to an inquiry forwarded as part of this research, the Museum of Public Relations identified that

> Brazil and Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Chile are the only Latin American countries requiring licensing for public relations professionals. There is some form of licensing in the UK and Austria. But every nation differs in its requirements. In some

nations, like Canada and the US, accreditation is optional" (Museum of PR, personal communication, October 4, 2024).

The United States occupational outlook identified that there were 308,000 public relations specialists in 2023 and another 116,000 public relations and fundraising managers (U.S. Bureau of labor statistics, 2023). Of these, the accreditation board that accredits PR practitioners from nine different associations across the United States identified that there were "3844 accredited professionals (Accredited in public relations - APR) among the 22,478 total members of the nine participating organizations. In other words, 17% of all members of unified accreditation board (UAB) participating organizations are accredited" (Penning et al., 2024, p. 2).

As a result, the environment, in my view, has not really been conducive to examining the more internal aspects of the practice, with focus overwhelmingly trained on the things all practitioners share: writing, internal communications, reputation management, social media management, marketing communications, strategic management and other more functional topics.

The value of research into public relations practitioners' experiences – particularly in the area that was the subject of this research – Technostress – is that it gave voice to the working experiences of a large and important occupational group that is primarily tasked with helping leadership manage the reputation of organizations at a time where so much of this work is technology-facilitated. The research also provided a science-informed barometer of the state of the profession and of its practitioners in relation to technology from the practitioners' point of view. The study framed the experience through the lens of elements that matter today in all workplaces – information overload, use of technology, job satisfaction, stress, work-life balance and a topic increasingly being turned to by government legislation in countries and jurisdictions that include Canada – the right to disconnect.

There may be elements to ICTs that PR practitioners find advantageous, like the ability to do work anywhere and anytime. At other times, the intrusion of work technology into personal lives may be more difficult. The ways in which employees made sense (Weick, 1995) of these different aspects of ICTs and regain some sense of mastery, or not, over their time and life was the nexus in which this research resided.

1.6 Definitions

1.6.1 Public Relations

In this thesis, I defined public relations in accordance with the "maple infused" definition of public relations, which was developed by Canadian academics and practitioners for the Canadian Public Relations Society following a process of consultation and engagement:

> Public relations is the strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals, and serve the public interest (Flynn et al., 2008).

It has been well established that public relations, and public relations definitions, have developed over the years from a perspective that initially viewed public relations largely as a one-way and not necessarily transparent practice that was purely promotional. Public relations evolved then to more of an information function with values that were more truthful and informative. Still, the current seemed to be largely one way, with forefathers such as Ivy Ledbetter Lee in the United States identifying in his Declaration of Principles that it was his company's plan was to "frankly, and openly, […] supply the press and public of the United States with prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about" (Morse, 1906). This said nothing about any form of dialogue with the press and public. In Canada, public relations grew initially with the country, as it sought to settle the West, build railroads, and support government priorities such as immigration (Lymer & Carney, 2015).

1.6.2 Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) were defined here as "desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, GPS, versatellers, iwatches, surveillance cameras, Google glasses, and all those network and Internet-enabled devices that take us online and enable us to interact with others" (Gottschalk, 2016, p. 1). That said, it is important to note that the devices themselves are not the sum of what constitutes ICTs. The information they convey, the data they store, and the way in which information can be exchanged gives these devices their power and foothold. The UNESCO definition of ICTs is much broader in this regard as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

1.7 Research Questions

This research focused on the following research questions:

RQ1. What does the experience of being connected to the workplace and available to do work at any time via information and communication technologies (ICTs) look like for public relations practitioners?

RQ2. How do public relations practitioners resist or otherwise emancipate themselves from the demands of hyperconnectivity in their daily work to gain a greater sense of equality in managing the intrusion of work and technology in their daily lives?

RQ3. What do these experiences reveal about public relations practice and practitioners?

Further chapters of this thesis focus on the literature that was examined to conduct this research and the theoretical framework that was applied. This was covered in chapter two. Chapter three covered the mixed methods methodology that was applied in operationalizing this research, and the details of the instruments that were constructed and deployed to respond to the research questions. Chapters four and five focused on results from the methodologies deployed. Chapter six summarized the findings while Chapter 7 concluded the thesis and provided an overview of suggestions and recommendations for future research.

2.0 Literature Review

This literature review examined what has been written about public relations practitioners and their experience of stress and technostress in the workplace – more specifically related to the stress that comes from working with technology – a particular type of stress known as technostress (Brod, 1984; Weil & Rosen, 1997) that was the focus of this thesis. It also framed this work within a particular view of society, the role technology plays in such a society, and what the reality is of practitioners that work within it.

Overall, the avenues followed in the literature review first applied a more sociological and broader (or macro) framework that sought to understand the type of society that public relations practitioners operate in today within the context of their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). This helped define this thesis within the path of hypermodernity (Lipovetsky, 2015; Aubert, 2008) and characteristics of hypermodernity such acceleration, urgency and hyperconnectivity. This research also focused more on the organizational (or meso) level only in relation to how public relations practitioners themselves reported on their organizational workplace. The research was far more focused on the more micro level of the lived experience of public relations practitioners and their work.

Technostress encapsulates the idea of a stress that can result in part from the technological world that abounds within our society. This led me to look at technostress to define what it is and then examine it in relation to public relations practitioners and their work. As I did so, I approached this study from a critical lens. To me, this meant that the issues for employees surrounding technostress were largely the product of the fact technological tools used for work were meant to serve the interests of organizations much more so than the workers themselves. While it has been recognized by researchers that technology cuts both ways, I also chose to focus on the dynamics that might allow workers to regain some sense of ownership for their time and lives. This led me to research such concepts as power and resistance, defined further in this chapter at 2.6.2. I also wanted to understand what societal levers might be part of current discourse to protect workers from being totally overworked and burnt-out. Pulling at this thread led me to look at a topic of much current discussion around the world - the right to disconnect, which is discussed in this chapter at 2.5.2. Such a right has begun to be recognized in law and in collective agreements in a handful of jurisdictions around the world, including in Ontario, which became the first province in Canada to mention this right in its labour law. Finally, through the results of my research I wanted to understand what this could all mean for practitioners and public relations.

2.1 Challenges of conducting a literature review in public relations

The language used to refer to public relations practice and its workers and managers was not consistent. Even among the professional and accrediting bodies of the profession, some were titled with the words communications and/or communicators, such as the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) or Women in Communication, while others preferred the words public relations such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the United Kingdom. In a case where neither was left out, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, a confederation of eight global associations and institutions representing about 360,000 professionals around the world, titled the association with both names. In addition, while there were specific journals focused on the public relations profession such as the Journal of Public Relations Research and Public Relations Review, others also included titles that revolve more around the word communications, such as the respected Journal of Communication Management.

Conducting a literature review on the technostress experience of public relations practitioners for this research also highlighted that not much has been written in public relations about the practitioners themselves. What I found was that much of the focus of public relations journals was functional, with articles abounding on crisis management, strategic communications, social media, reputation management and other topics – but little had been published on the practitioners and their experiences in comparison with other roles where academic research on professionals seemed more developed. This phenomenon has been commented upon by public relations scholars, for example Bridgen and Verčič (2017) in their book *Experiencing public relations*, reflected that public relations scholarship presented at a 2015 European Public Relations conference focused mostly on what they called the "frontage of public relations - the theory, practice and benefits of public relations" (Bridgen and Verčič, 2017, p. 2). They decried the fact that "everyday life in public relations is largely ignored in favour of the scholarship that attempts to position public relations as a 'serious discipline'" (Bridgen and Verčič, 2017, p. 3). This may be because public relations is a relatively new academic area of study when compared with longstanding occupations and professions such as lawyers, nurses, librarians and accountants. They noted that:

> The lives and experiences of those carrying out the work of public relations, the negative or problematic side of public relations, the obscure and the unusual (from a Western perspective) and the everyday work of the practitioner were hardly discussed (Bridgen and Verčič, 2017, p. 2).

The difficulty of conducting research on PR work seemed to also be highlighted when conducting literature reviews on public relations professionals in the mass media. Articles rarely carried titles that included the words public relations. One was more likely to find references, especially in the popular and social media, to "communications" practitioners of one variety or another – or even to a specific PR role, such as spokesperson, media analyst or communications consultant – making it a challenge to analyze coverage with any consistency. Given how pervasive the words communications and public and relations are, searches often brought up tens or hundreds of thousands of unrelated articles to the topic being researched – a search conducted on September 28, 2023 returned some 298 million results when the words "public relations" were entered in Boolean search as a term into the Google search engine. A search conducted November 4, 2024 in Web of Science brought up 13,769 entries and 88,459 in the Scopus database and128,837 results in the JSTOR database.

This lack of clarity also extends to the workers themselves and how they label their own work. In Canada and elsewhere in the world to varying extents, people are more likely to tell their friends they work in communications than in public relations. While the terminology public relations is used to some extent and within academia, an unofficial joke among many who work in the field is that no one really understands what people in communications or public relations do. Researchers have commented on the fact the practice is broad and there appears to be limited understanding of it and of the people who work in it. This was highlighted by Falconi (2006) who noted that there was lack of clarity within individual countries as well as globally on who to include in the definition of public relations managers or practitioners. They calculated at the time that there were between 2.3 and 4.5 million people who worked in PR around the world (Falconi, 2006, p. 8). Although global current estimates of PR practitioners were difficult to find, in North

America, the U.S. bureau of labor statistics had two occupations that mentioned public relations – public relations specialists and public relations and fundraising managers. Latest statistics identified that in 2023, there were estimated to be 275,550 people employed as public relations specialists in the United States and 116,600 estimated to be employed in public relations and fundraising manager positions. However, as Falconi also noted, this likely didn't include everyone who worked in public relations. In Canada, the public relations specialist category is part of the occupational group of Professional occupations in advertising, marketing and public relations as defined by Statistics Canada. The occupational outlook available on the Government of Canada's web site identified that in 2021 there were 201,600 public relations specialist positions in the labour market (Government of Canada, 2023). However, as in the United States, National Occupations Classification categories established by the Government of Canada excluded certain positions that were part of the public relations mix and also included many positions that were not specifically public relations. For example, the 2016 Canada census identified two broad categories of interest: Advertising Marketing and Public Relations Managers as well as professional occupations in marketing, advertising and public relations. (Canada census, 2016). At the time, the labour force included 69,115 Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations Managers (both employed and unemployed at the time of the census) while professional occupations in marketing, advertising and public relations consisted of 95,365. However, what this excluded is almost of as instructive as what was included. For example, these categories did not include, among others, writers and editors who may have worked in public relations, senior managers that may have worked in public relations, graphic designers nor public opinion or other research officers. This highlighted how difficult it could be to get a picture of the public relations industry not only in Canada, but elsewhere, when conducting research. This was echoed by authors of the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al., 2023), who referred to work by some of their scholars who noted that there were:

> hundreds of thousands of practitioners in Europe – there are no reliable statistics, as different terms such as communication management, corporate communications, corporate affairs, organisational communication, public relations, or simply communications are used to denominate this converging field (Nothhaft & Zerfass, 2023).

Within organizations, part of the confusion may be that people who perform public relations functions can also reside anywhere in an organization and there is no consistency between organizations on this point. Someone who works in internal communications, for example, may find themselves in a communications branch, or marketing, or they may just as likely work in human resources or corporate services, or as I did once, in a Legal and Public Affairs section. This also seems to typify examples of how public relations roles are sometimes coveted for inclusion by other functions, a practice known as imperialism defined by Lauzon (1991) in relation to PR "when the interaction between departments with domain similarities occurs as a result of perceived power differences, turf wars often develop with one department intruding on the activities traditionally in the domain of the other" (Lauzon, 1991, p. 245).

The history of the practice has also not been kind to the public view of public relations and one can't help but wonder whether this might be part of the challenge. Public relations emerged from an era of press agentry in which P. T. Barnum and others shamelessly used propaganda and promotion to influence audiences through a variety of means including publicity stunts (Page & Parnell, 2025, p. 29). It has been broadly identified that Barnum used gross exaggeration, fraudulent stories, and staged events to secure newspaper coverage for his clients, his American Museum, and later his circus. (Campbell et al., 2015, p. 405).

As a result, the term public relations was for a long time viewed negatively and more as a term that described various forms of publicity. While a more respected, ethically-focused practice in the 21st Century, public relations practitioners spent a time not so long ago being occasionally called "PR Flacks," a pejorative term sometimes uttered by journalists and others, a term that public relations practitioners intensely dislike. While writing in the New York Times Seth Schiesel (2000) noted that "Flack" - short for flack catcher - may be the most derisive printable word that journalists use to describe public relations people. The term re-emerged in the title of a Prime Television series called "Flack," which in keeping with this definition, demonstrated a more cynical view of PR practitioners' work. While the word flack has decreased in use to refer to PR, the word "spin" or "spin doctors" has also been used, also largely pejoratively, to denote the way practitioners – particularly those in political communications – are said to "spin" information in service to the clients they serve as one would spin yarn. Indeed, scholar Jim MacNamara (2019) identified in a book chapter on journalism, public relations and spin that "dozens of books and hundreds of articles have been written about PR as spin" (MacNamara, 2019, p. 345). As noted by Valentini (2015, p. 1), "The term (spin) does not indicate a profession, like public relations, or a neutral activity, like political communication, but is a biased expression used by journalists to discredit the work of public relations experts." Some have considered "spin" a despicable practice. Others have been more magnanimous in recognition that no facts or information are neutral and that the selection of certain facts over others can at times be justified. This led the public relations profession to focus more intensely on ethics codes that valued honesty, openness, and disclosure as values, making that the professional barometer against which all work was assessed such as in the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) Code of Professional Standards (CPRS, n.d.) and the International Association of Business Communicators' (IABC) Code of Ethics for professional communicators (IABC, n.d).

Public relations has also worked very hard over the years to position itself and have a seat at the table, as part of the "dominant coalition" as defined by Grunig as "the group of senior managers who control the organization" (Grunig, 1992, p. 5). The lack of a formal professional body for all public relations practitioners may also explain why it has been more difficult to find academic research more focused on the people who practice than the practice itself. Much of the research on practitioners as opposed to the practice of PR has tended to be conducted in large part either by the professional associations themselves - with some of this research finding its way into professional journals - or by teams of public relations scholars working in partnership with sponsors. For example, the North American Communication Monitor (Meng et al, 2024) is part of a global network of communication monitor studies and reports. This includes the European Communication Monitor - which has been published since 2007 by the European Public Relations Education Association (EUPRERA) (Zerfass et al. 2024), the Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor (Macnamara et al., 2021) and the Latin American Communication Monitor (Álvarez-Nobell et al., 2021, 2023). The benefit of these studies is that they are conducted either annually or bi-annually, meaning there is continuing tracking of various issues of interest to the public relations profession and scholarship. Detailed reports from each of these studies have been posted on the internet and through publications, as such openly disseminating knowledge gathered through this research. As will be noted further in this chapter, some of these studies have included results on the life and work experience of public relations practitioners. However, these studies primarily employed quantitative methods via surveys, which meant that there was little if any information on why PR practitioners responded a certain way and what their experience was in relation to the questions asked.

In summary, while there were real challenges to conducting a literature review relating to the lived experience of PR practitioners and their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), there were also valuable and important avenues of research that informed the research questions and the research in this thesis.

2.2 Research strategy

The literature review first focused on positioning this research more broadly within society – in this case modernity, and more specifically, hypermodernity. It also looked at some of the foundational works surrounding technostress in general, but also in particular about the lived experience of technostress and the use of information and communication technologies of public relations practitioners and the practice. As the literature review will show, technostress – and in particular factors to mitigate it – has been also tied to a number of other concepts such as stress, work-life balance, use of technology, and job satisfaction. As will be shown in the theoretical framework, this thesis did not focus on the traditional psychological concept of how people "coped with" stress or technostress. Instead, it chose to study the more social construct of resistance to investigate how public relations practitioners composed with the presence of their technological devices for work purposes at all hours.

The search strategy included the use of keywords related to the research questions in Google Scholar, the University of Ottawa library search engine and alerts were created over a period of several years in Web of Science and Scopus to search for relevant literature. Searches were also undertaken in the most respected PR journals such as the Journal of Public Relations Research, Public Relations Review and Public Relations Journal as well as the Journal of Communication Management. The search expanded as readings were gathered. More recently, AI aggregators such as Elicit and Research Rabbit were used as well, largely to validate what has already been found but also to find newer articles that may not have been part of earlier searches. It is also important to note what was not part of the literature review. The review was not meant to be an exhaustive search of everything that has been written on technostress, on lived experience studies, nor on public relations practitioners and practice. Instead, the focus was on helping elucidate the situation for public relations practitioners in this sample, using the lenses of technostress, public relations practitioners and practice. To do so, it was important to position this study within the society in which public relations operates.

2.3 Modernity

Social theorists have expressed that we are living in a new society which has replaced the more traditional forms of feudal society which were marked by a sense of order, industrialization, and the pre-eminence of the church. Scholars have called this new society modernity and it is a society that is capitalist, individualistic, and scientifically focused, among other elements.

2.3.1 Views of modernity

Ulrick Beck and Anthony Giddens' views of risk and technology considered that modernity is the social context of their views on risk and security. According to Beck, the feudal society was "dissolved" by "modernization and produced the industrial society" in the 19th Century (Beck, 2005, p. 10), a society that had as its characteristics elements like the move of people from rural areas to cities and application of science to producing goods and division of labour (Kennedy, 2011). According to Giddens (1991b), "The emergent social order of modernity is capitalist in both its economic system and its other institutions" (p. 11) and it is indeed widely recognized that modernity "emphasized the accumulation of capital and economic growth as the be all and end all of economic life" (Kennedy, 2011, p. 369).

Modernity is considered to be the period "from the mid-eighteenth-century European enlightenment to at least the mid-1980s, characterized by secularization, rationalization, democratization, individualism and the rise of science" (Putnam & Mumby, 2014). Beck called the stage we are in "advanced modernity" (Beck, 1992, p. 19) or "late modernity" and Giddens called this time "the post-traditional order of modernity" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 5). Their views are considered to "differ radically from those of both modern and post-modern theorists" (Eid, 2003, p. 813). For example, Giddens' views differ from Lyotard's, who has "popularized the notion of post-modernity" (Eid, 2003, p. 814), and post-modernity "less clearly defined, pluralistic and socially diverse than the modernity than preceded it" (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). Giddens' view was that we are still in a period of modernity in which the consequences of modernity are becoming clearer, with devastating consequences such as the degradation of work into dull and repetitive tasks, the impact on the environment, the totalitarian use of power and the use of military power, including nuclear weapons (Giddens, 1991b, p. 8-9).

> Rather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before. Beyond modernity, I shall claim, we can perceive the contours of a new and different order, which is "post-modern"; but this (period) is quite distinct from what is at the moment called by many "post-modernity" (Giddens, 1991b, p. 3).

Beck's view was that modernization today is dissolving industrial society and "another modernity is coming into being" (Beck, 2005, p. 10).

The relationship of modernity to technology is one some writers chose to highlight. For example Brey (2002) was of the view that "Technology made modernity possible. It has been the engine of modernity, shaping it and propelling it forward (Misa et al., 2002, p. 33).

2.3.2 Reflexivity

The idea of reflexivity is one that is well known but has largely been attributed to individuals or to researchers as they seek to apply knowledge. Beck and Giddens' views also applied reflexivity to modern society. Modernity's reflexivity "refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 20). He said the

> modern world is a 'runaway world'; not only is the pace of social change must faster than in any prior system, that was primarily subject to rules and tradition, but so also is its scope, and the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour (Giddens,1991a, p. 160).

For Ulrich Beck, reflexive modernization meant "the possibility of a creative (self-) destruction for an entire epoch: that of industrial society" (Beck 1994, p. 2) and that in a modern society modern "is becoming its own theme" (Beck, 2005, p. 19). Giddens noted that "modernity is essentially a post-traditional order. The transformation of time and space, coupled with the disembedding mechanisms, propel social life away from the hold of pre-established precepts or practices. This is the context of the thoroughgoing reflexivity" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 20). Falkheimer (2007) noted that Giddens pointed to three interdependent sources of modernity 1) the separation of time and space; 2) the development of disembedding mechanisms or "the lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens, 1990, p. 21); and 3) the reflexive appropriation of knowledge. Eid (2003) said Beck and Giddens viewed modernity in terms of a "central place for reflexivity." He noted Beck's idea of reflexivity leads mainly to critical change of social structures, while Giddens' notion posits the reproduction of structures. Giddens said reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge, even in the core domains of natural sciences (Giddens, 1991a). I see elements of these points in the discussion surrounding technology in the workplace as it has facilitated the ability for workers to work anytime and anywhere in a global world that is highly critical of the established order.

2.3.3 Risk in modernity and the risk society

The types of risks in a period of reflexive modernization were part of what both Beck and Giddens also considered a risk society. A risk society is "a society increasingly preoccupied with the future (and also with safety), which generates the notion of risk" (Giddens, 1999, p. 3). A risk society is also "a society where we increasingly live on a high technological frontier which absolutely no one completely understands and which generates a diversity of possible futures" (p. 3). There was a time, Giddens said, that "knowledge was presumed to be cumulative and presumed also to yield a progressive mastery of the surrounding world" (Giddens, 1995). These were ideas that adherents of Marx, who believed that "human beings only set themselves such problems as they can resolve" (Marx as cited in Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994, p. 59) could identify with. Giddens argued that neither Marx, nor Weber, who saw a rational world of "uncontrolled bureaucratic domination" represent the world we live in today. He believed the risk society is when:

> the hazards which are now decided and consequently produced by society undermine and/or cancel the established safety systems of the welfare state's existing risk calculations. In contrast to early industrial risks, nuclear, chemical, ecological and genetic risk (a) can be limited in terms of neither time nor place, (b) are not accountable according to the established rules of causality, blame and liability, and (c) cannot be compensated for or insured against. (Beck, 1998, p. 4).

I believe this is very relevant to the work that public relations practitioners do in our world, particularly with the advent of social media. While the risk of crisis always existed in organizations, for example, the ability for a crisis to occur anywhere in the world at any time and impact organizations, countries and societies is part of the reality of today's public relations practitioners, and this plays into practitioners' relationship with the technologies that they use for their work. Risks created by technologies also are a feature of the society we live in now.

Beck and Giddens both accordingly positioned the risk society as an element of modernity. To be precise, according to Beck we are "not yet living in a risk society" (Beck, 2005, p. 20), but are in the process of transitioning fully to one. Risk society "describes a phase of development of modern society in which the political, ecological and individual risks created by the momentum of innovation increasingly elude the control and protective institutions of industrial society" (Beck & Chalmers, 1998, p. 14). Risk Society is a social concept situated by these authors in the context of society and history. Up until around the early seventies, Beck said we lived in a world dominated by the unequal distribution of wealth, where social issues were linked to inequality and scarcity. This was more of an "industrial" or "class society" (p. 19), something he also called the "first modernity," one in which it was possible to calculate risks and the creation of the welfare state helped protect citizens (Beck, 2002). We are living now, Giddens said, in a period of "late modernity" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 3).

Beck (1992) defined risk society as "a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself. Risks, as opposed to older dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and to its globalization of doubt" (p. 21). The risk society is "characterized essentially by a lack: the impossibility of an external attribution of hazards. In other words, risks depend on decisions. They are industrially produced and in this sense politically reflexive" (Beck, 1992, p. 183). Beck's view was that in the risk society, we live with risks that are global. Something that happens in one part of the world may affect other people in other countries, other hemispheres. A nuclear disaster, for example, may not only have broad impacts on industry, ecology and society, but it may hide risks that no one can even fathom yet. These are new kinds of "industrialized, decision-produced incalculabilities and threats" which he said are spreading (Beck, 1992, p. 22).

> In the risk society, the unknown and unintended consequences come to be a dominant force in history and society. What is so worrisome about these risks is that they may be undetectable and "completely escape the powers of human perception (Beck, 1992, p. 27).

Beck said that the advent of the risk society also disturbs our world order in which scientific rationality helped people make sense of the world. His view is that scientific rationality is "a speculative house of cards," ill-equipped to deal with problems we may not know the answer to yet – and suggests scientists live in a world where sometimes, if you can't quantify it, the problem does not exist. (Beck, 1992, p. 29).

Both Giddens and Beck had a remarkably similar global outlook on risk, noting risks have an "inherent tendency towards globalization" (Beck, 1992, p. 36), and that in "the intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 26), the impact of globalization is such "that, in respect of the consequences of at least some disembedding mechanisms, no one can "opt out" of the transformations brought about by modernity" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 22). Giddens defined globalization as the "intensification of worldwide social relations which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa" (Giddens, 1991b, p. 64). For his part, Beck noted that globalization means that "the walls of distance break down and that strangers and strangeness are increasingly caught up in the horizon of one's life" (Beck, 1998, p. 133-134). In fact, Beck sometimes called what we face currently a world risk society. "[…] what happens in world risk society is that we enter a world of uncontrollable risk and we don't even have a language to describe what we are facing" (Beck, 2002, p. 41). Giddens would seem to agree, noting "modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order in respect of their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact" (Giddens, 1991a).

Critics of Beck like William Leiss (1994), in their review of Beck's *Risk Societ*y: *Towards a new modernity*, suggested that while some things Beck said in his theory of risk society make sense - like the fact that risk society is one where "our fate is bound up with risks that are deliberately undertaken – for the sake of benefits conceived in advance, by means of our technological mastery over nature" (p. 546), there are other things that are less certain. Leiss said he is not quite sure whether it is the nature of risk or the nature of society that Beck thinks has changed and accuses him of "sweeping generalisations and a lack of balanced illustrations," as well as a lack of clarity (p. 546). According to Jarvis (2007), there is really no empirical evidence to support Beck's views, and they noted that the popularity of Beck's thesis may be in part accounted for by the fact that the nuclear tragedy at Chernobyl occurred around the same time as his writings on the topic (Jarvis, 2007, p. 33).

2.3.4 Risk and (in)security

If we are living in a world where we never know what the consequences of modernity might be on ourselves, our institutions, our communities and we are constantly in a state of reflection or revision, one can only assume that some trepidation might go with that feeling and state of being. Giddens called this state of being "ontological insecurity." Giddens defined ontological security as "a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not in the perceptual environment of the individual" (Giddens, 1991a). He said it is an emotional rather than a cognitive phenomenon, rooted in the unconscious (Giddens, 1990, p. 92), and that ontological security is the "confidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity" (Giddens, 1984, p. 375). The concept of security, Giddens said, is linked to that of trust, which is initially developed in infancy.

> Ontological security is one form, but a very important form, of feelings of security in the wide sense. The phrase refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically closely related" (Giddens, 1991b, p. 92).

Ontological security relies on predictable routines. “The generation of feelings of trust in others, as the deepest-lying element of the basic security system, depends substantially upon predictable and caring routines established by parental figures” (Giddens, 1984, p. 50). Therefore, trust and routines act as a protective device against ontological insecurity.

It is within this backdrop that public relations practitioners operate. It is a world where the old rules of society no longer operate, where crises can occur anywhere, anytime, where some of these crises are not predictable, and where some of these situations are caused by the society itself.

2.3.5 Modernity and public relations

The conditions public relations practitioners compose with in their work are very much reflective of a modern, risk society. Particularly in the past 10-15 years, practitioners have worked within a world that is no longer bound by routines and that is prone to crisis at all hours of the day or night. For example, it used to be that the news cycle was reasonably predictable – print newspapers, even if they published daily, had specific deadlines for reporters to submit their stories – which meant public relations practitioners also worked with predictable routines. Now the news cycle is 24 hours, with a proliferation of news vehicles that is not limited by time or geography. Within seconds, news can travel around the globe on social media such as it did when United Airlines mishandled and broke the guitar of a Canadian musician, with the story eventually becoming a Harvard Business School case study (Deighton & Kornfield, 2010). Reputations can be lost at the speed of a tweet. Moreover, we are no longer always dealing with routine news. As witnessed by challenges faced by communities in recent years with weather events, we live in a world that is prone to crisis and where some crises and catastrophes are more difficult to prevent and predict, with tornadoes an example of how difficult it is to know when a crisis will hit. The Northern Tornadoes Project, housed at Western University, as reported by the Canadian Press and carried on the CBC news site identified that “between 2019 and 2021, 23 per cent of confirmed tornadoes were preceded by a warning. This percentage rose slightly to 35 per cent in 2022” (Bongiorno, 2024). Countries with the best intelligence in the world have difficulty scanning the environment fully enough to detect and manage impending crises. For example, in the initial days of the latest Israeli/Palestinian conflict, there was much discourse in the media questioning how it was that Israel, a country with some of the best intelligence in the world, was not able to foresee in a timely way the attack of October 7, 2023 (Harding, 2023). The world of public relations, “a *strategic* communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA, 2022), is also inextricably bound within a modern world that is prone to crisis, and in which some of these crises may unknowable. Crisis communications theory and enactment are highly developed areas in PR because crises impact on both stakeholders and on organizational reputation. So it is not surprising that some scholars have identified the connection between public relations and modernity as shown below.

Fredriksson, writing in Ihlen et al. (2009), identified that public relations “is a practice of modernity and has strong connections to capitalism, mass consumption and media development” (p. 27), saying public relations was born “in the wake of industrialization” (p. 27). According to Fredriksson, public relations helps support corporate and governmental bodies’ need to justify their existence in the wake of some of the elements of reflexive modernity, which he identified as in alignment with Beck’s ideas”

> increasing threats to organizational operations caused by actual risks or the fear caused by assumed risks; the implosion of modernity’s dualism, as is the case with the division

between the private and the public sphere; the individualization of opinions and values often expressed in the realm of subpolitics (Ihlen et al., 2009, p. 28).

These authors considered public relations to be part of the social order created by reflexive modernity and that as such, that it could be informed by the work of Beck and Giddens. Knight (2004) noted that the risk society thesis as elaborated by Beck "has recently found a receptive audience among scholars of corporate communications" as public relations grows in importance as a "strategic organizational function" (p. 53). They said this is also related to the "opening up of the public sphere" to challenge power that exists in the state and in corporations and other institutions (p. 53). However, they expressed concern that the risk society views risk "only in primarily negative terms as the threat of harm or loss. Risk has lost its earlier positive and neutral senses of the possibility of benefit and advance or of mere chance" (p. 54).

Falkheimer (2007) also advocated using the theories of Giddens in public relations, noting that "the analysis of risk, uncertainty and reflexivity is of high importance to public relations. In late modernity the development leads to new relations between organizations, society and the public concerning trust and legitimacy" (p. 289). He noted that there are advantages and disadvantages in using the theories of Giddens to analyze public relations. "The main advantage is that such an analysis may contribute to the understanding of public relations as a late modern societal phenomenon" (p. 292). However, Falkheimer (2007) noted that Giddens' theories of reflexive modernity and structuration (which he also focused on in the article) lacked empirical grounding. Still, he expressed the belief that it may be possible "to develop dynamic and process-oriented communication strategies from a society-centric and public-oriented perspective" (p. 287).

Beck has also been referred to in connection with crisis communication planning and management (Maisonneuve, 2010). Maisonneuve cited Beck in making a point about crises.

> aussi surprenant que cela puisse paraître, la plupart des organisations, n'y sont pas préparées et souffre (sic) souvent de myopie managériale face aux facteurs de crise inhérents à leurs activités» (Beck, 1992, 2003, 2004 as cited in Maisonneuve, 2010, p. 302).

Demetrious (2002) also used a risk society lens to study a case in Australia where grassroots groups were able to successfully question and scuttle the planned construction of a megawatt power station, demonstrating "emergent reflexive modernity" in Australia, (Demetrious, 2002, p. 154).

Public relations can also be informed by the thinking of Beck and Giddens around modernity and risk in its work with the media. The media has always been an important point of mediation between organizations and publics. Beck in particular saw an important political and social role for the mass media in late modernity's risk society, because knowledge plays an important role in communications and "due to the structural changes of reflexive modernity, mass media are given a much more central position than was once the case in business, politics, and social life" (Ihlen et al., 2009, p. 32). It is the political potential of catastrophes, Beck said, that makes for situations where power and authority may be reorganized as the "exceptional condition threatens to become the norm" (Beck 2005, p. 23). Beck made it clear that in such situations he saw "fissures and gaps between scientific and social rationality in dealing with the hazardous potential of civilisations" (Beck, 2005, p. 30). In a world where Beck and Giddens noted that scientific rationality and organizations may no longer hold the power they once had, it made sense for public relations practitioners to understand that the media has an important mediating role in crises or other situations as “access to the media becomes crucial” (Beck, 1992, p. 32), and the “argumentation craftsmen” (likely in part a euphemism for public relations practitioners) must recognize that neither they, their organizations or the media necessarily hold the power they once had (p. 32). Beck did think highly of the power of the mass media, however, noting that “reports on discoveries of toxins in refuse dumps, if catapulted overnight into the media, change the political agenda” (Beck, 1992, p. 197). He said that, for example, publication of scientific results in Der Spiegel, had the effect of bringing obscure scientific reports to the masses and that “Suddenly […] it haunts thousands of minds and thus demands personal responsibility and public (counter-) statements” (Beck, 1992, p. 197). Cottle (1998), in reviewing what Beck and Giddens had to say about mass media, found that the risk society was “theoretically predisposed to privilege the mass media as a key site in the social construction, social contestation and, further, the social criticism of, or social challenge to, risks and the deficiencies of institutionalized responses to these (p. 9), all the while criticizing Beck for the fact that some parts of his theory were underdeveloped. Others like Denney (2005) were not convinced the media always get it right, commenting that: “Some hazards, which present quite low statistical risks […] become amplified into a cause for political concern. Other potentially serious risks, for instance exposure to Radon gas, receive comparatively little media attention” (Denney, 2005, p. 44). One can’t help but note, as well, that much of these writings pre-date the advent of the Internet and citizen journalism, and social media. There are many more channels and many more voices now to contend with, and in the era of fake news, trust in the media and other institutions are real issues the media, society and public relations practitioners contend with and manage, particularly with the proliferation of social media. The European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al., 2018) identified in its report that “22.5% of European organisations and their reputation have been affected by fake news within the last months. The main sources of misleading content are social media (81.3%), but mass media (59.6%) also plays a huge role." As researchers have also identified, "manipulative intentions and misleading content intended to harm reputation" have been identified by PR practitioners as key elements of fake news (Jahng et al., 2020). That said, the media is still where most Canadians go for their news even in an online world. Anglophone Canadians cited CBC news, CTV news and Global news as their top three choices for reading online news while Francophones identified TVA Nouvelles, La Presse online and ICI-Radio Canada/ICI-RDI (Statista, 2023).

We have also witnessed many times how quickly social media can turn against an entertainer or company, such as in the United Airlines incident where a passenger was forcibly removed from a plane in 2017 and a resulting passenger video went viral (Creswell & Maheshwari, 2017). What this means for public relations is that it must prepare for all eventualities in dealing with the media and with its publics. It might also consider that its own communications could potentially create and/or be a source of risk in a modern world. Consequently public relations practitioners must be prepared to respond and share of their expertise in a modern and risk society, in which almost anything can become a crisis at the drop of a hat. This feeds into the idea that public relations practitioners, in order to support their organizations in a modern society, may be expected to be "always on." This means that the tools – including technology – that practitioners have at their fingertips become the ways in which they are able to help their organizations and/or their clients manage risks and threats in a modern society, regardless of time of day.

Jones (2002) noted his surprise, "given public relations' explicit role of reducing environmental risk and uncertainty for the firm" (p. 49) that it had not incorporated the ideas of

Beck's risk society in its practice. A more critical and reflective approach to the definition of publics "would aid both the theory and practice of public relations in coping with the complex and uncertain environment" (Jones, 2002, p. 49).

Another area that impacts public relations in the risk society is crisis management and communications. Tim Coombs (2010a) was of the view that crisis is now a global construct, which meshes well with Giddens' view that "understanding the juggernaut-like nature of modernity goes a long way towards explaining why, in conditions of high modernity, crisis becomes normalized" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 183). Coombs noted: "We must accept that no organization is immune from a crisis anywhere in the world even that if that organization is vigilant and actively seeks to prevent crises" (Coombs, 2010b. p. 17). In Giddens' view, "in a system open to continual and profound change many circumstances arise which loosely can be thought of as "crises". But it is not just rhetoric. Modernity is inherently prone to crisis, on many levels" (Giddens, 1991a, p. 184). Coombs said that crises require preparation and readiness, and that the "critical component in crisis management is crisis communication" (Coombs, 2010b, p. 17). He defined crisis as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes." (Coombs, 2010b, p. 19). However, his view of crisis as an "unusual occurrence that cannot be predicted but is expected" departed somewhat from the view of the risk society, which saw an era in which crises are unknowable and unexpected. Coombs further defined crisis management as "a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damages inflicted" (Coombs, 2010b, p. 19) and that it "seeks to protect the organizations, stakeholders, and/or industry from damage (Coombs, 1999, p. 4). He defined crisis communications as the "collection, processing and dissemination of information to address a crisis situation" (Coombs, 2010b, p. 20). Coombs agreed that communication is critical throughout the entire crisis management process. He noted that there are various strategies organizations use to manage communications during the various phases of a crisis. "Crisis communication occurs during all three phases of crisis management: "pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis" (Coombs, 2010b, p. 46). While Coombs believed that a lot of good work has been done technically in communications to support crisis response (for example, spokesperson training, image repair), he felt that a lot more communications research needed to be done in the pre- and post-crisis stages (p. 46).

If one accepts that public relations practitioners operate within a society in which modernity is the prevailing social order, then there are significant implications for practitioners and for the practice of public relations, given the role of public relations in organizations. A number of the elements of the modern, risk society play into the organizational responsibilities practitioners have. Whether it's working with various publics, responding to the media, managing social media, or attending to crises, public relations practitioners are usually at the table or involved in what it means to be an organization in a capitalist, market focused society. According to the literature cited above, it's a world where crisis is normalized, where technology rules, where social media and other forms of media play an important mediating role. Public relations sits at the heart of organizational response to events that occur in a modern society, so it stands to reason that practitioners may be personally engaged, but also impacted by working in a modern society, and that this may include their hours of work and how they work. Beyond modernity, however, some scholars have also identified a form of modernity that is particularly relevant to the discussion of technostress in public relations work.

2.4 Hypermodernity

2.4.1 The hypermodern society

Nicole Aubert is generally regarded to be at the forefront of a critical view known as «la société hypermoderne» (Aubert, 2008). Hypermodernity in her view was composed of two elements: hyperconsumption, and hyperperformance (p. 24). Her views and that of her collaborators and supporters would be considered part of a critical perspective in that she questioned the hypermodern environment and the impact it has on society, organizations and the individuals in those organizations. It is a reflexive approach (Tadajewski et al., 2011), although critics have tended to blame such researchers as being “undeservedly critical of management or business practice” (p. 3). Aubert saw hypermodernity as something different from postmodernity, which «exprimait le constat d’une rupture avec les valeurs et les idées représentatives de la modernité, notamment celle selon laquelle les découvertes scientifiques et, plus globalement, la rationalisation du monde représentaient une émancipation pour l’humanité» (Lyotard, 1979, as cited in Aubert, 2016).

2.4.2 Technology and the hypermodern society

It used to be one had to be in front of a computer in the office to answer work e-mails, or physically be in a department store to buy clothes. Now, it’s possible for people and employees to respond anytime, anywhere, using a smartphone or other device, and to order virtually anything over the Internet. This dislocation of space and time, Aubert said, has given people a sense of mastery over time: «un sentiment d’autonomie face au temps, un temps qu’il ne subit plus mais qu’il pose et croît maitriser» (Aubert, 2003, p. 61).

It has become clearer that access to technologies cuts two ways. They have given us immense freedoms, but have also created new constraints, prompting authors to call them «La laisse électronique» (Carayol et al., 2017). ICTs also have significant impacts on the workplace, on lives, and on individuals and their identity. In his book called *The Terminal self: every day in hypermoden times*, Gottschalk (2018) defined the terminal and such technologies as "desktops, laptops, tablets, smart phones, GPS, versatellers, iwatches, surveillance cameras, Google glasses, and all those network and Internet-enabled devices that take us online and enable us to interact with others" (p. 1). His thesis was that "interacting with terminals transforms us as social beings." His view was that technological devices are the bridge between the online and offline worlds and that in order to function within that bridge, certain actions and behaviours become part of what he called the "terminal self" in order to interact with others and with the capabilities that exist within the terminal. Some of these are enabled by the settings within the technologies that, in his view, foster acceleration of the pace of life and work and the way in which people interact with the terminal within a hypermodern society.

According to de Gaulejac (2014) use of technology in a hypermodern world brings about changes in human behaviours: «la rationalité implacable des technologies conduit à une irrationalité radicale des comportements» de Gaulejac, 2014, p. 153. Their view was that technological evolution puts people under pressure : rather than freeing the individual from work, les technologies «semblent au contraire le mettre sous pression» (de Gaulejac, 2014, p. 225). He also noted that hypermodernity alters the relationship between individuals and society and is characterized by «exacerbation des tensions dans le rapport entre l'individu et la société» (de Gaulejac in Aubert, 2006b). Gottschalk (2018, p. 11) noted, however, that there was not necessarily uniform agreement on the term hypermodern. "While some scholars use post-modern and hypermodern interchangeably, others insist that we should distinguish between these two terms, as they evoke different phenomena and approaches." For example, according to

Lipovetsky (2005), as cited in Verhoeven et al. (2018), the post-modern society has developed into a hypermodern society in overdrive, “characterized by a culture of hyper consumption, hyper change, hyper narcissism and paradoxes” (p. 471).

In a hypermodern society, according to Aubert, there are three lenses that can be applied to better understand hypermodernity. «Celui du rapport du temps, celui du rapport aux autres, celui du rapport à soi» (Aubert, 2008). With respect to time, for example, Aubert said that modern technologies such as the cell phone give the illusion of being able to control and master time. No longer do we need to wait days for a letter to arrive, or hours for an e-mail to get through a gateway. Text messages allow us to communicate instantly, anytime and anywhere. This demonstrates the face of «instantaneité» (Aubert, 2008). However, from the point of view of the individual involved, Aubert said this leads to a requirement of immediacy in responding to requirements. This immediacy then leads to «un cycle d’urgence qui tyrannise les individus en les contraignant à faire toujours plus de choses dans des délais toujours plus courts» (Aubert, 2008, p. 26). Aubert noted that this sense of urgency makes people feel like they do a lot of things, but never really get anything done. She also noted that while we focus on technology, it is not the technology but how people use it that creates the change. Technology simply facilitates the change. Using the example of the cell phone, Aubert (2008) noted: «Le téléphone mobile ne crée pas l’urgence, mais c’est lui qui, de plus en plus, le permet» (p. 59). The relationship of such technologies to urgency has been noted by others as well, noting that information and communication technologies support «l’implantation d’une idéologie de l’urgence dans les organisations» (Bonneville & Grosjean, 2006). Aubert’s voice was also clear on the point that technologies constitute no small part in this: «les nouvelles technologies de la communication jouent un rôle fondamental dans la mutation du rapport au temps qui s'est opérée ces dernières années» (Aubert, 2003, p. 55).

2.4.3 Hypermodernity and hyperperformance

Industrialism was primarily seen to be a struggle of the classes and de Gaulejac says this has now given way to what he calls «la gestion managériale» or what he calls a management ideology that transforms everyone into human capital (de Gaulejac, 2014, p. 154) in a system of hyperperformance in the workplace. He and Aubert have also called it «le système managinaire» in that «c'est le contrôle du psyche qui devient essentiel» (Aubert et de Gaulejac, 1991, p. 110). De Gaulejac said this system celebrates autonomy, enrichment and liberty (de Gaulejac, 2014, p. 153), but also «organise un état de crise permanente» (p. 153). Aubert (2003) called this a situation of «Flux tendu» (p. 78), or just-in-time production, a management approach which meshes with the environment of «urgence généralisée» in which production goes on in an environment where costs must stay low and production high, with little to no downtime, or what she called «temps mort» Aubert made this point by referring to the well-known Eisenhower Matrix, developed by former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, which divided time management into four quadrants, important and urgent, important and not urgent, not important and urgent and not important and not urgent. Aubert said the effect of hypermodernity has been to squeeze out the important and not urgent quadrant, and the urgent but not important quadrant, where most strategic thinking and the ability to re-energize by delegating to others took place. «Tout serait devenu à la fois urgent et important» (Aubert, 2003, p. 77).

This problem was also brought to life in Hélène Weber's book about her experience working at McDonald's, where «tout a été pensé pour obtenir une efficacité maximale» (Weber, 2011, p. 51), a place where procedures and hyper-control of tasks dominated and the only way to earn and negotiate power was through hard-work and the resulting promotions to positions where one got to encourage others to work hard too. People, technology, rules and suppliers were all leveraged to support a system that as Weber, in harkening back to Taylor and Ford noted, «Il est specifié non seulement ce qu'il faut faire, mais comment et en combien de temps il faut le faire» (Taylor, 1911, as cited in Weber, 2011, p. 113). The point Aubert made about the importance of no downtime is clear at McDonald's: «Il ne doit pas y avoir de temps mort» (Weber, 2011, p. 118). Weber said the effect of the organization of tasks «ont pour conséquence de renforcer l'emprise de l'organisation sur les employés en les mettant dans des situations qui les contraignent de fait à accélerer leur cadence de travail» (p. 117). This has imposed an environment, une «emprise spécifique sur les individus, dans la mesure où ils ne possèdent presque aucun moyen de se soutraire au rythme qu'elles imposent» (p. 112), leading some to say that those who work as McDonald's have «du ketchup dans les veines» (p. 105), which is also the title of Weber's book, suggesting that it is the organization that is the lifeblood of the individual rather than the other way around. George Ritzer (2008, as cited in Bryman, 2011) also coined the term "McDonaldisation" as "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurants are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world" (p. 1). Ritzer outlined four dimensions of McDonaldisation: efficiency; calculability; predictability and control through non-human technologies, which could, for example, measure "the precise amount of ketchup" (p. 2). It was this type of precise calibration and programming of machines that put the worker at the mercy of the machine, «la succession des gestes se trouve rythmée par les machines» (Weber, 2011, p. 114). Living in a hypermodern society affects not only society, but the individuals in it. Okhuysen et al. (2013) identified that the workplace matters because it is "the content but also the context in which individuals, live, act, and interact with others" (p. 492).

In the workplace, this translates in an expectation of performance that will be "above expectations." De Gaulejac (2009) said this type of pressure on individuals «suscite une pression continuelle, un sentiment de ne jamais en faire assez, une angoisse de ne pas être à l'hauteur de ce que l'entreprise exige» (p. 229). In a review of Benoit Heilbrunn's edited book which included chapters from a number of writers: La performance, une nouvelle idéologie?, Ragusich and Bonneville (2009) noted that

> L'ère est désormais celle de l'homo performans. The monde serait désormais composé d'individus obsédés par la performance chez qui la hantise de ne pas valoir assez et/ou l'espoir de valoir plus sont tels qu'ils les définissent en tant qu'êtres humains (Ragusich & Bonneville, 2009, p. 2).

This type of pressure creates a form of "hyperactivity" to keep up. It is also a two-edged sword, in that people are proud of the work that they do but also report feeling exhausted (de Gaulejac, 2014, p. 229). Aubert said hypermodernity creates hypermodern individuals, who have a «personnalité fondalement individualiste» (Aubert, 2006b) that has evolved within the context of immediate satisfaction and «l'éclatement des limites.» De Gaulejac (2006) had a similar viewpoint, adding that those living in a hypermodern society experienced a «perte de sens […] l'expression d'un monde vécu comme incoherent.» He said it is also a world of haves and have nots. «Les uns souffrent d'un excès des normes, les autres de leur absence» (de Gaulejac, 2014, p. 130). Aubert, for her part called this «une bipolarisation de l'individu contemporain autour de ces deux extrêmes de l'individualisme, par excès et par défaut» (2006b, p. 74).

Like de Gaulejac, Aubert saw individuals for whom «hyperfonctionnement de soi» resulted from cultures of urgency in which it was impossible to determine what was urgent and what was not. As noted earlier, Aubert and de Gaulejac (1991) called the management system that responds to current society as a «système managinaire» (p. 110), a system in which employees' own narcissistic needs are met by total devotion to the enterprise. This devotion to the system is facilitated by various explicit systems that support it such as training (Aubert & de Gaulejac, 1991, p. 121), evaluation systems and management by objectives (p. 123), positive feedback and reinforcement (p. 123) and other more implicit systems such as the suggestion that one must always exceed requirements (p. 127). The call to constant high performance «rejoint une tendance narcissique chez les employés à faire appel à un 'soi grandiose,' qui peut tout faire, un soi professionnel sans limites» (Rhéaume, 2001, p. 20).

2.4.4 Hyperperformance opportunities and risks

Researchers agreed that there were pluses as well as minuses and a cost to pay to urgency and hyperperformance in the workplace. «La culture de la haute performance se traduit d'un coté par une augmentation remarquable de la productivité, la rentabilité et l'autre, par une pression intense sur les entreprises et ses salariés» (de Gaulejac, 2014). Clearly Aubert (2008) was of the view that the hypermodern workplace leads to significant issues for individuals:

> Les individus sont conduits à «hyperréagir», sans plus pouvoir prendre le temps du recul et de la réflexion, et «hyper-fonctionner», un peu comme des machines. D'où ces pathologies qui apparaissent, dans lesquelles certains individus finissent par fonctionner comme des «piles électriques qu'on ne peut pas débrancher» ou qui «tournent en rond, comme un embrayage ou une boîte de vitesses qui tourne dans le vide» ou encore qui «pètent les plombs» (Aubert, 2003, cited in Aubert, 2008, p. 33).

In a study with others of an organization he called TLTX, Pagès (1979) found that people also referred to this type of involvement, as one interviewee noted, as «une, drogue, où on est esclave. On la déteste et pourtant on en a besoin» (p. 159). Others have called it le «Culte de la Performance» (Ehrenberg, 1991). Pagès (1979) spoke of a type of amorous relationship with the organisation, one in which the self becomes totally consumed by the enterprise. People in such a state alternate between a sense of pleasure from all the positive things they derive from the organisation, coupled with a form of «angoisse» which approximates a fear of death, a «contrepoint du plaisir» (Pagès, 1979, p. 163). Employees become isolated from people and focus solely on their relationship with the organisation, which is what he said the organisation wants (Pagès, 1979, p. 181). These elements, Pagès, identified, occurred at the level of the subconscious. Critics of this thesis (Duprez, 1982) said that while the focus on the unconscious hold organizations have is interesting «les auteurs n'ont pas su limiter leur analyse en généralisant trop facilement à l'ensemble du social» (p. 318).

Pagès was not alone in talking about the dichotomy of extreme feelings that employees lived with in a hypermodern organisation and society. Work is seen to be fundamental to «la construction positive de la santé mentale» (Rhéaume, 2001, p. 11), and is a «source importance de plaisir et de souffrance» (p. 11). Rhéaume further identified that our hyper-industrial time is a time of change «où le travail change de signification et de place» (Rhéaume, 2001, p. 7) a form of productivity on steroids world he called le «productivisme maximal» (Rhéaume, 2001, p. 8). Like others, he noted that there are winners and losers, as some organisations and people thrive in such a society and others do not. He blamed in part technology for the way in which people placed heavy investment in their work.

> Dans nos entreprises hypermodernes, tout un ensemble de dynamiques sociales et psychologiques convergentes se développent, menant à une pathologie de surinvestissement au travail (Rhéaume, 2001, p. 21).

This state of work and being, Aubert and others declared, leads to psychosocial risk. Montreuil (2014) said these risks are the product of three issues in society: a new economic context of competition, client demands, employment markets and related factors; new ways of organizing work such as just-in time production, project work, performance evaluations and other elements; and a new social context and expectations of workers. This in turn, in Montreuil's view, leads to a «multiplication des facteurs pouvant générer les» (p. 13). Like others, Montreuil found that technology accelerated change: «La transformation numérique, qui s'opère dans les entreprises, ne fait qu'accélérer le processus de changement» (p. 14), and one assumes, causes more stress.

In his article on fatigue in the workplace, (Loriol, 2003) said that since the 1980s, there had been an interest in defining fatigue in terms of «souffrance,» where in the past the psychosocial dimensions of fatigue were studied more in terms of «ennui» or «monotonie» (p. 462). He noted that it was the human relations approach on motivation that more clearly established that workers had «besoins psychologiques 'naturels' et stables devant être satisfaits» (p. 463), like recognition. Loriol said that jobs that have a «fort engagement personnel relationnel, à haute responsabilité ou artistique» sont reputés dangereux du fait d'un risque de surinvestissement et donc d'épuisement dans la quête inaccessible d'un idéal» (p. 473). He said it is precisely this mechanism that is responsible for the terms burnout or syndrome d'épuisement professionnel (p. 473). Loriol concluded that fatigue «doit être comprise comme le résultat de processus sociaux complexes et non comme la simple mesure objective des efforts fournis au travail» (p. 481).

Aubert held strongly to view that we are living in a society that has created its own form of religion: «celle de la performance et du dépassement de soi» (2006a, p. 339). Aubert used the word «hyperperformance» to denote the idea of «performance poussée à l'extrême qui s'impose à tous les individus» (Aubert, 2006a, p. 349-340). The entreaty to always do more and better that were the hallmarks of Taylorism have now been replaced by the imperative to go faster, but eventually people come up empty when their work is the only thing that helps them make sense of the world (Aubert, 2006a, p. 345). It's precisely at the time where «Le Moi» of the individual successfully merges their identity with what they consider an ideal organization that people are impacted.

> La personne craque […] C'est le phénomène bien connu du burn-out qui laisse la personne 'ravagée' de l'intérieur comme par un incendie, écrasée par la chute de son Moi idéal, identifié à l'idéal organisationnel (Aubert, 2006a, p. 348).

What Aubert and others suggested is what Valléry and Leduc called «les risques psychosociaux» (Valléry & Leduc, 2017) in today's workplaces. These are defined as «des risques pour la santé mentale, physique et sociale, engendrés par les conditions d'emploi et les facteurs organisationnels et relationnels susceptibles d'interagir avec le fonctionnement mental» (p. 9). Organizations are adapting to respond to a global world by deploying new methods of production, technologies, and other measures, and there is a cost: the authors noted that in addition to musculo-squeletal pains that were the initial hallmark of industrialized society, we now have greater than ever «manifestations telles que l'état de stress, le mal-être ou l'épuisement professionnel» (p. 16). Other manifestations of psychosocial risks include «souffrance,» which the authors defined as «la sensation douloureuse aiguë éprouvée par l'individu», burnout, and antosocial behaviours such as harassment, incivility, provocation and violence of various forms. (p. 35-41). Burnout may be defined as "a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding" (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001). These authors noted that research findings indicate that "workers see the bonds of loyalty between employees and companies, and the spirit of cooperation among employees, being eroded by anxiety and pressure to work harder for less" (p. 505). Some might argue that organizations don't care. Weber (2011), in their recounting her work at McDonald's referred to Foucault when they said that practices there focus on the totality of the sense and work to «rendre les corps utiles et dociles.»

The problem, according to de Gaulejac (2014) is that modern enterprise looks upon stress, exhaustion and other responses to hypermodernity as external to the organisation, and that worker symptoms are treated on an individual basis by psychiatrists, psychologists and through other interventions. The emphasis is on the employee to cope. This is clear and one sees it in the proliferation of stress management, and other types of courses and methods offered to employees. If you're stressed, do yoga they say. Unfortunately this does not begin to address why one is stressed. This type of approach «externalise les conséquences de la violence des relations de travail qu'elle génère» (de Gaulejac, 2014, p. 329).

That said, there are those who feel that the word «souffrance» is used far too widely. «Aujourd'hui tout le monde s'est mis à souffrir» (Ehrenberg, 2002), to the point where «le statut social de la souffrance psychique déborde largement le domaine de la médecine et de la santé» (p. 1047). Ehrenberg was of the view that it is a language to define problems, a way to give sense to our lives. His view was that this focus on the «interiorité» of life is unheralded, and that the really important thing is to «comprendre les raisons de ce souci et les significations qu'il revêt» (p. 1047). Others agreed with this assessment:

> Ce qui s'impose de façon flagrante à notre époque, c'est la souffrance au travail. Elle occupe en effet le monde des arts et du spectacle tout autant que les médias et les institutions politiques. Elle devient omniprésente. Elle est souvent présentée comme un phénomène contemporain, révélateur de notre société, de sa complexité, et de la plus grande fragilité de ses membres (Linhart, 2015, p. 97).

But like Ehrenberg, Linhart said it's important to figure out some key issues: «La question essentielle n'est pas tant qui souffre et comment, mais d'où provient la souffrance et pourquoi?» (Linhart, 2015 p. 97).

Part of the issue is it is difficult to assess where suffering and stress come from and the severity of it. The most quoted definition of stress is that it is "a generalized effort of an organism to adapt itself to new conditions", which Hans Selye termed the "general adaptation syndrome" (Selye, 1936). He later came to call this type of response "stress" (Selye, 1951). Stress is a difficult concept to operationalize because various stress factors may mean different things to different people, and something that may stress one person may not another. However, de Gaulejac (2014) also noted that in a performing enterprise stress is considered something to learn to live with, not "une maladie professionnelle mais comme une donnée quasi naturelle à laquelle il convient de s'adapter." (p. 223). He also squarely placed the blame on organizations, whose ways of operating «provoque une série de malaises qui disparaissent lorsque la pression du travail s'allège» (p. 245). Lazarus and Folkman (1984), also tied stress to the workplace, noting that the stress response:

is experienced when an individual is faced with situations that they perceive as taxing or exceeding their resources and when there is a lack of fit between job rewards and individual and/or organizational needs" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 68).

Aubert and Pagès (1989) analyzed stress as a social factor, showing that «c'est surtout l'absence de maîtrise sur l'organisation de son travail qui est un facteur déterminant de stress» (as cited in de Gaulejac, 2014). Aubert said stress led in the workplace to «pathologies de fonctionnement», ou encore "pathologies de la «surchauffe» and that workers they interviewed used terminology suggestive of an analogy between individuals and machines (Aubert, 2006b, p. 77).

2.4.5 Social acceleration

Sociologist Helmut Rosa (2012) said we are in a stage of social acceleration and that a critical analysis "of the temporal structures of society of its acceleration, and of the alienation it creates is the only rationally valid option in a world that has become too fast and unstable to allow an in-depth analysis of its characteristics" (Rosa, 2012, p. 139. as cited in Gottschalk 2018, p. 15). It is also said that social acceleration "manifests itself through three distinct analytical dimensions: technological acceleration, social change and the pace of life" (Fortier & Therrien, 2018). These authors noted that social acceleration worked in concert with neo-liberalism and that it affected "both the system and its actors, thus giving rise to a hypermodern society (Aubert, 2010) characterized by a constant state of urgency on which global capitalism thrives" (Fortier & Therrien, p. 463). They worry in particular about the advent of the pressure for acceleration caused by new digital technologies and the resultant link to project failures, such as, they note, the Phoenix pay system, which affected tens of thousands of employees and retirees at the federal government level in Canada (Fortier & Therrien, 2018, p. 465). Their view was that "new communication technology and devices ensuring instantaneous exchanges and the ability to be reached anywhere at any time fuel optimization" (p. 464). For their part, Marcel Drulhe said we are living in an era of «turbo-capitalisme» noting we are in a world of «organizations-caméleons», characterized by an ethos of responsibility, autonomy, and a sense of the «transitoire», among others (Drulhe, 2004, p. 19). He distinguished between the times we live in, which he calls "capitalisme industriel" and "capitalisme bourgeois" (p. 19). He too feels we are not yet in a post-industrial society, but rather a hybrid state (p. 19), marked by "neotaylorism" (p. 21). People are far more likely to get plugged in for a time on a project as proof of their "flexibility," yet, the issue with this, according to Drulhe, is that it fails to build common relationships. A network of rules takes over and, «le nouveau taylorisme multiplie les protocoles au détriment du 'relationnel'» (p. 21). For example, he noted a serious accident that occurred in a plutonium factory in Japan. An analysis revealed that there was an official manual of procedures that wasn't followed but replaced by one that included work-arounds. Weber noted similar problems in their time working at McDonald's, where employees chose to work around various procedures to get things done faster - a form of resistance to the established order that allowed employees to regain some measure of control over a management environment that worshipped speed, control and micro-management (Weber, 2011). As Druhle (2004) said: «on travaille ensemble mais pas en commun: la flexibilité tue la fraternité» and he speaks of employees experiencing «souffrance» that comes from a sense of being exploited and not recognized in today's workplace (p. 21).

Unlike postmodernists who announced the end of modernity, "hyper-modernists are concerned by its radical acceleration" (Gottschalk, 2018). A hypermodern society Aubert noted, is one in which

> tout est hyper, ce préfixe désignant le trop, l'excès, l'au-delà d'une norme ou d'un cadre et impliquant une connotation de dépassement constant, de maximum, de situation limite. L'accent est donc mis non pas sur la rupture avec les fondements de la modernité mais sur l'exacerbation, la radicalisation, voire une sorte d'«emballement» de la modernité» (Aubert, 2006a).

Technologies are one way in which society has changed its relationship with time (Aubert, 2003). There was a period where time was seen as something that flowed, or passed, as in the passage of time (Aubert, 2003, p. 21). More recently time was seen as something that could be possessed, a type of object to be seized «une donnée quantitative que nous cherchons justement à saisir, à posséder, que nous voulons soumettre et dominer» (Aubert, 2003, p. 22). In the past couple of decades, time has taken on new dimensions as people speak of time contracting, accelerating, and compressing, in the wake of globalization (Aubert 2003, p. 23). While these characterizations of time give it an autonomous status (p. 23), it is not time but the people in society who are accelerating «pour répondre aux exigences d'une économie et d'une société qui tournent à vitesse toujours plus grande, exigent des performances toujours plus poussées et des actions toujours plus immédiates» (p. 23). What is clear is that we are experiencing a huge shift, «une mutation radicale de notre rapport au temps» (p. 21), and that globalisation brought with it a revolution. Aubert saw technology as a key element of hypermodernity. «La révolution survenue dans les technologies de la communication y joue un rôle essentiel, impliquant une mutation de notre rapport au temps, une obligation de réagir dans l'immédiat et une impossibilité de vivre des valeurs de long terme» (Aubert, 2008, p. 24). This in turn has affected society, the individuals in it, and the workplace, and information and communications technologies have made it worse according to Bonneville (2013):

le développement des TIC dans les organisations a justement contribué notamment à exacerber certaines logiques productivistes qui se manifestent désormais à travers une hyper-intensification du travail : c'est l'art d'en faire toujours plus, dans un temps toujours plus court, avec des ressources moindres.

2.4.6 Hypermodernity, ICTs and public relations

The term "hypermodernity" has been used in a limited way in public relations. "Modern times are over. We now live in hypermodern times," declared an editorial on corporate social responsibility in hypermodern times in a public relations publication. (Verčič et al., 2018, p. 431). The possibility of being connected at all times helped to blur the boundary between work and non-work time, as stated by Verčič: "Among other things, the Internet has blurred the boundary between the public and the private and the political and the commercial" (Verčič et al., 2018, p. 431). This blurring of the boundaries was therefore recognized by these authors, at the same time as they sounded the alarm surrounding artificial intelligence as well. "Advances in Artificial Intelligence should induce us to question the very essence of humanness" (Verčič et al., 2018, p. 431).

In such an environment, researchers noted that it had become difficult for workers to achieve work-life balance. In a study on women in academia (Bonneville, 2016, p. 86) cited research by Currie and Eveline (2011) who said "the boundary between work and family is increasingly becoming blurred, especially because of the use of information communication technologies that enable professors to work all the time" (p. 533). The women interviewed by Bonneville (2016) talked about how much harder they felt they needed to work than men, how overloaded they constantly felt, the difficulties of trying to balance having a young family with a career in academia, leading the researcher to conclude that "the structural pressures which are present in the university setting have an impact on the work for women" (Bonneville, 2016, p. 93). A study on technology induced stressors among journalism and mass communication faculty using a Technology Stressors Scale in which Beam et al. (2002) found that "tech stress is lowering job satisfaction and raising levels of exhaustion" (p. 336), and that "stressors resulting from the use of new technology have the most pronounced influence on intrinsic job satisfaction" (p. 344).

With respect to public relations practitioners and agencies, I would suggest that these professionals are faced with a multi-faceted imperative in relation to information and communication technologies. On the one hand, they are like other workers who use ICTs in their work, and as a result, may face some of the same challenges as others in a hypermodern society. On the other hand, public relations and other communications practitioners, I would suggest, have a special relationship to speed and urgency in that they bear the responsibility of helping manage an organization's communication presence, reputation and relationships with a broad variety of audiences, in a 24/7 world, whether or not a crisis is occurring. Cell phones, the Internet and social media are their tools of the trade and rare is the public relations practitioner – particularly within managerial levels - who can ever walk away from work at the end of the work day and know for certain that there will not be more work to do via e-mail, text, social media, or generally in response to organizational demands. Public relations practitioners are also required to be up-to-date themselves on current technology, not only for their clients, but also in order to manage their own identities online. Finally, public relations practitioners are often considered the conscience of an organization. It is part of their role to help organizations navigate the issues that arise from being in a hypermodern society.

In public relations, there is truth to the fact that practitioners, in some cases, are prone to addictive behaviours that exist in society when it comes to their relationship with their communication technologies. Constantly checking cell phones, email or other enabling technologies so as to not miss anything, as we will in the results section in Chapters 4 and 5, is sometimes worn like a "badge of courage" by such employees and seen as part of the job. That said, like some organizations in hypermodern society, I would suggest that employees working in public relations may also be part of "greedy organizations" (Burchielli et al., 2008). These institutions, according to Coser (1974), seek "exclusive and undivided loyalty" (p. 4). Further they seek to weaken their employees' "ties with other institutions, or persons that might make claims that conflict with their own demands (Coser, 1974, p. 6), and finally employees find their identities "anchored in the symbolic universe" of the institution (p. 6), leading Coser to say that demands on the person in greedy organisations were "omniverous" (p. 6). Burchielli et al. (2008) concluded that:

> work is in conflict with life and that there is no balance for workers who must make many personal sacrifices in order to meet the expectations of the workplace, such as working long hours and leaning heavily on the social support of family and friends (Burchielli et al., 2008, p. 1).

In their qualitative study conducted with public relations agency professionals, Gilkerson et al. (2018), echoed this in noting that those interviewed said social media had increased the speed and workload of practitioners, creating a 24/7 responsibility. "Many discussed the speed that social media work requires, describing an accelerated process of the job – and that it created a need to always be "on" and available for work or to respond immediately to client-related issues" (p. 8). Interviewees also talked about a constant need to keep up with advances in technology for their clients, the imperative they felt to manage their own personal social media brand (as many public relations professionals viewed their personal social media activity as part of the job), and how "the lines between 'at work' and 'off work' are being blurred, and perhaps do not exist anymore" (p. 9). The authors also reported that while multiple interviewees said they enjoyed their work, many also said the concept of work-life balance was an "antiquated idea," a "myth" for today's public relations practitioners, and that "the long hours they and their colleagues spent on social media and public relations occasionally resulted in extreme stress and burnout" (p. 13).

This conflict between work and personal life was also identified in research conducted by Jiang et al. (2017), who conducted a quantitative study with communications professionals, examining their perceptions of the impact of social media use on their work, leadership behaviours and work-life conflict. Like other researchers, they noted that social media is a two-edged sword: that adopting social media "may create great flexibility for professionals to work at a convenient location and time, improve their work productivity, or reward them with additional time and energy" (Jiang et al., 2017, p. 37). On the other hand, they noted extended working hours, increased workload and more stress were also part of the package. Practitioners engaged in social media tended to perceive a high level of time-based (where work leaves little time to be spent on family and other responsibilities) and strain-based (when fatigue, anxiety, and other psychological preoccupations at work spill over outside work) work-life conflict. Further, the more social media tools public relations professionals used in their work, the higher their perceived level of strain-based work-life conflict (Jiang et al., 2017, p. 37).

Wright et al. (2014) looked at the use of communication-related technology outside of regular working hours and its relationship to work-life conflict, burnout, job satisfaction and turnover intentions. While their quantitative study included various companies, it is noted that seven public relations firms and six advertising firms were included in the sample. The study found that the increased amount of time using communication technologies for work-related tasks outside of regular work hours was predictive of increases in work-life conflict associated with communication technology use (p. 518). It also found that when controlling for age, perceived life stress, and perceived usefulness of technology "increases in work life conflict association with communication technology use would be predictive of increases in job burnout" (p. 519). The study also talked about the blurring of boundaries that came with communication technologies: "As with other work duties that are carried over into home life, communication technologies (despite their convenience) may blur the boundaries between work and home" (Wright et al., 2014, p. 521).

Wright & Hinson's (2017) use of social media and other digital media study in communications ran for more than a dozen years. Respondents increasingly noted over the years that social media had changed the way their organizations communicated. Since communicators use various technologies to access and work with social media, it is clear that technology is being leveraged for public relations practitioners to do their jobs in this area. The authors concluded that public relations "practitioners continue to agree strongly that these new media are changing the way public relations is practiced" (Wright & Hinson, 2017, p. 7).

Feminist scholars Aldoory et al. (2008) conducted focus group research with women in public relations to examine, among other things, what the challenges were to work-life balance. "Participants struggled between the constraining and facilitating roles of technology" (p. 10). Participants referred to "crackberry" use and their "addiction" to monitoring e-mails using handheld devices (p. 10). One cannot help but note that in such cases, the technology facilitates a human compulsion to keep checking, something that was also noted in this research and expanded upon in Chapter 4. In fact, some authors (Gilkerson et al, 2018) have reported that their interviewees “seemed to wear their heavy workload as a ‘badge of honour’ within the profession. Extreme hours were often noted to be integral to their professional and personal identities” (p. 12). Wright et al. (2014) had a similar observation, noting that public relations practitioners had a passion for their work but that

> some employee’s (sic) stress and burnout levels might be affected by their own dependency on communication technologies […] In this sense, it is not so much that supervisors or other sources are intruding on one’s personal life. Rather, some employees may have difficulty curbing their tendency to continually check in with work (due to technological dependency or addiction) (Wright et al., 2014, p. 524).

There was also a suggestion that public relations itself may need to reframe its theoretical thinking to take into account that we are living in a hypermodern society, and all that means. “Modernization, postmodernization and hypermodernization theory provide an interesting macro theoretical framework to study PR and communication management because it is the cultural context for professionals in a global economy” (Verhoeven et al., 2018). They noted that to date, there is “no existing literature about PR and hypermodernity” (p. 478). To close this gap, their study of European PR professionals focused on assessing their awareness of hypermodernity in order to understand how this might influence practice. They found that transformation towards a hypermodern culture as defined by Lipovetsky (2005) was recognized by the majority of European PR and communications professionals (Verhoeven et al., 2018, p. 478). The study, that was part of the European Communication Monitor’s 2017 version, sought to identify the extent to which practitioners worked in organizations that exhibited the values and behaviours of modern, post-modern or hypermodern organizations. It found that most organizations were in the process of transitioning to behave in response to a hypermodern society, such as engaging in key societal debates and focusing on the consumer.

2.5 Stress, technostress and ICTs

Hans Selye (1951) is broadly recognized as having initially coined the term stress and defined it as the “non-specific response of the body to any demand.” He saw it as a disease of adaption and was primarily focused on the physiological effects of stress. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), the stress response “is experienced when an individual is faced with situations that they perceive as taxing or exceeding their resources and when there is a lack of fit between job rewards and individual and/or organizational needs” (p. 68). Much of the literature and research on stress seemed to flow from this work, with Lazarus (1993) and colleagues establishing much of the framework for studying psychological stress. As a particular form of stress, technostress has been defined as stress that is a product of the interaction between humans and computers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Psychotherapist Craig Brod’s (1984) book *Technostress: The Human Cost of the Computer Revolution* defined technostress as a new kind of disease, “a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with the new computer technologies in a healthy manner” (p. 16). He felt that technostress manifested either as a “struggle to accept” computer technology, or in a form of “overidentification with” computer technology (Brod, 1984). Brod’s is considered the seminal definition of technostress, quoted in virtually all research and publications on technostress to this day. Among other things Brod said overidentification with technology led to a “technocentered” state in which high-performing individuals entered into a form of symbiotic (and one can presume, unhealthy) relationship with the machine (Brod, 1984, p. 17).

He was not alone in his view that technostress was unhealthy. The Japanese medical community launched a study, the advent of which was reported upon by Anderson (1985) in the prestigious journal Nature where technostress was defined as “the stress and concomitant psychosomatic disorder induced by the introduction of high technology” (p. 6). The article drew a picture of people worked with or around computers flooding into Japanese medical centres with a variety of psychosomatic disorders. Anderson (1985) also suggested the Japanese claimed the term technostress, which they called a “tendency” or “syndrome” which created a variety of psychosomatic ailments. As well, an early book (Caro et al., 1987) and an article written by Caro and Sethi (1985), proposed “the concept of technostress” (p. 291). Their book was not particularly well received by Roskies (1988), writing in *Canadian Psychology*, who criticized editing errors such as typos and said it didn’t have much to say (p. 135). Other early works spoke of the stress of working with technology but did not generally refer to it as “technostress.” Some even questioned whether technostress was something that truly existed as did the Human Factors Society, which had a workshop entitled “Technostress: fact, fad or fallacy” at an annual meeting (Turnage & Howell, 1991). That said, the initial contextual definition of technostress did place it squarely in the domain of psychology in relation to information sciences, which is not surprising given that the word stress is part of the psychological tradition. The term disease was also used by Brod, one might suggest, because of his view as a psychotherapist of what technology did to people – the fear of technology, he believed, bred such things as anxiety, headaches, irritability, resistance to learning about computers or rejection of the technology (Brod, 1984, p. 16). More seriously in cases of overidentification, he felt technostress led to “a loss of the capacity to feel and relate to others” (Brod, 1984, p. 17), and caused people to treat others as if they were machines. He was quite alarmed at what he observed and proclaimed that "in its more severe stages, technostress may be threatening our survival as a species" (Brod, p. XIII).

The focus on a more psychological or biological approach to technostress has been noted as well by Grummeck-Braamt et al. (2021), who traced the evolution and structure of scientific studies and articles on technostress. They found that research into what would later be called technostress was "mainly based on biology and psychology" (p. 6624) and stemmed from psychology's tradition of studying stress, with seminal research in the area of stress spilling over into people's initial thinking about technostress (for example: Selye, 1956; Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These and other works established the initial theoretical foundation of later works on technostress from a psychological perspective and established an orientation drawn from psychology's theories on coping or strain. In the years immediately following Brod's book, there were attempts to begin to measure technostress through various existing and new measures such as the computer technology hassles scale (Hudiberg, 1989).

After Brod's initial definition, it wasn't until the early nineties that isolated studies began to emerge. However, much of the focus at the time was on librarians who reported feeling burned out after working with technology for full days (Kupersmith, 1992), and for whom a mix of individual and organizational interventions were suggested. Information technology workers have also frequently been studied in relation to technostress. Some of the other occupations that were later examined also include knowledge workers (Oh & Park, 2016), who found that while a heavy workload created technostress for employees, the requirement to respond to work demands after regular hours was less of a factor in job satisfaction, particularly for managers. However, they found that other staff were impacted by responding to work after hours, and that this affected their work-life balance. Stadin et al. (2020) used a critical incident approach to study health care managers' use of ICTs and found that negative aspects of digital communication, poor user experience, and a need to improve organizational resources were all factors in these employees' technostress. Other occupations studied in recent years have also included social workers (Scaramuzzino & Martinell Barfoed, 2021), librarians in digital scholarship (Murgu, 2021) and accountants (Boyer-Davis, 2019).

Another often-cited definition of technostress comes from Weil & Rosen (1997), themselves respectively psychologist and psychology researcher/educator, who defined technostress as "any negative impact on attitudes, thoughts, behaviours, or body physiology that is caused either directly or indirectly by technology" (p. 5). They differentiated themselves clearly from Brod by saying categorically that they did not consider technostress to be a disease. However, their focus was on what technology did to people and how it affected lives at home, at work and during leisure time. This clearly placed the technology in the form of an object that acted on the human condition. Their view of technology, however, was more balanced and in keeping with more recent work that is less likely to pathologize technostress. "Technology may do wonders **for** us, but it is also doing something to us. What it is doing is causing us Technostress" (Weil & Rosen, 1997). Their book *Coping with Technology @ work @ home @play* took a how-to approach on coping with technostress by setting boundaries and other techniques, which I interpreted as a form of resistance in order to restore a healthier equilibrium, This is mentioned in further depth in this chapter and was a key component of this research. More recently Tarafdar et al. (2019) defined technostress as "stress that individuals experience due to their use of Information Systems" (p. 7). Nimrod also more recently defined technostress as "stress induced by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use (Nimrod, 2018, p.

1086). In their study of the development of a technostress scale for use with aging populations, they documented various other terms that are sometimes used as proxies for technostress, in their view incorrectly. Terms Nimrod (2018) mentioned in their literature review included such things as technoaddiction or technophobia as well as problematic Internet or smartphone use. These latter terms are not intended to be the focus of this study.

Quantitative scales were developed to measure various elements of technostress (Ragu-Nathan et al, 2008, Taradar et al, 2007) and this has fueled significant quantitative research on technostress. While the definition of technostress didn't change significantly as a result of the new measurement scales, it evolved to more clearly identify that a relationship existed between what became known as "stress creators" and "stress mitigators." However, the technostress measures are largely focused on measuring the various types of technostress and their negative input on people, and what I interpret as factors external to the technostress itself being defined as mitigators of technostress. For example, stress creator sub-scales such as techno-overload and techno-invasion (see Table 1) were developed and validated as part of measuring technostress. At the same time, these authors theorized that there were also "stress inhibitors" (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008) such as job satisfaction that could mitigate the effects of technostress on the individual. With the validation of scales came a greater ability to conduct correlation studies such as the relationship between technostress and such elements as productivity, role stress (Tarafdar et al., 2007) or job satisfaction (Suh & Lee., 2017; Khan et al., 2013).

Table 1

Technostress creators and definitions

Item	Definition
Techno-overload	Refers to an ICT's potential to drive an employee to work faster and longer
Techno-invasion	Refers to an ICT's potential to invade an employee's personal life when performing job tasks, because employees can be reached at anytime and they may feel the need to be constantly connected
Techno-complexity	Refers to the inherent quality of an ICT that makes employees feel inadequate with regard to their computer skills
Techno-insecurity	Refers to situations where users feel threatened about losing their jobs
Techno-uncertainty	Refers to the constant changes and upgrades of software and hardware that may impose stress on employees

Note: Technostress creators shown were as identified by Ragu-Nathan et al. (2008); Tarafdar et al. (2007).

The research focus in this area has been broad, measuring the experience of technostress, from categorizing and measuring both the stressors and mitigating factors in technostress to experimental studies that demonstrated the effect technostress has on hormone production (Riedl et al., 2012). Management and information technology studies have focused on the relationship between technostress and outcomes such as role stress and productivity, or job satisfaction (Tarafdar et al., 2007). There has been research focus that suggested technostress represented the "dark side" of technology (Salanova et al., 2013; Tarafdar et al., 2019). The research has identified that as technostress increased, dependent variables such as job satisfaction, performance, productivity, and organizational commitment decreased, although not all studies presented with the same magnitude of results (Sarabadani et al., 2018). Some studies looked at technostress as more of a cognitive problem (Bucher et al., 2013). Authors have suggested that there are many reasons why people experience technostress, among others, work overload and role ambiguity (Ayyagari et al., 2011). Scholars have also noted that technostress is seen to play a role in a number of outcomes from anxiety to depression to burnout (Galvin et al., 2022), although others noted much more research is needed to draw causal relationships between technostress and mental health outcomes (Dragano et al., 2020). Much of the research still harkened back to a psychological or human resources lens.

An interesting turn is that the focus of studies has changed as technology, language and the external environment have evolved. While technostress at first referred to technology in general, this language evolved to more precisely focus on information and communication technologies (ICTs). Tarafdar et. al. (2007) defined technostress as being “caused by an inability to adapt or cope with new lCTs in a healthy manner.” They argued that increases in productivity could be “offset” by a failure to reduce technostress in workers and by this they meant addressing “technology-imposed information and work overload, technology invading personal life and privacy, inability to deal with technology complexity, technology threatening job security, and fear of technology uncertainty” (Tarafdar et al., 2007, p. 324) as was identified in the various technostress scales in figure 1. They tied technostress to ICTs, noting that technostress

> is one of the fallouts of an individual’s attempts and struggles to deal with constantly evolving ICTs and the changing cognitive and social requirements related to their use. Its effects have become increasingly apparent over the past few years with the rapid proliferation of ICTs in the workplace (Tarafdar et al., 2007, p. 303).

In the past few years, studies on a specific aspect of technology have also emerged. For example, there have been several studies on technostress and social media induced technostress (Brooks & Califf, 2017; Bucher et al., 2013). The advent of the pandemic also led to studies about technostress in various occupations during COVID-19, (Spagnoli et al., 2020; Oksanen et al., 2021; Panado Abilleira et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2022). The move to hybrid workplaces, to online education, and work at home may have fuelled a renewed interest in studying technostress.

The focus on technologies as bad or dark has been challenged in recent years by scholars (Salanova et al., 2013; Rohwer et al., 2022). According to Tarafdar et al. (2017, corrected 2019) a review of the literature on technostress found that scholars had focused primarily on the negative side of technostress. They noted the process of technostress was conceived largely as a stress creator that created adverse consequences for users (p. 7) and did not take into account the positive side of technostress, such as the opportunities to lead to greater effectiveness and innovation (p. 6). They argued that technostress needs to be conceived now as "enhancing the positive and mitigating the negative" effects of technostress. They called Eustress the positive stress that results from the use of various information systems (Tarafdar et al., 2017, p. 24), and advocated for a greater inter-disciplinary focus to research on technostress between the information systems and psychological disciplines, for example, in order to gain greater understanding of motivations, why people experienced technostress and what forms of coping helped mitigate technostress. Some literature has aligned with this view. For example, Ohly and Latour (2014), in their research conducted with employees in Germany, found that the motivation behind why an employee used their smartphone for work in the evening had an impact on well-being. Employees who felt they were autonomously making the choice to work vs. being required to use their smartphone for work showed higher levels of positive affect, state of recovery and detachment, and lower levels of negative affect. They argued that measures to relieve employees of the freedom to use their phones after work may actually be a form of control that removes the work flexibility employees have (p. 181), an interesting thought when one considers ongoing discussions around the world about the right to disconnect from ICTs after work. Similarly, Eurofound and the International Labor office (Messenger et al., 2017), observed that the use of ICTs had transformed the world of work and brought about both positive – such as shortening of commuting time, greater working time autonomy, better overall work–life balance, and higher productivity – and negative effects such as tendency to lengthen working hours, to create interference between work and personal life, and to result in work intensification, which could lead to high levels of stress with negative consequences for workers' health and well-being. Given that public relations practitioners are often called to respond to crises and emergencies after hours, on holidays and weekends, it was then useful to look at what had been written about public relations practitioners and technostress.

2.5.1 Technostress in public relations

A literature review focusing on the words "technostress" and "public relations" did not find any articles titled with all these keywords. A deeper search found isolated studies that included some PR practitioners in the research sample but were not uniquely focused on public relations professionals. One such study was completed with European communication directors on the stress potential of social media and focused on the cognitive and literacy aspects of technostress (Bucher et al., 2013, p. 1651). The view of the authors was that being literate in social media "means being able to cope with overload, invasion and uncertainty" (p. 1652). Another study on technostress (Ninaus et al., 2015) was an exploratory qualitative study conducted in Hong Kong and Austria with professionals in advertising, public relations and journalism. It focused on ICT stressors and positive features of ICTs. The study found that "constant availability, connectivity pressure, an inner obligation for availability and an increased workload emerged as major stressors of work-related ICT use" (p. 7). It also noted that positive features of ICTs included such elements as the ability to facilitate efficiency and productivity via timely information exchange and the fact ICTs gave employees the ability to organize their work with respect to time and space. They argued that this created an opportunity for better balancing work and life (p. 1).

Several studies also addressed stress in public relations by examining ICT use. These studies also followed a work-life balance lens (Aldoory et al., 2008; Jin et al., 2014; Jiang & Shen, 2013) where work-life balance was defined as “efforts by male and female employed persons who juggle various, personal, home and work responsibilities” (Aldoory, et al., 2008, p. 2). For example, Aldoory et al. (2008) conducted focus groups with public relations practitioners to examine how they perceived work-life balance. The research found that participants “struggled between the constraining and facilitating roles of technology” (p. 10). Jin et al. (2013) conducted an online survey with Public Relations Society of America members which looked at how practitioners coped when faced with stressors in work-life conflict situations, and found six distinct styles, the most prominent being rational action and positive thinking. Likewise, Shen et al. (2016) applied the same scale used by Jin et al. (2014) to study practitioner coping styles in relation to work-life conflict. They identified that when PR practitioners experienced high work-life conflict, they “felt more reluctant to seek out emotional comfort from friends and families (emotional expression), less inclined to evaluate the situation objectively and rationally (rational action), failed to view the circumstances more positively (positive thinking) and hesitated to ask for advice about what to do (instrumental support)” (Shen et al., 2016, p. 419). Jiang and Shen (2013) looked at work-life balance and family responsibilities in relation to other family responsibilities, salary, and whether they were the primary income earner for their household. Finally, in survey research with millennial public relations practitioners. Gallicano et al. (2012)

identified that public relations practitioners who worked in agencies found it difficult to have a satisfying work-life balance.

The use of ICTs by public relations practitioners was also addressed by Shen and Fussell Sisco (2015), who defined ICTs broadly as “social media, communication software programs, and Interview devices” (p. 1). Their research, also conducted via survey with Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members found that use of ICTs was an antecedent to work-life conflict. These authors made the connection between the use of technology and work-life balance for public relations practitioners, noting that “while some may argue that the use of technologies has improved communication for practitioners, it has also blurred the line between working hours and non-working hours (p. 2). This highlighted that while there were no doubt positive elements related to the use of ICTs for work, there were also significant impacts on elements such as work-life balance, showing that ICTs were considered a double-edged sword as was shown by several of the studies highlighted above. Earlier, Johnson (1997) conducted qualitative research with PRSA members in the form of interviews to elicit PRSA practitioner views on the use of technology in practice. Johnson linked the use of e-mail, Internet, and other new technologies to the PR theories of James Grunig (1992), in identifying that technology might enhance the ability to conduct two-way symmetrical communication with publics. While practitioners identified that they experienced stress in staying up-to-date with various technologies, they also identified several benefits in the form of advances in productivity, efficiency, and research capabilities (p. 229). Similar results that showed the benefits of ICTs were identified by Chan et al. (2015) in their small exploratory study of mass communication specialists in Hong Kong. While this study included workers in journalism, advertising and public relations in equal measure, they investigated the use of ICTs by these practitioners using a job demands and resources model in relation to stress and burnout. This human resources model identifies that jobs have a number of demands that are stressful but that these can be "buffered" by various resources. This model, which has been widely used and later known as JD-R theory, identified that:

> work overload, emotional job demands, physical job demands, and work-home conflict are all risk factors for job burnout (particularly exhaustion and cynicism), but that the undesirable impact of job demands on burnout can be alleviated by job resources such as job autonomy, social support, quality of the relationship with the supervisor, and performance feedback (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 273).

In their study, Chan et al. (2015) found that ICTs were perceived more often as a job resource than as a job demand and that elements such as better communication with colleagues at different locations, ability to access documents anyplace anytime and better communication with clients, among others, were mentioned more frequently than job demands such as the work day being extended to non-office hours, being accessible by boss or clients anytime, information overload, or intrusion on private life (p. 86). However, the overwhelming majority reported that "they experienced longer working hours and information overload because of ICT" (p. 85).

The idea of pressure, or speed, in public relations, and the subject of constant connectivity, in relation to time-based work conflict or time pressure was tackled by some studies (Aldoory et al., 2008; Gilkerson et al., 2018; Guo & Anderson, 2018). Use of ICTs in PR has been found to be a predictor of time-based work-life conflict, in that the responsibilities of work may intrude upon time that would normally be allotted to another life role. In their study of resilience in public relations, Guo & Anderson (2018) identified time pressure - defined by Cœugnet et al. (2011) as the resulting imbalance in the amount of time available to do a task vs. the time available to do so - as one of the areas individuals define as adversities on the individual level.

Few studies seem to have addressed the strategies PR practitioners used to restore balance. However, Aldoory et al. (2008) conducted focus groups with male and female practitioners, in which they looked, among other questions, at what "strategies practitioners use to mix, balance or sabotage work and personal commitments and desires" (p. 10). They found that open communication with family and the workplace, manipulating time by establishing routines, use of new technology, and quitting current employment were all strategies employed (p. 12). It has been more than a decade since this last study. It was conducted shortly after the introduction of the Apple smartphone and before social media became a significant force in public relations not only for practitioners, but also their organizations and publics. In addition, the changes in work brought about by COVID-19, and in particular the advent of more telework, may also be fertile ground for revisiting earlier research. Telework has been defined as working away from the office, using technology such as ICTs, in order to stay linked to the office and its work (Bélanger & Allport, 2008).

Other studies on PR practitioners (Meng et al, 2019; Zerfass et al., 2018) seemed to indirectly address the idea of technostress. According to Meng et al. (2019), one-third of North American communication professionals surveyed reported they felt tense and stressed during the course of a normal workday; the sources of this stress included information and work overload (p. 83). A similar study conducted in Europe (Zerfass et al., 2018) found the main drivers of work stress included, among others, the need to be constantly available outside work time to access emails and phone calls, and workload. Shen & Fussell Sisco (2015) found that as heavy users of technologies, public relations practitioners felt ICTs increased workload, hours spent working and increased job-related stress (p. 11). While there has also been longitudinal research into how social media is dramatically changing the way public relations is practiced (Wright & Hinson, 2017), the authors looked at where various tasks conducted by public relations practitioners were organized within an organization and where the function and tasks reported managerially, rather than looking at how the practitioners experienced what they do.

Some articles have also begun to emerge specifically tackling resilience in PR and this seems like one way the issue is being approached by scholars. Resilience is relevant to discussions on stress and has as a result not surprisingly been defined within the psychological realm, most notably by the American Psychological Association:

> Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (a) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, (b) the availability and quality of social resources, and (c) specific copying strategies. Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can be cultivated and practiced (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018).

There have been a handful of recent studies (Guo & Anderson, 2018; Moreno et al, 2019; Erskine & Shoenmaker, 2018; Ziegele & Zerfass, 2021) that have applied the study of resilience to public relations. Ziegele and Zerfass (2021) noted that “stress resilience in communications management has been only sparsely studied” (p. 336). Their research on resilience in PR made the case that resilience ought to be considered a competency in public relations because higher levels of resilience may be protective against adverse mental health outcomes and burnout. Their research with agency practitioners in both Germany and the United States concluded that resilience can be learned, which aligned with the APA definition of resilience.

The scholars who have studied resilience in PR also recognized that given the pace at which public relations practitioners work and the demands of their job, resilience can be helpful to practitioners in order to facilitate well-being. Erskine & Shoemaker (2019) found in their survey-based qualitative research that resilient PR practitioners enacted a variety of personal and protective factors in order to maintain resilience – factors such as positive relationships and a sense of agency and adaptability. That said, these studies suggested that resilience, and the ways in which people coped with stressors fit into a more classic psychological approach which focused on stressors and the ways in which people coped with them or organizations provided supports.

In all of the studies on resilience, there was little mention of technology. Some of the interventions reported upon were more organizational in nature, such as organizations providing health club benefits to help people enhance their resilience. That said, one of the studies did show that some practitioners identified work-life balance as a stressor (Anderson & Guo, 2019). Framed as a competency for practitioners as identified by respected researchers such as Ziegele & Zerfass (2019), the study of resilience seemed to highlight the role of organizations in ensuring that they provided an environment that facilitated resilience in many forms – such as the ability to disconnect from technology, a topic that has flourished in recent years as countries have tackled the problem of technology facilitating access to workers after the regular work day.

2.5.2 The right to disconnect

One way some countries have sought to mitigate the constant connection related to ICTs risks is by establishing a right to disconnect. The right to disconnect is meant to protect workers in relation to the intrusion of information and communication technologies into their private space after working hours. The European Foundation (Eurofound, 2021) has defined this right as the right for workers "to be able to disengage from work and refrain from engaging in work-related electronic communications, such as emails or other messages, during non-work hours" (European Industrial Relations Dictionary). In 2021, the European Parliament also approved a resolution that identified the right to disconnect as a fundamental right of workers and called on the European Commission to adopt "a legislative framework with a view to establishing minimum requirements for remote work across the EU ensuring that teleworking does not affect the employment conditions of teleworkers" (European parliament, 2021). Eurofound identified that legislation surrounding the right to disconnect would "allow workers to disconnect from work and refrain from engaging in work-related electronic communication, such as emailing or other forms of messaging, outside working hours without facing adverse consequences" (Eurofound, 2021, p. 1).

France and Spain are considered pioneers in such laws and practices (Lerouge & Trujillo Pons, 2022). Other countries around the world, primarily in Europe but also elsewhere, implemented laws or regulations enshrining the right to disconnect. These included, among others, Italy and Ireland, while most recently laws have also come into effect in Belgium, Luxembourg and Portugal (Kelly, 2022). In the United Kingdom, the winning Labour government campaigned on a promise to implement a "Right to Switch Off, so working from home does not result in homes turning into 24/7 offices" (UK Labour party, 2024, p.9). In Canada, the Government of Canada created a right to disconnect advisory committee which submitted a final report to the Minister of Labour (Government of Canada, 2022). The report highlighted the different views of Unions/Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and employers. Unions and NGOs advocated for a legislated solution to the Right to disconnect, while employers believed the current Canada Labour Law and regulations were sufficient (Government of Canada, 2022). Most recently, Canada announced in the 2024 federal budget its right to disconnect proposal to “amend the *Canada Labour Code* to require employers in federally-regulated sectors to establish a right to disconnect policy limiting work-related communication outside of scheduled working hours” (Canada budget 2024, p. 210), although it has been noted that this would not apply to the federal public service. Within Canada, only Ontario has legislated the Right to disconnect for workers, which it defined as “not engaging in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls or the sending or reviewing of other messages, so as to be free from the performance of work” (Working for Workers Act, 2021, S.O. 2021 s. 21.1.1). It required that companies with more than 25 workers have a right to disconnect policy.

The French law was framed in such a way that organizations were mandated to enter into annual discussions with their workforces on a variety of topics that fell under the general rubric of professional equality between men and women and quality of life and work conditions. This area of the law covered such things a discrimination, equality between men and women, the rights of workers with disabilities and the right to disconnect, with the section on the right to disconnect noting it as a required area of annual discussion between organizations and their workers as follows:

> Les modalités du plein exercice par le salarié de son droit à la déconnexion et la mise en place par l'entreprise de dispositifs de régulation de l'utilisation des outils numériques, en vue d'assurer le respect des temps de repos et de congé ainsi que de la vie personnelle et familiale. A défaut d'accord, l'employeur élabore une charte, après avis du comité social

et économique. Cette charte définit ces modalités de l'exercice du droit à la déconnexion et prévoit en outre la mise en œuvre, à destination des salariés et du personnel d'encadrement et de direction, d'actions de formation et de sensibilisation à un usage raisonnable des outils numériques (Loi du travail, s. 2242-17).

As noted above, the European Parliament initiative encouraged member countries to legislate the right of workers to digitally disconnect from their work responsibilities after working hours. The initiative suggested there should be minimum requirements for remote working and clarity on breaks and rest periods. It specified that the right to disconnect was particularly significant in the wake of the increase in remote work during COVID (European Parliament, 2021). Others have also noted the advent of ICTs created a dichotomy in those who had (or had not) access to information, with ICT users in western societies finding themselves (at times) willingly and constantly connected to their devices, giving rise to such terms as nomophobia (fear of being without one's mobile device), infobesity (a term sometimes used to denote information overload) and fear of missing out (FOMO) a term so pervasive that it was added to the Oxford Dictionary in the last decade, and defined as a feeling of worry than an interesting or exciting event is happening somewhere else (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, n.d).

The right to disconnect flows from the belief that workers are increasingly engaged in responding to work demands after hours and that this should not be so. While technostress is one area of inquiry that has been defined in relation to work stress flowing from technology, there are also other terms that are used in the literature. The growth of technological devices that can be used for multiple purposes to conduct work while not in the office has been coined workplace connectivity. For example, Work Connectivity Behaviour After hours (WCBA) has been defined as "the use of wireless enabled technology devices to engage with work or work-related colleagues during non-work time" (Richardson & Benbunan-Fich, 2011). Their study with marketing professionals within a media organization leveraged human agency theory. Other terms have included ICT-enabled work extension (Schõllbauer, et al., 2021) which they defined as "mostly unpredictable work contacts during workers' private time which are not pre-defined" (p. 150). Their systematic review of the ICT-enabled work extension and its consequences on the quality of workers' lives in terms found that much of the research could be defined along what they called two stands: "workers' ICT enabled work extending behaviours" and workers' "perceived expectations of others regarding their ICT-enabled availability for work outside of working hours" (p. 150). Their research found that much of the research found a detrimental relationship between work extension and well-being, but that there was a beneficial relationship between work extension and performance or commitment (p. 154). This demonstrated that the situation with ICTs and workers could be more nuanced, and that the general assumption that workplace connectivity behaviour after-hours was bad did not take in the full picture.

While the right to disconnect has largely focused on the rights of workers and largely framed as a workplace issue worthy of legislation or other intervention, research has also focused on selective unplugging by employees during vacations that involve travel, defined by as being partially connected or disconnected from information and communication technologies (ICTs) during travel (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). Other terms, such as digital free tourism (DFT), have also been used to refers to tourists who were likely to

> voluntarily avoid digital devices and the Internet on holiday, or travel to destinations without network signals. DFT has advantages for tourists in increasing well-being, mental health, and social networking during their journeys (Hassan et al., 2022, p. 1).

There has also been mention in the literature of the concept of vacationing in "technology dead zones," defined as locations where there is limited or no technology access (Pearce & Gretzel, 2012).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Critical theory and management

My approach to this thesis took a critical theory perspective, which focuses on the need for society as a whole to change in order to improve the human condition. My own bias in this area is that I believe society places not enough focus on organizations bearing more responsibility for ensuring workers have a safe workplace in which they are not over-stressed and over-worked, and rather expects workers to find a way to be more resilient and reduce stress largely through personal initiatives that include things like exercise, counselling, mindfulness, and other forms of proactive or restorative work. Organizations bear responsibility to the extent that they provide the resources that may help fund some of these activities, through training, benefits and other resources. However, my view is that organizations rarely tackle the bigger questions and reorganize the workplace and resources in such a way that would allow workers more freedom. Some organizations and individual managers may be more or less attuned to the importance of allowing their employees to have balance and enact formal or informal policies to support this, but there is no consistency. As a result, this can put workers in the position where they are seen as rebelling against the established order if they assert their rights, for example, through grievance processes. This doesn't mean that organizations don't care about their workers. My sense is that traditionally there has been more focus on the needs of the organization and its clients than on the needs of employees.

This is consistent with Horkheimer (1982), who noted that a critical approach is one that seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them." It is an approach that has its roots in the Frankfurt School of thought and that departs from the premise that organizations exploit and dominate workers in search of greater profit within a capitalistic framework. The International Monetary Fund has identified that "the essential feature of capitalism is the motive to make a profit" (Jahan & Mahmud, 2015). Capitalism was seen by Weber, Marx and Durkheim, among others, as being a crucial backdrop to modernity as its primary goal is the pursuit of profit, although their views varied on the relationship between modernity and capitalism and their impact on society. Critical approaches study the resulting impact on workers of a society in which the pursuit of profit is paramount. For example, Deetz (2005) defined critical studies of organizations as:

> all works taking a basically critical or radical stance on contemporary society, with an orientation toward investigating exploitation, repression, social injustice, asymmetrical power relations (generated from class, gender, or position), distorted communication, and misrecognition of interests (Deetz, 2005, p. 86).

Critical perspectives "attempt to shift our attention from 'functional' and 'managerialist' approaches to deeper concerns about meaning and power at work, recognizing not only different epistemologies but different politics as well" (Okhuysen et al., 2013, p. 493). They investigate "issues of power, domination, and control, with the goals of understanding, critique, emancipation and social change" (Putnam & Mumby, 2014, e-reader version).

For example, in the context of this research, I departed from the view that ICTs such as smartphones and laptops may tether people to the workplace so that work becomes virtually at 24/7 engagement that organizations covet with some of their workforce. Some scholars called technological devices an "electronic leash" (Carayol et al, 2017). More recent approaches to critical theory suggested that the power dynamic between organizations and their workers is more constitutive, or socially constructed, and that communication plays an important role. This means that rather than the situation being fixed and unchangeable, there is opportunity to learn more about these areas through research to shed light on these imbalances, and also better understand how there may be opportunity for better communication and for hearing the voices of workers and other groups (Deetz, 2005; May & Mumby, 2004). In keeping with this approach, my research inquired of public relations professionals to better understand their situation and learn more about the ways in which they took hold of some opportunities to liberate themselves, particularly in relation to ICTs, or saw room for improvement. In particular, I sought to better understand the types of strategies practitioners used with their technology to restore balance between their work and personal lives. In essence, what did people do with the technology and the information that flowed through it?

2.6.2 Power and forms of resistance

Resistance as a concept in critical management and communication studies was put forward by a number of authors (Foucault, 1978; Vallas, 2016) and tended to be seen as a term in opposition to power. Mumby (2005) and Thomas & Hardy (2011) criticized many of these views as primarily focusing on the two poles of resistance – the extent to which organizations exercised power and control over workers, or the extent to which workers resisted in order to gain or regain some measure of power and control. Mumby's view was that the process was more fluid and dialectical and consisted of "how organizational stakeholders and interest groups engage with, resist, accommodate, reproduce, and transform the interpretive possibilities and meaning systems that constitute daily organizational life" (Mumby, 2005, p. 22). He felt, as did Prasad & Prasad

(2000) that resistance was constituted and reflective of an interpretive struggle. They felt that routine resistance was best understood as a "local social production involving the discursive participation (willing or otherwise) of different organization members" (Prasad & Prasad, 2000, p. 389) and that resistance was constituted within the social environment. For example, their study focused on how employees responded to the introduction of a new computer system, with forms of resistance ranging from decisions not to use the system to asking questions in staff meetings. For those who chose, for example, to continue to work manually rather than within the new system, "It was not just a matter of habit, but one of reasserting some control over work rhythms and managerial expectations" (Prasad & Prasad, 2000, p. 395). Mumby criticized many of the leading approaches to studies of resistance as being far too managerialistic and not leaving enough space for human agency in everyday work life. Like Mumby, Thomas & Hardy, (2011) also framed power and resistance as both constituting organizational change.

Various forms of resistance have been defined in the literature. According to Huault et al. (2014) some critical studies of emancipation took a more macro lens focused on liberating people from overall societal oppression. However this approach to emancipation was criticized by scholars for being overly intellectual (Alvessson & Wilmott, 1992), too simplistic (Latour, 2004) or overly negative (Huault et al., 2014, p. 26). In response to this, some scholars identified the concept of micro-emancipation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992) in which workers looked for places within managerial control where they could temporarily escape oppression. Micro-emancipation has been defined as the process through which individuals and groups become free from repressive social and ideological conditions, in particular those that place unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human consciousness (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1992, p. 432). While the study of micro-emancipation is very helpful in contributing to the study of lived experience, it has been criticized for focusing on "banal activities" (Huault et al, 2014) that detract from larger struggles and for focusing on emancipation as a minor means to release the pressure of domination that may be inconsequential and reinforce organisational control (Fleming & Sewell, 2002). Others, however, like Rancière (2006), saw emancipation as departing from a position of learning to trust in one's abilities and potential to be equals, rather than trying to seek liberation from oppression. He also saw various forms of emancipation as opportunities for redistributing what he called "the share of the sensible," in which groups could have an impact on the existing order and reconfigure their position in an environment where equality was a sensible goal (Rancière, 2006). The idea that workers may be strategic in how they operate within the workplace and seek out areas in which they can assert themselves has also been raised through work conducted by Crozier & Friedberg (1977). Their work asserted that rather than being fixed by organizational charts and other bureaucratic structures, organizational power was constituted by interactions and players within an organization and who function within a broader society. Crozier focused very much in his research on the voices of workers and felt that human beings, rather than being entirely dominated by organizations, had the opportunity to exercise "a margin of freedom within the normative, material, formal and relational constraints that restrict, determine and prescribe their behavior" (Musselin, 2024). This would allow workers to in a sense circumvent formal organizational models as they found zones of uncertainty. In these zones, workers found places in which they could exercise power – unclear areas of policies, and other systems, for example. This allowed workers to then obtain power that one might not have otherwise predicted in the managerial order.

In such an environment, is there hope or are workers condemned in a productivist, hypermodern world to alienation and investing of themselves to the point of burnout and other pathologies? Not surprisingly. and as has been noted earlier in the chapter, the train of thinking has seen autonomy in the workplace as an illusion created by management, «L'autonomie ne procède que d'une ruse du management pour s'assurer de l'implication des salariés, le travail, en définitive, se révèle pour ce qu'il est: aliénant» (Cousin, 2006, p. 64). However, Cousin (2006) was also critical of approaches that focused only on work conditions and saw more context to the role of workers as social actors in the workplace.

> La mise en avant de la souffrance, avec la peur comme moteur, masque l'autre versant du travail, plus subjectif, mais qui se construit dans le rapport à soi, aux autres et à l'objet du travail et peut prendre diverses formes. Le travail est ambivalent et procure aussi du plaisir (Cousin, 2006, p. 68).

He believed it was possible to regain some balance in this area by creating a distinction «entre le travail et ses conditions. Cette distinction […] permet de saisir la part de plaisir qui existe dans l'accomplissement du travail, ce qui n'empêche pas qu'il demeure au plaisir de la productivité et de la rentabilité des capitaux» (p. 67).

There are voices that have also noted that performance is not necessarily all bad, and that a critical view can be one of extremes that doesn't take into account the more positive aspects of a term. Performance is

> notamment indispensable à la santé économique du système et elle pousse les êtres humains à se dépasser, à avoir des objectifs, des rêves et à réaliser ceux-ci. C'est lorsqu'elle devient une véritable idéologie, un culte, une obsession, une mode de vie auquel chaque individu doit impérativement se soumettre qu'elle est malsaine (Ragusich & Bonneville, 2009, p. 3).

Dominique Méda's research reviewed research on European countries and found that work occupied a very important place in the lives of Europeans. France was at the top of the list, where about 70 per cent considered work to be very important (Méda, 2016, p. 14). As reference point, this compared, for example, to England, where only about 40% responded similarly (p. 13). Méda advocated for a form of work they call «soutenable» to counter the situation of pressuring «la machine humaine» to the point of exhaustion or in such a way that women couldn't participate and balance work and family life (p. 57). For Méda, sustainable work meant a better organization of the work itself, and an effort to better integrate work in life (which they said is more likely to better define work quality). They pointed to the examples of learning organizations, some more decentralized and others where autonomy was more controlled (p. 63). They also referred to research that shows learning organizations tend to be more open to permanent training, and autonomy to the extent that employees have true responsibility (p. 63). Ultimately, Méda noted, society needs to rethink its view of progress and wealth with respect to work:

> améliorer continûment les conditions de travail et d'emploi et faire en sorte que le travail décent se répande dans le monde tout en permettant parallèlement que les diverses activités humaines, les différents rôles qui incombent aux individus puissent être également exercés (p. 65).

Méda recognized, however, that there were significant issues in the way of such an approach: "il n'y a pas de volonté politique; l'emploi de la qualité n'est pas considéré comme un objectif majeur de l'Europe" (p. 59). The rest of the world seems caught in a similar conundrum in which the focus is more on productivity and other gains rather than addressing organizational issues through the improvement of the environment and working conditions in which workers operate.

Some also saw the answer in how information and communication technologies are deployed. While these are seen to have both positive and negative attributes, Vallléry and Leduc pointed to the work of the Centre d'analyse stratégique (CAS, 2012), who have reflected that «une des idées clé est de pouvoir agir sur les logiques de conception et de mise en oeuvre des TIC, afin que celles-ci soient mieux adaptées aux usagers et à leurs activités» (p. 44).

De Gaulejac (2014) believed the organizations that created the problem needed to solve it. He advocated linkages between human resources and mental health (De Gaulejac, 2014, p. 246) to do so. He also advocated that organizations tally the economic, social and human costs of the «quête effrénée de la performance.» In the meantime, he said, easing up on the pressure at work would reduce health costs (p. 246). However, some critics have been cynical about the suggestion that human resources departments might help solve this problem.

Montreuil (2014) advocated an approach that was aligned with other occupational health and safety risks in the workplace: a three-pronged approach that included prevention, protection, and repair. In the case of psychosocial risks, he advocated changing the language slightly into primary, secondary and tertiary prevention (p. 11). He felt this provided a continuum of interventions, from applying approaches to prevent harm in the first place to «les mesures visant à limiter les conséquences des troubles psychosociaux» (p. 11). In my view, the challenge with this approach is that it assumes that all levers can be applied internally to an organization, although even Montreuil spoke to the fact that these issues at their genesis were economic and societal.

Public relations practitioners, like public relations agencies and consultancies, find themselves in my view in an interesting place in hypermodernism, being not only people in society impacted by it, members of teams, and individuals navigating through hypermodern times, but also individuals charged with advising organizations how to navigate these times. Communicators and public relations practitioners have a responsibility to remind their organizations that profit at all costs can create ethical and other issues for them in how they relate to and treat employees, customers, and to other stakeholders. The pressure to produce creates more risk for organizations, risk that leaders may not easily see if they are mired in the productivist approach that hypermodern times bring. In the matter of all sorts of relationships communication has the opportunity to be a voice of sanity in the wilderness. But communicators need to try as best they can to slow themselves down first, in my view, so that they are less caught up, and subject to the pressures and urgencies of the moment and reclaim some of that strategic time in the important but not urgent quadrant where strategic thinking resides.

As noted, critical theorists have identified speed as one of the hallmarks of living in what is known as hypermodernity (Aubert, 2008) and noted that the use of ICTs is central to this notion for workers. According to Aubert (2008) «La révolution survenue dans les technologies de la communication y joue un rôle essentiel, impliquant une obligation de réagir dans l'immédiat et une impossibilité de vivre des valeurs de long terme» (p. 23). Critical theorists would note that the use of ICTs is all part of the managerial drive to make people more productive, one of the ways in which organizations exercise power and control over employees. Some of the use or abuse of that power includes instilling a sense of urgency and instantaneity (Bonneville & Grosjean, 2006) which is reflected in the nature of ICTs. According to Wajcman (2015) much of social science sees technology as the main force driving the acceleration of time in society [e-reader version]. However, Wajcman believed that time pressure was related to broader transformations in society such as gender relations, and that how people used time was a function of their values (Wacjman, 2015, e-reader version). Wacjman identified that people felt they have a deficit of time, defined as having not enough hours in the day to do everything they wished to do and this was in part because digitalization had influenced people's experiences of work and leisure time. For example, intensification could be caused by multi-tasking with digital devices.

> As a subjective state, an acceleration of the speed of life affects people's experience of time. It causes individuals to consider time to be scarce, to feel rushed and pressed for time. In other words, people feel that they can no longer find time to complete the tasks and activities most important to them (Wajcman, 2015, e-reader version).

Similarly, Rosa's theory of social acceleration viewed the acceleration society as one where "technological acceleration and the growing scarcity of time (that is, an acceleration of the pace of life) occur simultaneously" (Rosa, 2003, p. 10; Rosa, & Scheuerman, 2009). There have been, however, a variety of views. Wajcman and Rose (2011) studied interruptions in a work day and found that these were largely caused by the employees themselves, suggesting that employees did have choices. In a similar vein, Russo et al. (2019) studied how workers exercised agency and make disconnection decisions. Their view was that workers were not "passive agents" (p. 12) but rather "knowledgeable agents" (p. 17) who had the capacity to manage ICTs in alignment with their preferences, values and commitments.

My own bias as noted is that information and communication technologies, as they have evolved, have been used by organizations to extend the work day into personal and leisure time for some workers for some time, making it extremely difficult at times for these workers to have healthy boundaries between their work and life. Studies have also begun to emerge that show just how porous the boundaries between public and private life became during the COVID pandemic, as remote work and telework took significant hold. At the same time, I am cognizant of the fact that ICTs are beneficial to workers' use of time as they can use them anywhere and anytime. As a result, the constant demands have led at times to consequences for workers that are well described in the literature. As a researcher, I recognize my bias in this regard as I was a public relations manager for many years who could be contacted or required to do work at all hours of the day or night. I wasn't sure whether the effect of this was to turn even the most mundane of tasks into an urgent matter that required immediate response from me. At the same time, I acknowledge that sometimes workers do have choices – the choice whether to respond or act when faced with such demands in the private sphere. Technology allowed workers to at times use strategies that helped them to mitigate such demands, something I wanted to investigate. I am of the view that employees do have some agency that they can enact in the face of constant work demands, but I wanted to better understand what strategies public relations professionals used and in what circumstances to liberate themselves from the constant demands of work. I wanted to focus on this to better understand the society in which we operate, and in particular in relation to ICTs, to hear from the workers themselves how they dealt with the demands of work in their private space, and to see whether it was possible to tease out some avenues that may improve the conditions in which workers operate.

Scholars such as Felio (2015), Jauréguiberry (2011), de Gaulejac (2014), Aubert (2008), and Proulx (2005), also focused on the place that ICTs occupy and/or on the issues of urgency and hyperconnectivity in modern society. Nicole Aubert (2008), for example, shed light on long-term and complex mechanisms of social transformation and the relationship individuals have with these changes. As was identified earlier in this chapter, according to Aubert (Aubert, 2009), we are in a hypermodern society that results from a compression of time and space in which everything is hyper - hyperconnected and in hyperdrive – underlining how people in society have changed their relationship to time and worship urgency, to the point where employees and employers at times consider everything urgent and important, whether it is or not (Aubert, 2003; Aubert 2009, p. 77). This type of urgency creates what de Gaulejac (2014) called "hyperactivity" to keep up. It also cuts both ways, in that people are proud of the work that they do but also report feeling exhausted (De Gaulejac, 2014, p. 229). Some have also noted that the state of urgency that ICTs enable then leads to a variety of psychosocial outcomes for workers (Valléry & Leduc. 2012; de Gaulejac, 2014).

I wanted to leverage concepts of Aubert's «Culte de l'urgence» in relation to hyperconnectivity to look at the experience of public relations practitioners with ICTs. Further, I thought to leverage other critical scholarly reflections as these examined how people use ICTs and how they made sense of the intrusion of ICTs in their lives in a world where ICTs can have both benefits and more negative impacts. More recent theories of usage, for example, recognize as noted previously that usage is socially constructed (Jauréguiberry & Proulx, 2011) and is about more than appropriation of technologies. According to Jauréguiberry & Proulx (2011), the use of ICTs sits at the intersection of two human tensions in a hypermodern society: the drive to make sense of one's position in the world while continuing to be an autonomous individual to the extent possible. According to de Certeau & Giard (1990) the idea that people make sense, «bricolent», or have their own «manières de faire», speaks to the fact that it is people who then appropriate the technology and make it work for their needs. In the same vein, this research might have the opportunity to examine how public relations practitioners appropriate ICTs and make use of them in a way that can help restore their sense of control.

I felt it would be useful to understand what options workers had in situations where they felt they were in situations where for their own benefit or wellness, they needed to employ strategies of various types to regain control, or agency, over the circumstances in which they found themselves.

So much of the research around technostress seemed to revolve around the process of coping. This is not surprising given that technostress was coined by people involved in streams of the psychological profession. However, to my mind, the idea of "coping with" something implied that there was no power over whatever agent was causing the stress and resulting need to cope, and that the only option was to then add coping processes to the situation to try and mitigate the inherent stresses which could not be changed. I felt that resistance was a different construct. It was one in which individuals had some sense of agency to assert themselves over the present order. It allowed for workers to make decisions to not be captive at all times and to reclaim their time. I believe there is a difference that shifts the power to those who are subject to the stress or agency that is pressed upon them.

2.7 Research rationale

I found that when it comes to technostress, there is clearly a gap in research conducted in North America with public relations practitioners. What few studies of technostress in PR exist have not been completed in North America. Overwhelmingly, the concepts of interest - work-life balance and stress in PR - have been studied from more of a psychological lens, grounded in the literature on coping. Like much of the research on stress and technostress, the psychological lens of coping or human resources lenses such as the job demands / resources model seem to have been applied rather than the more communicational and social theory lenses, ones that look at issues like the type of society we live in, the role communication plays, and/or how workers can exercise agency within their environment. And while there has been more recent focus on the importance of resilience for PR practitioners and this is a valuable concept, this seems to have been positioned by researchers largely as a competency to develop to cope with the demands of the practice, which approaches the issues from a different lens than this research.

In terms of methodology in many of the studies relating to PR workers and ICTs, the studies appeared to have been either qualitative or quantitative, but generally not both. The literature review found that for the most part, studies of constructs that surround issues of work-life balance, ICTs, and the intrusion of work into the personal life of PR practitioners or workers in general have applied only one methodology. Research on technostress was largely built based on quantitative methods. Many other studies employed surveys to gather the views of practitioners. Some included interviews and focus groups. However, there are very few studies with PR practitioners that have employed both quantitative and quantitative methods. Based on this finding, the choices that were made with respect to methodology flowed directly from these observations and were detailed in Chapter 3. This literature review found overall that there was a research gap in mixed methods studies of technostress in PR in Canada and elsewhere, and that there was a need to examine the lived experience of technostress among Canadian PR practitioners.

While I have also chose to position this research from a critical theory perspective, I recognize that the research is showing that ICTs are not necessarily the bane of workers' existences that some researchers have made them to be. Everywhere I turned, where there was initially research that constructed concepts as deleterious to workers, there was also more recent research that decried the negative lens that was initially applied and pointed out that there are also positive effects that have sometimes gone unrecognized. This is even true with respect to some of the foundational authors of technostress measurement, whom, as we saw in this review, have modified their initial views on a negative construct that could be mitigated by such factors as job satisfaction and training, to a more balanced view that took in more of the idea that there could be positives flowing from technology.

With respect to work-life balance, I found that our society struggles to some extent with the idea that boundaries can be porous and in some ways more constrictive yet still benefit workers. On the one hand, it's clear that the movement to support the right to disconnect from ICTs is a very real and growing one because of the links to well-being and work-life balance. That said, most jurisdictions have created legislation or guidelines that are less restrictive, that mandate policy but not necessarily enforcement. I also noted through this literature review that the ability to cope with an overload of information is being seen by some researchers as a concept to be embraced. The ability to multi-task and to move 24-hours a day from one sphere of life to another is seen by some as resilience – a competency to be embraced and cultivated.

I was left with so many questions. If ICTs have impacted the lives of practitioners and the practice of PR today, how? What have been the positive impacts and what have been the negative impacts in the 21st century, here and now? Further, what does technostress look like for PR practitioners in North America? What does it mean to a PR practitioner to have a balanced life and / or to try and compose between their public and private lives? Again, the idea that work and home life were separate is one that underlined the whole idea of work-life balance, but as we learned through the pandemic, remote work, and in recent years – those boundaries could be porous. Is that necessary all bad? I didn't know, and I concluded that the way to gain more knowledge was to research what the practitioners themselves had to say today. I also wanted to know what strategies practitioners used to not face some of the psychological risks that could come with overload. In other words, how did they resist the constant call of technology-facilitated work?

3.0 Methodology

The purpose of this research was to study the technostress experience of public relations practitioners in Canada in relation to information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their work. The intent was to understand, from the point of view of public relations practitioners, what the experience of being connected to the workplace and available to do work at any time via ICTs is like for them. Secondly, this research inquired into how public relations practitioners resist or otherwise emancipate themselves from the demands of hyperconnectivity in their daily work. Thirdly, this research intended to bring to light the experience of public relations practitioners, and as such demonstrate how the work of practitioners and the practice of public relations have been transformed in the hypermodern society. These three areas of focus represented the questions that were examined, and all research instruments flowed from these focus areas as well as from the literature review.

3.1 Research approach

My desired approach was:

a) To create an environment in which research participants could reflect and comment on their own experiences.

b) To allow data, themes and information to emerge from the practitioners themselves. This very much reflected my wish to conduct this research more inductively, by gathering data first, and then stepping back to analyze it and see what types of patterns emerged.

> The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

c) To conduct research that reflected a more social constructivist worldview in which people seek to make sense of the world in which they live and work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

This approach was important to me because of my own position in relation to this research as identified in greater detail in Chapter 2. Having worked in the public relations community for many years prior to undertaking PhD studies, I was concerned that my own experiences may impact on the research in some way. It was important to me that I recognize my own position and experience, with both the benefits and risks this may create. For example, benefits included that my position as a former practitioner allowed me easier access to the people I wished to reach; that as a result, I might also come from a privileged position in that I could relate more quickly to respondents and them to me; and that given my experience, I would be able to more quickly draw in-depth and meaningful conclusions from the research. In fact, it can be said that I embodied myself the characteristics of what some researchers have called “key informants” those who “as a result of their personal skills, or position within a society, are able to provide more information and a deeper insight into what is going on around them” (Marshall, 1996, p. 92). Key informants are those people in an organization that researchers may approach to better understand the workings of the organization. Key informants generally have certain characteristics such as their role in the community; their knowledge; their willingness to share that knowledge with researchers; their communication skills and their impartiality (Tremblay, 1957).

My own position as a former PR professional also carried with it certain risks; the risk that bias may be introduced into the research; that I may approach the research as a PR professional rather than a researcher, and that I would assume that my own experience was valid and reliable.

This highlighted to me the importance of my own reflexivity in pursuing this research – that is, as described by Berger (2015):

> […] turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation (Berger, 2015, p. 220).

My sense is that with the growth of professional master's and other graduate programs in Canada and elsewhere, much of the student research in public relations and in other disciplines is now conducted by practitioners who have significant if not in-depth knowledge of their topics by virtue of their professional experience. This can be advantageous, but also dangerous if personal experience and thinking get in the way of conducting research. According to Drake (2010), there is a need for particular caution in such cases.

> The validity of insider research requires reflexive consideration of the researcher's position, and this is especially pertinent in the case of research undertaken by practitioner researchers on professional doctorates (Drake, 2010, p. 85).

I found myself throughout this research questioning many of my decisions, small and large, to assess whether they were being coloured by my own experience. I enacted certain strategies to ensure I could check myself continuously in this area. For example, I asked two or three professors with no experience in public relations but much research experience to review research instruments and other tools. I reflected at each step on the various scales I planned to use and the questions I wanted to ask. I thought through the recruitment strategy to consider what would be more effective for the research and not what would be easiest for me. I kept personal notes on some of the interviews; and I challenged myself through my research and reading to minimize any biases I might have.

Flowing out of the literature review and the gaps found, I made the decision to structure this research as a mixed methods study. Mixed-methods is a research approach, popular in the social, behavioral, and health sciences, in which researchers collect, analyze, and integrate both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a long-term program of inquiry to address their research questions (Creswell, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2019). For this research, I chose to conduct quantitative research first, followed by qualitative research that began once survey responses had been received. This mixed methods approach is known as explanatory sequential mixed methods (Cresswell, 2018). In constructing the research instruments, I chose to make use for the most part of well-travelled scales for the quantitative portion of this study, supplemented by open and close-ended questions that would allow practitioners to express themselves in several areas with a focus on their voices in answering the questions. For the qualitative portion of the research, my focus was on delving deeper into the areas of interest that were raised by the data from the quantitative work.

While a quantitative approach alone could have provided statistical and numeric insight into the technostress experience of PR practitioners and an indication of some areas of concern to practitioners, it would not have responded to the goal of understanding the more socially constructed lived experience of PR practitioners. A mixed methods study provided a more complete understanding of how practitioners experienced, managed and responded to technostress. Quantitative data provided the avenue for gathering statistical and other data on various areas of interest that was part of the life experience of practitioners, such as job satisfaction, stress in general, technostress and work-life balance as well as some limited open-ended data, while the qualitative research helped further probe, explain and help understand public relations practitioners' lived experiences. As mentioned, this research differed from much of the research in public relations because it employed mixed methods. As well and as noted in Chapter 2, I found that much of the research on the lives of PR practitioners employed qualitative or quantitative research, but not both.

While the interest in mixed methods research has grown and is viewed as a highly desirable and complementary method of inquiry, criticisms of this approach revolve around the fact that the two methods are philosophically incompatible and are overused without attention to consolidating the two methods to derive value from both approaches. According to (Creswell, 2012), there are 11 controversies and corresponding questions on mixed methods, spanning the gamut from the actual definition of mixed methods to whether value is added through this method of inquiry.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative methodology for this research proved to be highly valuable. Because public relations practitioners are not homogeneous, the amount of research on this occupational group is quite limited. It was only by mixing the two methods that this research was able to gain greater insight into practitioners' experiences: the quantitative research quantified what practitioners were experiencing and began to probe into certain specific areas, while the qualitative research unveiled more detail and meaning behind those experiences.

3.2 Ethics

Prior to proceeding with data collection and given that I would be conducting research with human subjects, I sought Ethics approval from the Office of Research Integrity and Ethics at the University of Ottawa. The Ethics approval process provided an opportunity to solidify my thinking behind the work I wanted to do and with what respondents. It also gave me the opportunity to consider my own position within this research, and part of this helped with final decisions about methodology and distribution. I received approval to proceed with this research under project number S-03-22-7322 on March 7, 2022. The ethics certificate was renewed in 2023 and in 2024.

3.3 Quantitative research

Once ethics approval was granted, I prepared to start by conducting quantitative research via a survey questionnaire. Quantitative research is used to explain phenomena by collecting numerical data analyzed using mathematically based methods such as statistics. It emphasizes quantification in both collection and analysis. (Bryman et al., 2012; Cresswell, 2018). There are various forms of quantitative research (Cresswell, 2018, p. 13). In this case, I chose to conduct survey research. It is a form of quantitative research that, according to Cresswell (2018) provides "a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (p. 13). Quantitative research is seen to come from a more positivist view defined within a world which is essentially static and unchangeable and can be measured.

Advantages of using a quantitative research approach such as a survey include that data gathering is cost-effective (Fowler, 2009), that it can provide a representation of a population and that quantitative research can take less time than qualitative research because data can be gathered and then analyzed statistically easily via software (Queiros et al., 2017). The disadvantages of this approach include that it captures a moment in time only, that the response to questions is from the point of view of the respondent and therefore can be biased, and that there is no direct connection between the researcher and the respondent(s) and that survey research doesn't "capture emotions, behavior and changes of emotions of respondents" (Queiros et al., 2017, p. 382).

While it was important in this research to numerically measure certain elements that flowed from the literature review and research questions (for example, use of technostress sub-scales to measure technostress), I also wanted to provide opportunity for respondents to share some of their own experiences in this first phase of research. As I developed the bilingual survey, I ensured it included known scales and measures, but I also developed several original closed-ended and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions gave survey participants an opportunity to express themselves in their own voices on such issues as work-life balance, the right to disconnect, and the survey in general.

The choice of a survey was one that seemed uncontestable to me if I was to study technostress. It is a construct that has been operationalized using quantitative indices as defined earlier in the literature review. I did not come across research that measured technostress any other way. Other options might have been to embed some of the technostress questions that were usually measured quantitatively within the interview to score them as part of the discussion; or to conduct the survey on the telephone. The study of technostress has a very strong quantitative tradition; therefore my choice was to make use of some of these scales, supplemented by others, to draw a picture of what public relations practitioners were experiencing, and then have what was gathered in the surveys help inform the qualitative process as well.

3.3.1 Survey construction

The quantitative survey portion of this research was undertaken via the Qualtrics survey interface. Qualtrics is a cloud-based platform widely used by researchers to create, distribute and obtain reporting of web-based surveys. What was particularly useful to me was that the platform is able to distribute surveys in more than one language. I programmed the survey script and questions directly into Qualtrics in both of Canada's official languages in order to make the survey accessible to participants in English or French. I was given a personal Qualtrics sign in by the University of Ottawa's Inspire Laboratory, which is part of the university's School of Psychology.

As noted, I wanted to ensure the survey would be bilingual to facilitate completion of this national survey by public relations practitioners in any province or territory of Canada in their official language of choice. The questionnaire and all related project documents (qualitative discussion guide, recruitment letter, consent forms, e-mails and social media scripts) were therefore developed first in English and then translated into French with the assistance of a free web-based translation tool. The translated text was then adjusted by me for meaning and clarity to ensure concordance between the English and French versions of the survey and other research documents before finalizing both versions.

Once the questionnaire was translated and a final draft version available in the Qualtrics interface, the University of Ottawa Inspire laboratory in the School of Psychology also made some additions to the survey to support a separate study into Insufficient Effort Response (IER). It has been recognized in psychological and other data gathering that respondents sometimes provide invalid data. One of the ways in which this occurs is through a careless or inattentive response to the survey questions, where respondents might invalidate or skew the results (intentionally or non-intentionally) of a survey by responding carelessly or in certain ways or by "frequently skipping items, misreading items, or responding without reading items" (Johnson, 2005, p. 105). It has been recognized that Internet-based research has fewer controls, leading to a possible decrease in data quality (Johnson, 2005). The research in this area has focused on how scientists can detect careless or insufficient effort responses in order to remove these responses from the data set, leading to a greater stabilization of the results. According to Curran (2015) the types of methods in use include such things as assessing speed of response and response time on the assumption that there is a minimum time required to answer question(s); by analyzing strings of responses to see if people are answering questions the same way and without sufficient thought; looking for outliers that don't conform to the general pattern of responses; consistency of a specific respondent's answers and multiple other strategies. The literature suggested that to be most effective several strategies should be used concurrently, as the various strategies do not always measure the same thing, or may correlate differently with one another, as Meade & Craig, (2012) found. In the case of this study, timers were added throughout the survey so that speed of response and time spent in a section could be assessed, not so much for this study, but to support the PhD dissertation of another student and employee of the Inspire Lab. In addition questions that specifically directed respondents to answer in a certain way to see whether respondents focused their attention and effort on each question of the survey (for example: "please select totally disagree to this item") were added. Several questions were also added at the end of the survey asking participants to self-assess the effort they put forth in responding to the survey, how much attention they gave the survey, and then respondents were asked to provide an opinion on whether their data should be used or not. These final questions were very similar to Meade and Craig's (2012) self-reported single item (SSRI) indicators (p. 441-442). The opportunity to collaborate with another doctoral student in my research was not something I had initially foreseen, however I am thankful that the opportunity presented itself to make our respective research projects stronger and more scientifically rigorous.

Once the draft survey questionnaire was finalized, a test survey was created and distributed to six people who were asked to take the survey and provide feedback. This is known as pre-testing and is accepted by researchers as a way of assessing whether there are any errors in language or survey processes prior to the survey being officially administered (Presser et al., 2004). Six testers completed the survey in English and one in French. Four of the testers were PhD candidates at the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa, and the remaining two were recent alumni at the Master's level from the Department of Communication. The testers were asked to move through the survey and comment on anything they did not understand or that might need adjustment. They reported that the questionnaire functioned well, however, they made several suggestions that resulted in improvements to the questionnaire. For example, there was one French question where the response choices had not been translated; there were some minor suggestions regarding language; a forward and back button was suggested for ease of navigation; and a small typo was caught and corrected. A few other suggestions were not implemented because they would have involved changing the format or content of scales that had been validated by scholars external to this research. One of the testers also communicated they did not understand some of the IER insertions and why they were there. While I understood that the insertion of the IER components may cause some confusion, I chose not to request changes to this with the Inspire lab and left these questions intact. Once the changes were made, I finalized and reviewed the survey again and the researcher from the Inspire Lab did the same to ensure their questions functioned as planned. I then opened the survey for response collection and prepared to gather data.

3.3.2 Inclusion criteria

The survey targeted respondents with a very specific public relations profile. Inclusion criteria sought participants who were:1) full-time (30 hours or more per week) public relations practitioners working in Canada; 2) had three (3) or more years' experience in public relations; and 3) responded to work demands outside of regular work hours (such as on evenings and/or weekends and/or holidays). I chose these criteria because I reasoned that full-time practitioners were more likely to have the types of responsibilities that also required them to work at hours other than regular business hours and therefore to respond to a variety of demands that might infringe on their work-life balance. This would then allow me to best respond to my research questions by focusing on those who might be in a position where they might need to implement strategies to mitigate their use of technological devices for work in order to manage the balance between their work and life. I was also more interested in focusing on practitioners who had at least a few years of experience in the practice, and therefore would be better positioned to comment on their use of technology to facilitate work. Finally, I wanted to specifically focus on practitioners whose role required them to work after hours, or on evenings, weekends and holidays, because I was interested in focusing on how technology-facilitated work impacted on their work-life balance and their private space.

3.3.3 Recruitment

The strategy for recruitment focused on reaching public relations practitioners likely to meet the criteria through the associations they belonged to in Canada, through a variety of social media groups, and through my personal networks. This was necessary because as noted in Chapter 1, there is no single place where PR practitioners can be found in Canada, because there is no universal licensing or accreditation body in Canada for all public relations practitioners. A first recruitment letter containing the link to start the survey and other information about the survey such as inclusion criteria, information about the survey, benefits of participating, a link to the detailed consent form and start of the survey and contact information for the researcher, researcher's supervisor and the Office of Ethics and Integrity was distributed in both official languages on May 9, 2022, through English and French posts on Twitter (now known as X), Facebook and LinkedIn.

In the ensuing days and weeks, I also sent LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter messages to individuals in my network to ask that they consider participating in the survey and possibly share the link with others they thought might be interested in the survey. I attached a copy in English and French of my recruitment letter as well as a direct link to the survey to ensure they were provided with the full context for the survey. I also communicated with several associations that represent communications practitioners both at the national and regional levels, such as the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Société Québécoise des professionnels en relations publiques (SQPRP), the Canadian Association for Communicators in Education (CACE) and Women in PR, to ask for their support in sharing the survey with their members. I also mentioned my survey and shared the link to it at a Crisis and Coffee event hosted by the Canadian Centre for Crisis and Risk Communication in Canada and shared my information with the University of Ottawa alumni association.

A reminder post on my LinkedIn was posted on May 25, 2022, and a reminder was posted on Facebook on May 26, 2022. A second reminder was posted on my LinkedIn profile on October 13, 2022, and also reposted on Facebook on October 14, 2022, and Twitter on October 26, 2022, with a final reminder post on December 6, 2022. Other social media groups where the link was posted included: IABC Ottawa; Professionnels des communications numériques; Women in PR; PR and Communications Professionals. When posting to my personal social media, I also tagged other organizations that may be interested in the survey, with some in my personal network retweeting my message. In addition to my own posts, the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education (CACE) sent a letter to their members on May 17, 2022, with a reminder in June asking them to complete the survey; the CPRS Ottawa-Gatineau chapter distributed the link to the survey in their newsletter in September. The Canadian Public Relations Society shared information about the survey nationally in its monthly newsletter in the summer of 2022 with a reminder a few months later, and a number of other individuals and professional organizations shared my post.

The choice of sampling in this way reflected a non-probability sampling method. A probability sampling method would have meant that everyone in the public relations profession had an equal chance to participate in the study. However, this is not possible in public relations because practitioners as a whole cannot all be reached, as noted above. This research therefore used a non-probability sampling method, a method associated most often with case studies or qualitative research - it does not need to be random but should have a rationale for which cases are included (Taherdoost, 2016).

The selection of participants was purposive as defined by Taherdoost (2016), sourced for inclusion in the study based on affiliation with groups where public relations practitioners were more likely to be affiliated or have an interest. It was also a volunteer sample as respondents within the sample group could choose to respond to the survey/or not. As shown, survey participants were sourced through a mix of convenience sampling in that participants were found through existing networks and organizations, and to a more limited extent through snowball sampling, a method that uses a few cases to encourage others to take part. For example, in some cases my contacts encouraged theirs to complete the survey by sharing the link, which can be more of a snowball approach.

3.3.4 Questionnaire

Once respondents clicked the active link to the survey, they arrived on the first page of the questionnaire in the Qualtrics interface. There, they were presented with an opportunity to choose the language in which they would respond to the survey. The landing page was English by default, but the French questionnaire could be accessed easily by toggling between English and French in the drop-down menu at the top right of the landing page of the survey. Once they either stayed on the English landing page or toggled to the French first page, respondents were immediately presented with a consent form prior to completing the questionnaire. The consent form closely followed the template provided by the University of Ottawa for such forms. By proceeding with the questionnaire, consent was implied, and this was indicated to respondents in the consent form itself. As they moved through the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide responses in a variety of areas.

3.3.4.1 Job Satisfaction. To measure job satisfaction, the job satisfaction scale (Spector, 1985) specifically sub-scale 8 with four items was used to assess the extent to which respondents felt a sense of pride in their jobs. Spector used a six-point agree-disagree scale when the scale was validated. For the purposes of this study, a six-point disagree – agree scale was also used, with three of the items scored positively from 1 to 6 and the other reverse scored. The three positively scored items of the job satisfaction scale, sub-scale 8 were also used by technostress researchers (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008) to measure job satisfaction, in particular as they sought to correlate it with what they called “technostress creators.” Job Satisfaction, for these researchers, is considered to be a “technostress inhibitor”, which mitigates the impact of technostress on employees. I chose this scale because it was a short-scale that had also been used in the analysis of technostress and because research has shown there is usually a relationship between job satisfaction and certain measures of technostress.

3.3.4.2 Stress in General Scale. To measure stress, I chose the Stress in General Scale (Stanton et al., 2001) a measure of general work stress. Since this was one of the first studies in which technostress was applied to public relations practitioners and practice, I wanted to use a scale that was commonly used to measure work stress. This would provide a sense of which characteristics of the scale practitioners most often related to in their work. The validated stress in General Scale (Stanton et al., 2001) includes 16 items which are then grouped into two sub-scales: the first scale of seven items is entitled pressure and includes such items as whether the respondent would identify their work as “demanding” or “pressured” and includes reverse-coded items such as “calm” and “relaxed.” The second grouping was coined by the authors as a measure of threat. It includes items such as whether respondents would consider their work to be “nerve-wracking” or “overwhelming,” and it too also includes reverse-coded items such as “comfortable” and “smooth running.” While the two groupings seemed to indicate less serious and more serious aspects of stress, the authors have indicated that these groupings are largely “convenient descriptive labels rather than as documented psychological stages of the work experience” (p. 877). While both sub-scales have been found to have strong validity, some authors (Yankelevich et al, 2011) have criticized the groupings by indicating that the words in the second group are far more laden or “emotionally affective.” These authors note that several researchers have treated the items as a single scale, for example Aziz et al. (2006) in their work on workaholism. The scale as initially constructed was scored with three options: Yes, I can’t decide, and No. To obtain more granularity than these responses, I chose to use a five-point Likert scale with the choices being: never; rarely; sometimes; often and all the time. A five-point Likert scale has been used by other authors who have applied a Likert scale to this work for example, by Lipka (2010).

3.3.4.3 Technostress scale. To measure technostress, I used several sub-scales of the Technostress scale. According to La Torre et al. (2019), the great majority of technostress research is quantitative and uses this well-documented and validated quantitative technostress scale (p. 26). By using the scale with public relations practitioners, this study gathered knowledge on technostress factors that were more significant for public relations practitioners participating in this research. The factors that create technostress include such items as constant connectivity, information overload, competitive pressures, rapid change and multi-tasking (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008, p. 422).

The technostress scale has several sub-scales that fall into two general constructs: first, technostress creators include elements such as techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-security and techno-uncertainty (Tarafdar et al, 2007). The authors tested the validity of their hypothesis that there were also a certain number of technostress elements that impact on role stress and productivity such as role overload, role conflict and productivity. Some of these elements, along with others such as job satisfaction, and organizational commitment were also later identified as technostress inhibitors (Ragu-Nathan et al, 2008), suggesting that these factors mitigate the level of technostress people may feel. When these were tested by the authors, they concluded that technostress creators decrease job satisfaction and that technostress inhibitors increase job satisfaction (p. 430).

For this study, I used several of the sub-scales that have been developed to measure technostress in order to respond to the research questions and because I felt that they aligned well with my research questions. I used the techno-overload and techno-invasion scales from Ragu-Nathan et al. (2008), but also the role overload and productivity scales from Taradar et al. (2007). I also measured job satisfaction as noted earlier through sub-scale 8 of the Job Satisfaction Scale. I chose these scales in particular because they were relevant to the research questions and were aligned with what the literature review had elicited in such areas as work-life balance and private vs. public life.

There were certain sub-scales I chose to exclude because I did not feel they aligned with my research questions, seemed outside of the scope of this research and/or may have confused respondents. The genesis of much of the technostress research is about technology and information systems, with some elements focusing more on the technology itself in organizational contexts than I wanted to explore rather than on the impact of technology on its users – and I wanted to primarily focus on the latter. For example, I chose not to use the techno-complexity sub-scale, which covered areas such as how comfortable people feel with new technology, whether they find the technology complex and whether they find it takes them a lot of work to learn how to use the technology. I also did not use the techno-insecurity sub-scale, which speaks to whether respondents feel threatened by the technology, and whether newer employees with better skills present a job threat. Another sub-scale I did not employ related to techno-uncertainty, which focuses primarily on to what degree respondents feel there are constants upgrade in software, hardware and technology in their organizations. While these are also valuable avenues to investigate, I felt they were further removed from my research questions and were they included, would have diluted the focus from the experience of technostress of public relations practitioners to the broader organizational experience of technology, which was not my focus.

The original technostress instrument of Ragu-Nathan et al**.** (2008) employed a five-point Likert scale with choices ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. A sixth choice labelled I don’t know/not applicable was also included. For my research, I chose to also use a five-point Likert scale for technostress items labelled from Total Disagree to Totally agree, with a not applicable/don’t know item as the sixth option.

3.3.4.4 Work-life balance. The concept of work-life balance was measured by using the scale developed by Hayman (2005), a scale that consists of 15 items that were adapted from a previous scale that was presented in Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003), whose genesis was the Fisher’s unpublished dissertation. According to Hayman

> The original scale consisted of 19 items designed to assess three dimensions of work-life balance: work interference with personal life (WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), work/personal life enhancement (WPLE) (Hayman, 2005, p.2)

The final scale of 15 items is the one that Hayman used and that I utilized for this study. Hayman asked respondents to indicate the frequency with which they had felt a particular way in the previous three months, using a seven-point time related scale (1=Not at all, 4=Sometimes, and 7=All the time). I used the same seven-point scale with the same items used by Hayman, (2005). These items were grouped in the three sub-scales of work interference with personal life; personal life interference with work and work personal life enhancement and included such items as: my personal life suffers because of my work; my job makes my personal needs difficult; my work suffers because of my personal life; and my personal life gives me energy for my job. Item 7 which read “I am happy with the amount of time for non-work activities” was reverse coded. I wanted to use this scale because I felt it would help identify how people felt about the boundaries between their work and life.

3.3.4.5 Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health (SLOSH). To measure the stress people felt from the work demands that come from technology, I also used several questions from the Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health (SLOSH). The SLOSH is a study that is following a cohort over time to study relationships between various social and environmental work and life factors and disease and health (Magnusson Hanson et al., 2018). Participants were surveyed every two years, starting with 2006. I found some of the questions in their questionnaire to be particularly current and relevant to my study, which is why I included them in my project. I was particularly struck by how well these questions focused on the impacts of technology on respondents' possible stressors related to technology and work. I used six questions from the SLOSH survey that began with lead-in text identifying that technology can be a great help, but also a source of stress. I then used a five-point Likert scale ("not at all" through to "significantly", with a fifth option "does not apply to my work", where respondents were asked to estimate the extent to which they feel stress and were asked to respond to several statements. These statements included items such as "too many calls and e-mails", "demands to be available on work-related issues during leisure time" and "constantly being interrupted by the telephone and e-mail." The SLOSH study also used a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "to a very high extent" to "do not use telephone, e-mail or computer at work." I used different labels for my scale because I did not feel this fifth option in the SLOSH would be reflected in my study of public relations practitioners.

3.3.4.6 Original questions. In addition to the use of scales, I felt there were a number of areas where I wanted to gather more information about public relations practitioners' experience of technology and work. I developed several original questions to gather this information. These included questions in the following areas:

Work-life Balance. Respondents were asked to rate their work-life balance on a scale of 0 through 10. In a follow-up open-ended question, respondents were asked to write in why they rated their work-life balance where they did. I inquired in this way because I wanted to understand more about respondents' thinking, and how they themselves made sense of their answer.

Use of technology. The questionnaire also included a series of questions on technology and work, to better understand what technology public relations practitioners use in their work and whether this is technology they purchased themselves or that was provided by their employer or client. These questions provided context for what technological devices practitioners use in their work. Respondents were asked to select from a list provided in the survey and to identify the technological devices that had been provided respectively by them or their employer/client, and to identify which items they did not use in their work. To ensure that nothing was missed, an open-ended question that asked whether there were any items missed was also included in the questionnaire. Respondents wrote in the additional technological devices they use and were asked to identify whether these items were purchased by them or by their employer or client.

Respondents were also asked separately to identify which device(s) they used most often to do their work. Respondents were given a choice of several options that included items such as a laptop, desktop computer or tablet. They were asked to respond by dragging and dropping their top choices.

There were also several questions where respondents were asked about their response to various buzzes and beeps they receive on their devices. I was trying to better understand whether public relations practitioners felt compelled to respond immediately to their devices or not as I reasoned that if that was the case, there was likely intrusion at times into their private lives and that this may also impact on any efforts to mitigate work technology in their private sphere. One question asked whether they found themselves answering texts and e-mails at all hours of the day and night, with a choice of responses ranging from “this is not true” to “this is always true.” In a follow-up question to this one, they were asked whether when their phone rings, buzzes or tweets for work, they felt compelled to immediately respond. Again, respondents were provided with a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from “never” to “all the time.”

Strategies to regulate use of technologies. To respond to the research question around how public relations practitioners resist or otherwise emancipate themselves from their technological devices, the questionnaire then asked three questions about whether and how practitioners distanced themselves from the demands of their devices. First, they were asked to what extent they regulated their use of their devices, with choices ranging on a five-point scale from “never” to “always.” Secondly, they were given a series of strategies that are sometimes used by people to regulate their use of devices and asked to what extent they used each of these strategies, with choices ranging from “I don’t use this strategy” to “I do this always.” I wanted to see whether there was a particular strategy or strategies respondents said they used. I also wanted to see what strategies they were less likely to use, as I thought this may be telling. Finally, respondents were asked in an open-ended question to name any additional strategies they used that may not have been mentioned. This would allow for the collection of information that may not have fallen within the parameters of the various options given. This was consistent as a strategy with my overall approach to this study in its focus on the voices of the public relations practitioners themselves, and I felt that the responses would provide valuable information for the interviews.

Disconnection practices. In the next series of questions, respondents were asked several questions with respect to the right to disconnect. First, I wanted to know whether Canadian practitioners were aware that the Province of Ontario had passed a law, to be effective in June 2022, that entrenched the right to disconnect for employees. Respondents were asked to respond "yes" or "no" to this question about their awareness of the law. In a follow-up question, respondents were asked to identify, regardless of where they worked in Canada, whether their employee has a right to disconnect policy; plans to implement one within the next year; has no plan or policy but has practices that support the right to disconnect; or does not have a plan or policy. This allowed me to get the pulse of what the situation was at that time for those who responded to the survey.

Respondents were also then asked their views on the right to disconnect for public relations practitioners, through two open-ended questions: first they were asked to comment on the extent to which their organizations would be supportive of public relations practitioners who wished to exercise a right to disconnect. A second question then asked how practitioners feel about whether public relations practitioners should be able to disconnect from demands of the workplace, and whether this is possible in PR. By asking these questions, I wanted to hear more from public relations practitioners themselves on this question as it relates to a timely issue that is being legislated not only in Canada but around the world as identified in Chapter 2 and speaks to work-life balance, both from their view of what organizations expect and their own views of what practitioners themselves believe is possible.

Hours of work. The next group of questions sought to better understand numerically the working hours of PR practitioners and the extent to which they were called to work beyond regular working hours as well as on weekends. The answers to these questions were important, as they would provide a sense of the working lives of PR practitioners. There were four questions in this section. The first focused on how many hours per day on average practitioners estimated they worked each day of the week. Respondents used a sliding scale to respond to this question. In other questions, respondents were asked to specify how many hours on average they worked beyond the regular work week; how many days in a year they worked overtime or beyond a regular work day; and how many weekends a year they worked. It was important to me to gather this information because it would provide descriptive data to help characterize the work lives of practitioners and help in the second phase to identify practitioners who would be invited to be interviewed.

Demographics. The survey then moved to the demographic section, which gathered information via eight questions on the year of birth of respondents; their years of work experience; gender expression; education; province of work; employment level; type of organization in which they worked as well as the area of public relations in which they worked. I felt the answers to these questions may be instructive for data gathering, and to potentially look once the data was available at whether various demographic groups responded differently to specific questions.

Insufficient Effort Response**.** The survey also included three questions inserted within the survey as part of the work on insufficient effort response to allow respondents to provide a measure of self-assessment with respect to their attention to the survey while they were completing it. First, they were asked how much effort they put forth towards the study with options for answers ranging from “Almost no” to “a lot of.” Secondly, respondents were asked to use the same scale to assess their effort towards the study. Finally, they were asked, with the answer options being “Yes” or “No,” whether in their honest opinion their data should be used.

Next phase invite. Finally, respondents were informed that the next phase of the study would include interviews and were asked if they would be interested in participating in these interviews. The response options given were “Yes,” “No” and “Maybe.” If an answer of yes or maybe was provided, respondents were asked to provide their contact details so the researcher could contact them. The last question in the survey was an open-ended question asking respondents whether they had any further comments on any aspect of the survey, after which they could press the submit button. This last, open-ended question provided an opportunity for respondents to comment as they wished, again in keeping with the general approach of the survey.

Survey Launch and closure. The survey was launched on May 9, 2022. The last survey was collected February 15, 2023, after which time the survey was closed to further responses. There were 147 original responses logged by Qualtrics. Following data clean-up to remove any incomplete responses, 123 responses remained to be analyzed for results. Once the survey was closed, the process began to then move to the qualitative stage of this research.

3.4 Qualitative Research

For the second part of this research, I chose to conduct qualitative research in the form of interviews. Qualitative research comes from a view of the world that is more interpretive and socially constructed, in which the focus is on individual meaning of the human experience in a more inductive style (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 4). This approach aligned both with my research questions and the way in which I wanted to approach this research. Qualitative research is also interested in analysing subjective meaning or the social production of issues, events, or practices by collecting non-standardised data and analysing texts and images rather than numbers and statistics (Flick, 2014, p. 542). Similarly, Queiros et al. (2015) noted that “qualitative research is not concerned with numerical representativity, but with the deepening of understanding of a given problem” (p.370).

The advantages of this approach were that it focused on understanding opinions, thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences of individual participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It delved into the whole range of information that surrounds these experiences. It allowed for individual participants to discuss the meaning they attached to various events and situations. The disadvantages of a qualitative approach include that its results are not considered statistically valid and cannot be generalized to a population (Flick, 2011). It is also an approach that takes time both in collection of the data and its analysis and that is perceived to be more subject to biases (Bazen et al., 2021).

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview includes specific questions, but there is flexibility for both the interviewer and interviewee.

> The interviewee still has a great deal of leeway in deciding how to reply […] questions may not follow the exact order of the guide and some questions not included on the list may be asked in response to what the interviewee says (Bryman et al., 2012, p. 166).

This type of interview is intended to unveil how interviewees see their experiences in alignment with a more interpretive approach. I positioned myself as having some directional questions but being open as well to approach these interviews more phenomenologically as well (Creswell, 2018, p. 14). The phenomenological interview is a qualitative method that looks at a topic or phenomenon from the point of view of the participant and seeks to provide as complete a description as possible of their lived experience and of how they interact with the lifeworld (Giorgi, 2009). The semi-structured interviews focused on gaining more insight into the experience of these practitioners and the ways in which they experience technostress and other questions raised through the surveys. According to Blais & Martineau (2006), «L'analyse inductive générale permet de réduire les données brutes pour en arriver à extraire les sens derrière ces données» (p. 15).

Interviews responded to the research questions and my approach best as they gave voice to the participants themselves. The statistics from the interviews supported this as in analyzing the transcripts generated by the interviews, they showed that the participants spoke roughly 80 per cent or more of the time, with the researcher asking questions and probing further about 20 per cent of the time.

3.4.1 Selection criteria

With the number of responses, it was not reasonable to interview everyone. At the outset, my research plan included 25 interviews. The plan also included to select those to be interviewed as a sub-set of respondents to the survey. As a first step, survey respondents were asked in the survey to indicate whether they would be willing to be interviewed. The choices given as a nominal scale were "yes," "maybe" or "no." Any no answers were discarded in analyzing which respondents were to be invited for interview. Yes or maybe answers were then placed in a spreadsheet for further review. The decision on who to invite for interviews was made by cross-checking with a question which asked respondents how many hours a week they work by day.

The first group of invitations was sent to those who identified in their responses that they worked 50 or more hours per week. The reason I made this choice was that I hypothesized that those who worked more hours may be more likely to make use of the ICTs outside of regular hours of work. Responses for this group ranged from 50 hours to up to 74 hours per week. Eighteen invitations were sent out via e-mail, with a follow up message to those who had not responded a week later. From this group, the first 15 interviews were scheduled. There were 7 men and 8 women in this group. These interviews were conducted between February 1 and March 3, 2023.

For the second group of interviewees, in similar fashion, I identified via a spreadsheet the respondents who identified that they worked between 45 and 49 hours per week. There were 16 respondents in this group. An initial invitation was sent via-email on February 8, 2023 with a reminder e-mail to those who had not responded on February 17, 2023. From this group, nine interviews were scheduled with six respondents who identified as male and three respondents who identified as female. Of note there was one additional individual offered an interview who did not answer the survey. This individual, a retired practitioner, saw the invitation letter for the survey and reached out to the researcher via e-mail because they felt they had relevant information to share. Following discussion with my supervisor, we agreed it would be of support to the research to offer an interview to this individual, and this was done. The second group of interviews was conducted between February 27 and March 17, 2023, for a total of 25 interviews between the two groups.

Prior to all interviews, a signed consent form was received in accordance with ethics guidelines. The interviews all took place via Zoom and were recorded within the platform. The audio files were then transferred to otter.ai for transcription, with the exception of one French interview which transcribed in Sonix. Audio files were then loaded into NVivo for analysis.

Also prior to each interview, I reviewed the respective interviewee's responses to the survey. I looked not only at how they responded to the closed-ended questions, but also to the open-ended ones. I looked for areas in which there may be conflict or discrepancy or even areas that I could probe further in the interviews. Prior to each interview, I prepared a summary sheet for the respondent that summarized my observations, as well as any further areas in which I might wish to probe surrounding the interview questions. I had the summary sheet available for reference to me to help me as the interview proceeded.

3.4.2 Research design.

An interview questionnaire was designed in accordance with the intention to conduct semi-structured interviews. I used the guide and the questions to ensure that all areas had been covered in the interview. The interview questions were designed to probe further into the answers provided to the survey, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of respondents. Prior to each interview, I also reviewed the individual's answers to the surveys and created a one-page summary of some of my observations. This also provided me with certain areas in which I could probe further. The interview guide was designed entirely with open-ended questions that would allow those interviewed to express themselves. The guide was structured as follows.

3.4.2.1 Introduction. This section first thanked participants for agreeing to the interview. It also reviewed how the interviews would proceed and reminded participants that the interviews would be audio recorded. Permission was then requested verbally to begin.

This stage-setting phase then moved into introductory questions one through three where interviewees were asked to share a bit more about their work, the types of hours they worked, and what a typical day involved. They were also asked what role technologies played in their work and what their experience was in working beyond the traditional work day, and on holidays and weekends.

3.4.2.2 Technology and work. Questions four through nine covered how practitioners experienced conducting their work using ICTs such as smartphones and tablets. This section focused on finding out more about the impact on the interviewees of work facilitated by ICTs on their stress level, their time and their work-life balance. The questions also inquired of how things have changed in these areas since they started their career in PR, and what the impact of these changes have been on them, as well as on the practice of PR.

3.4.2.3 Strategies. In this section, questions 10 through 14 focused on the strategies practitioners may have used to carve out times for themselves and get a break from technologies that are used for work; whether practitioners felt their employers or clients understood/tried to help practitioners gain better work-life balance; and whether there were things practitioners did collectively with their colleagues to carve out time. This section also probed further on some of the written comments that were recorded in the survey in the open-ended questions about the right to disconnect, and also asked respondents about whether they felt the pandemic changed anything in relation to their work and working hours and their use of ICTs.

3.4.2.4 Conclusion. The first of two closing questions covered what practitioners felt should be done to ensure practitioners were better able to balance their work and lives. The concluding questions asked whether there was anything else that hadn't been covered that they would like to add. The participant was then thanked for their time and participation in the research, and the researcher answered any questions the participants may have at this stage specifically about the research.

Once both the survey and interviews were completed, this research then proceeded with the analysis of results. Chapter 4 covers the analysis of the survey results, Chapter 5 the interview results and Chapter 6 is a synthesis of results from both methodologies and discussion, while Chapter 7 concludes the study.

4.0 Survey results

4.1 Introduction

The bilingual survey (French and English) was launched on May 9, 2022, on the Qualtrics interface. The final survey was completed on February 15, 2023, after which time the survey was closed to further submissions. As noted in the methodology section, respondents were recruited and accessed the survey directly through the link that was provided in the invitation letter. The results were analyzed by using the Qualtrics Reports interface, SPSS, NVivo and Atlast.ai as well as manually. Results for any questions that gave respondents the option to write in one or more sentences were analyzed separately with other qualitative results that were part of the semi-structured interviews that followed. Where there was a relationship between the quantitative and qualitative findings, these were also explored. These are summarized in Chapter 5.

The survey interface generally functioned well. However, some respondents did identify a difficulty when using their smartphones or tablets in responding to a question on which work technologies they use. This question used a drag and drop option where respondents would drag and drop the names of the technologies they use in their work, and whether these had been provided by themselves or their employer. A few respondents identified that when they answered this question they could not complete it, and this was brought to the attention of the researcher in their response to an open-ended item at the end of this question where they could identify what other technology they have or use other than what was specifically mentioned in the question. One wrote: «J'ai de la misère à glisser les items restants car j'utilise ma tablette personnelle et ça ne fonctionne pas bien mais je n'utilise pas ces items.» Another said: "This list doesn't function well on my smartphone." Yet another indicated: "I had a really hard time doing this question on my phone. It wouldn't let me easily drag boxes." This problem had not been identified through testing and it is surmised that the differences in performance may have been related to the type of browser and/or smartphone used to respond to the questionnaire. This was not a pervasive issue, and this question type was the only one in the survey that used the drag and drop feature. Respondents were able to complete the rest of the survey without issue even if they experienced this problem, and those who did not were able to make their selections without issue. This particular question was not crucial to the analysis and there was enough other data to draw observations.

No other issues were reported in completing the survey. As noted in Chapter 3, a variety of scales were used in the survey, supplemented by both original questions and open-ended narrative questions. There were 147 cases logged by the Qualtrics interface. This meant that someone clicked the link to the survey and reached it.

4.2 Data cleaning

Data cleaning, sometimes known as data cleansing, is a process whereby the data is checked for quality and errors, and then some adjustments are made to the data set to reduce the likelihood of bias in the analysis phase (Van den Broeck et al., 2005). While data cleaning is not a substitute for good design, it deals with data problems after the information has been gathered (for example via a survey).

In this data set, as a first step, I removed any cases from the survey where there was no data to indicate that the survey had been attempted. I performed this procedure on two separate occasions, several days apart. I did this for quality control purposes and to ensure I had not removed any cases that had data in them. Cases where there was no data at all generally occurred when someone clicked on a link but then decided not to proceed. In addition, there were a few other cases with no data resulting from the researcher clicking in preview mode. Once all these cases were removed (24 in all) there were 123 cases remaining. Of these cases, there were also a number of cases where respondents had not completed the entire survey. Sometimes they abandoned early (6 cases of abandon after the first question on job satisfaction with four items), in others it was further along in the survey.

I needed to consider whether these were cases I should delete from the data set because respondents had not answered the full survey. Qualtrics registered that once the cases with no data at all were removed, remaining respondents had answered anywhere from 10% to 100% of the survey. Ninety-two completed the survey in its entirety. By taking a detailed look at the cases, I found that even in those cases where the survey was abandoned half-way through, there was valuable data. Questions up to the point where the survey was abandoned were answered carefully and completely.

Retaining the data would mean that I had retained information on everyone who had completed any portion of the survey beyond the first scale on satisfaction. It would validate the attempt they made to be part of this research. It would also allow me to analyze the data, question by question. An advantage to developing statistics in SPSS is that it identifies for many of the analyses how many missing values there are, and then can recalculate percentages based on the number of responses received, so that the results are not misrepresented. In the cases where SPSS did not do this, I made the decision that I would calculate percentages manually in order to consider only those values that had been input by respondents.

The disadvantages of retaining all data would be that not all respondents would necessarily be the same on each question, and that it would be a bit more difficult to draw comparisons across different questions. It might also render some calculations less statistically correct. I also thought about whether it was possible that some respondents would not consider themselves as having participated if they did not complete the whole survey.

In the end, I chose to retain all of the remaining responses, with the proviso that any statistics I used for a given question would be seen to represent only those who had answered the question and that no inference would be made that it applied to all respondents. I also decided that if I were to draw correlations between one question and another, I would then opt to only draw correlations between those cases that had answered all the questions that were being correlated. This would ensure that I was comparing the same two sets of responses, and that the data was not being biased toward one set of responses over another. Even though this might mean more work for me, I felt it was worthwhile in this situation, given the size of the survey sample. I also felt that since the respondents had given consent at the beginning of the survey, there was no issue with using the data even in cases where the survey had not been fully completed.

I was somewhat less concerned about those who did not complete the full survey because my intention was not to do advanced statistical analysis of the results. Although respondents had been apprised that the survey would take 15 to 20 minutes to complete, it is recognized that it is significantly longer than the average brief survey and that respondents may have just decided while they were actively completing the survey that they simply couldn’t give it that much time. It was hard to know the reasons why the survey was abandoned.

4.3 Descriptive statistics

4.3.1 Gender, language, province

Of the 123 surveys retained for analysis, 28 (30.1%) when adjusted for missing values identified their gender expression as Male, with 65 (69.9%) identifying as Female. Respondents overwhelmingly chose the English version of the survey (*n*=118) or 95.9% with a handful (*n*=5) or 4.1% choosing the French version of the survey. Respondents indicated their primary place of work was in one of eight different provinces (respondents came from all provinces but not Newfoundland or Prince Edward Island or the Territories). The majority of respondents were from Ontario (70.7%) with the next groups identifying that they worked in British Columbia (12%), Alberta (5.4%), Manitoba (4.3%), New Brunswick (2.2%), Quebec (3.3%), Saskatchewan (3.3%) or finally Nova Scotia (1.1%).

4.3.2 Age

Respondents were asked to enter their year of birth in the survey. This allowed for a more detailed understanding of the age demographics of the survey group. Responses indicated that all respondents were born between 1953 and 1996, or if calculated for the year in which the survey was largely administered (2022), at the time the ages would have ranged between 26 and 68. The following chart shows responses grouped by decade. This particular sample indicates that 83.9% of participants were born anywhere between 1961 and 1989 based on the data, or between the ages of 33 and 61. The mean year of birth of all participants was M=1975, or around 47 years of age at the time of the survey.

Table 2

Respondents' date of birth by decade

Decade	*n*=	Percentage (%)
1950s	8	8.6
1960s	21	22.6
1970s	32	34.4
1980s	25	26.9
1990s	7	7.5
Total	93	100

4.3.3 Years of experience in public relations

Respondents were also asked to identify, by clicking on a number, how many years of experience they have worked in public relations. Responses ranged between two years (only one respondent) and 41 or more years in public relations. I then placed these responses into categories to better understand the data. The mean overall among those who responded to the question was M=18.32. As the table shows, about two-thirds of those responding reported they had between 11 and 30 years of experience, with the other third primarily focused in the 0–10-year range, and the remaining 10.9% at the 31 plus years of experience. It should be noted that there were no responses of 0 or 1 as it would have meant the response did not fall within the selection criteria, and therefore the case would have had to be deleted. A case that reported two years of experience was also technically outside of the criteria, but was retained.

Table 3

Years of experience in public relations

Range	N	percentage
0-5	6	6.6
6-10	15	16.5
11-20	33	36.3
21-30	27	29.7
31 and over	10	10.9
Total	91	100%

4.3.4 Employment level

When asked how they would describe their current employment level, many of the responses suggested that a significant majority of respondents came from middle management or senior ranks. A large percentage identified their employment level as such, including such roles as Manager (28%), Director (22.6%), Executive (5.4%), Senior executive (8.6%), CEO/COO/CCO (3.2%) or Senior Consultant (12.9%). The remaining identified their role as either intermediate consultant (2.2%), Coordinator (1.1%), Officer (3.2%), Supervisor (1.1%), or Contractor (5.4%). A further 6.5% chose the ‘other’ option and wrote in their answers. Within this group, responses included: Consultant and instructor, Principal advisor, Owner/CEO, Owner, Senior team lead/strat comms advisor and Senior Comms advisor. I chose to keep these separate in the “other” category rather than integrate them into the other categories, because I assumed there was a reason why respondents chose to select the ‘other’ category.

4.3.5 Employment sector

Respondents were then asked what type of organization they would say they work in. A majority (55.4%) reported that they work in the public sector, while a further 16.3% said they work in the private sector, 8.7% work for a non-profit or non-governmental organization; 6.5% in a consultancy/agency, and 9.8% identified themselves as independent practitioners.

Respondents were also able to choose an "other" option in which they could write in their type of organization. Write-in responses made up 3.3% of responses and included such responses as: education; government, and "post-secondary education which is broader public sector." I also chose to keep these separate from the other categories and leave them in the "other" group.

4.3.6 Public relations disciplines

To better understand the type of work respondents did, they were then asked what area of public relations they primarily worked in. Almost half (46.2%) reported this area as being strategic communications, with the next largest category reported as generalist (16.4%), which I took to mean that their work spanned a variety of communication functions. The next largest categories included in equal measures internal communications (6.5%) and external communications (6.5%), followed by social media (4.3%), stakeholder engagement (3.2%) and then media monitoring/media relations (2.2%) and writing (1.1%). As with other such questions, respondents were also given the option to select "other" and then write in their response. This was done by 5.4% of respondents who identified their disciplines as digital strategy, almost all of the above, training, and "everything on the list I also have government relations in my portfolio and relations publiques."

4.3.7 Education

The education profile suggested that a good number of respondents had advanced educations, with a breakdown as shown in Table 4. Since so many of the respondents were from Ontario, this may not be surprising given that there are several master's programs in Communication across the province and a Masters in Communication Management in southern Ontario at McMaster University.

Table 4

Highest completed education level

Highest completed level	***n*=**	**%**
PhD	3	2.9%
Master’s Degree	38	36.9%
Bachelor’s Degree	43	41.7%
Joint Diploma and Bachelor’s	2	2%
College Diploma	6	5.8%
PR/Marketing/comm. certificate	8	7.8%
Other	3	2.9%
Total	103	100

Of those who responded “other,” the write-in responses included: I have 2 Master’s degrees, a second diploma, and “started masters degree but has (sic) to pause. Plan to finish.”

4.4 Hours of work

The issue of how much public relations practitioners work and how much of their work spills over into what might have been traditionally considered personal or leisure time was an important one for this research. Selection criteria also specifically sought to better understand how much practitioners used their technology to conduct work on weekends and holidays, in order to better understand what this meant for practitioners and the practice. This research therefore sought to draw a picture of what the respondents were experiencing with respect to hours of work.

Respondents were asked in a first instance to indicate how many hours per day they worked on each of the regular days of the week (i.e. Monday through Friday). For the most part responses seemed fairly consistent, which much of the responses clustered between 7 hours and 10 hours per day with M=8.74 hours per day on Monday; M=8.667 on Tuesday; M=8.7849 on Wednesday; M=8.6522 on Thursday and M=8.1739 pm Fridays. However, there were a few people who worked less on days of the week and notably a few who indicated they worked anywhere between 11, 12, 13, 14, or 15 hours per day on one or more days of the week. One person indicated they worked 24 hours a day on each of the five days of the week. This did not seem realistic, however, the person did respond to the full survey and their other responses did not seem extreme, so it's possible they simply felt as if they were on and working 24 hours per day.

The public relations practitioners who responded to the survey were also asked to identify how many hours per day they worked on each of Saturday and Sunday. While many practitioners did report working on weekends, generally the numbers indicated that on Saturdays, the majority of practitioners who responded to this question (*n*=69; M=1.8841) worked between one (30.4%), two (20.3%) or three hours (13.0%) on a Saturday. However, roughly 14.3% of practitioners reported working four, five, eight or nine hours on Saturdays, indicating that while a large number of hours of work may occur on Saturday for some practitioners, this did not seem to be the norm. Similar observations could be made in looking at the responses for Sunday, but again fewer respondents seemed to provide data for this question (*n*=61; M=2.2787). Results indicated that practitioners who responded to the question tended to work slightly longer on a Sunday, although responses suggested that 18% did not generally work on Sundays, while responses for the rest were largely clustered around working one (26.2%), two (19.7%) or three (16.4%) hours on a Sunday. When one compares Sunday to Saturday work, a larger percentage of practitioners (19.6%) reported working four, five, six, seven, nine or 10 hours on a Sunday. While the responses suggested overall that practitioners didn't routinely work long hours on weekends, it would seem that at least some did, and that many practitioners did at least some work on weekends, and that some even put in significant hours.

To lend more specificity to this data since it was so closely related to the experience of technostress for practitioners, questions also asked respondents three follow-up questions: they were first asked to estimate how many hours of overtime they work in a week; second, they were asked how many days of overtime they work in a year, and finally, they were asked how many weekends a year they work. It should be noted that anytime practitioners gave a range such as 2-3 hours, I coded these at the top end of the response, so in this case 3 hours. While one could argue this slightly increased the average, it was rare enough that I didn't feel it materially impacted the results. On the first question, which asked: "In a work week, how many hours on average would you say that you work beyond the regular work week" (for example after regular hours, evenings, weekends, holidays), I created one document and then colour-coded categories for the responses. The categories I used were 0-5 hours, 6-10 hours, 11 to 15 hours, and then 16 or more hours. Most practitioners indicated they worked at least some overtime in a regular week. However, several indicated their response as zero (0), yet still had numerical data above zero in the other two sub-questions (except for one respondent). It made me wonder whether practitioners were discriminating in some cases between paid and unpaid overtime, a question that was not specifically addressed by this research. Nevertheless, the data indicated that most practitioners did work at least some overtime within a week, with a fairly broad range of responses. In the zero to 5 hours per week range more half of responses were found (n = 52, M = 2.94). In the 6 through 10 hours a week, there were fewer responses (n = 16), but most were in the range of 10 hours per week, with M =9.5. In the 11-15 hours per week range, I found again that answers tended to cluster around the higher end of this category, and this was reflected as (n = 16, M = 13.93). Finally, there were respondents who indicated they worked more than 16 hours of overtime in a week, where (n = 7, M = 20). What one can observe is that while roughly more than half of practitioners worked less than an extra hour per day of overtime on average, there were still respectable numbers among those who responded to the question who worked anywhere between almost 9.5 and 20 extra hours per week.

Respondents were then asked about the number of days practitioners worked overtime in a year. The categories created for this question were 0-10, 11-30, 31-60, 61-100, 101-199, and then 200 or more days. There were again a fair number of respondents who estimated they worked 10 or less days of overtime per year (*n* = 20, M = 6.6) or between 11 and 30 days of overtime (*n* = 14, M = 20.2) per year, while another group (*n* = 13, M = 45.6) said they worked between 31 and 60 days of overtime per year. Fewer seemed to be at the high end of days of overtime, but the responses did speak to how much public relations practitioners estimated they worked, and this was sometimes substantial. Eight practitioners estimated they worked between 61 and 100 days of overtime per year, with M=90. Another eight practitioners estimated they worked between 101-199 days of overtime per year (M = 149.5). At the higher response levels in the category of 200 or more days per year, there were seven respondents with a median of 244.2 days of overtime per year. However, this was not the totality of responses to the question overall, as a number of respondents took advantage of the space that was given to them for this question to respond in a short narrative format. Another eight respondents indicated in narrative form that they worked overtime either every day or almost every day. “I work 360 days a year,” noted one, or another “All year round” with several answering similarly in noting they worked overtime almost every day or almost every work day, or most days. This suggested that some practitioners worked overtime significantly more than half the workdays in a given year. This was further reinforced by the answer of a second group of three respondents, two of whom indicated identically that they worked overtime “more than 75 per cent of the time,” with the third respondent indicating that they worked more than 100 days of overtime per year. Among the remaining responses, one item of note was that there were several respondents who truly could not estimate the number of days of overtime they worked in a year. “I don’t know – a lot,” “Unsure,” “No idea,” represented these types of responses. A couple of respondents chose to provide further definition to their rhythm of overtime. One noted:

> During an event, I work OT almost daily. Outside of that, only the occasional hour or two, normally by choice (Manager, Public Sector).

Overall, the picture from the responses to this question suggested again that while some practitioners worked fewer days of overtime per year, overtime was part of the practice of public relations for almost all practitioners who responded to this survey, and the demands on their time could for some be quite significant.

Finally, for the question surrounding the number of weekends worked, I categorized the answers roughly by quarter year: 0-12 weeks, 13-26 weeks, 27-40 weeks, and 41-52 weeks. What was noticeable here was the variety of answers. Four responses suggested no weekend work at all (response of 0). In the zero-to-12-week range, about a third of respondents noted they worked this number of weekends in a year. However, what I noticed was that many of these were at the low range – anywhere from 0 to 5 weekends worked in a year which was confirmed by M = 4.48 for this group. For those who responded that they worked between 13 and 25 weekends a year roughly two-thirds of these responses were at the higher range of anywhere between 20 and 25 weekends which was reflected in a median of M = 18.93. In the 26-39 weekends worked category, there were 11 respondents, with M = 29.09 weekends. Finally, in the 40-52 weekends a year worked, there were 29 or again roughly a third of respondents, with M = 47.68 for this group. Overall, it was found for this sample that while a number of practitioners worked many weekends, there were also some who were not often called to work on weekends. The range in responses may also have reflected the ebb and flow of the work, as one respondent noted.

> This varies significantly. Quite often I'm responding to issues that crop up on the weekends while engaged in personal activities with the family/friends (Manager, Public Sector).

Two other practitioners indicated that while practitioners may find they work on weekends, the amount of time they work may be limited.

> A little on most but not a lot (Manager, Private Sector)
>
> Work the full weekend? Maybe 1. More partial though (Senior Executive, Public Sector).

4.5 Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction was measured in the survey with four questions that are part of the job satisfaction scale (Spector, 1985). This scale has also been used by technostress scholars who have considered job satisfaction to be a factor that mitigates the negative effects of technostress. The results of the survey indicated that job satisfaction was quite high among public relations practitioners as measured by these questions. A scale of 1 to 6 where 1 is strongly disagree and 6 strongly agree was used, except for the fourth statement in this scale, which was reverse coded.

On the first statement respondents were asked to respond to the statement: “I like doing the things I do at work.” Responses (N = 123) indicated significant agreement (M = 5.36, SD = .801), with 92.8% of responses indicating either strong or moderate agreement, 4.7% in slight agreement, and only three (3) respondents identifying any form of disagreement, the choices being do not agree, disagree moderately or disagree slightly.

On the second statement respondents were presented with the statement “I feel a sense of pride in doing my job,” and asked to rate it along the same scale. On this statement responses continued to indicate quite a positive response to the statement (n = 122, M = 5.48, SD = .815). In terms of percentages, 90.3% strongly or moderately agreed with this statement, with 61% of respondents in strong agreement; 7.3% agreed slightly and only 2 respondents did not agree in any way.

The third statement showed some variation in the extent to which respondents agreed with the statement. The statement presented was “My job is enjoyable.” While the response was still quite positive in agreement (N = 123, M = 5.06, SD =.917), a shift in the proportions of the extent to which there was agreement with this statement was apparent, with only 32.5 % of respondents in total agreement with this statement, another 48.8 per cent in moderate agreement; 13.8 % agreeing slightly and the remainder either totally, slightly, or moderately in disagreement.

The fourth statement was reverse coded in accordance with how this question was handled in the scale. The statement was: “I sometimes feel my job is meaningless.” Responses indicated (N = 123, M = 2.29, SD = 1.595). The higher standard deviation would suggest a greater variation of responses, and this was found in the data. Where the first three statements saw responses clustered overwhelmingly around a moderate or strong form of positive agreement, the descriptive statistics for this statement response were more broadly distributed. In the responses, 35% did not agree, 17.9% disagreed moderately, 8.1% disagreed slightly, but we also found 26.8% agreeing slightly, 6.5% agreeing moderately and 5.2% in total agreement, suggesting that roughly 4 in 10 respondents felt their jobs were sometimes meaningless to some extent. One other possibility for this broad distribution may be explained for some respondents by insufficient attention to the question: having responded to three questions with the same scale, some respondents may have simply answered the same way with a reverse coded question. Having looked at the data, I believe this may have been possible in isolated instances. For example, one or two respondents indicated moderate or total agreement with the first three statements, denoting strong positive responses to these statements, but then also scored “totally agree” to the reverse coded question on meaninglessness. While it is impossible to know for sure, it is possible these respondents simply ticked off the same order in which the choices were presented. I believe this is possible because it is difficult to make sense of someone highly satisfied on other measures with their work to feel so strongly about their job being meaningless.

In summary, an observation to this group of responses is that public relations practitioners who responded to the survey seemed quite positive when it came to agreement on such statements as whether they like the things they do at work and feel a sense of pride in their job. They were only slightly less strong in their agreement when it came to rating their job as enjoyable. However, there was a greater distribution of sentiment on the question of whether the work that they do is sometimes meaningless. This question also provided an opportunity to reflect upon the question of attention to the detail of survey questions by the respondents themselves.

4.6 Stress in General

In order to gain a sense of the general stress experience of public relations practitioners surrounding their work in general, I used the Stanton et al. (1985) stress scale, composed of 16 items, divided into two general areas indicating pressure (7 items) and threat (9 items). Respondents were presented with single words that described their work, and asked to what extent this represented their experience on a five-point scale of 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4= often and 5 = all the time.

In the area of pressure, I found that respondents to this question were most likely to say that their work was demanding (n = 116, M = 4.01, SD = .704), hectic (n = 117, M = 3.85, SD =

.738) and that all things were stressful (*n* = 117, M = 3.57, SD = .791), closely followed by pressured and pushed. They were less likely to characterize their work as calm (*n* = 117, M = 2.52, SD = .857) or relaxed (*n* = 117, M = 2.21; SD = .826). The distribution of responses was also instructive on this portion of the scale. For example, 23% of those who responded said their work was demanding all the time, a further 55.6% said their work was often demanding, meaning that more than three quarters of respondents felt their work was demanding either all the time or a lot of the time. Conversely, respondents noted that their work was never (12.8%) or rarely (36.8%) calm, with only one respondent noting it always calm.

In terms of how respondents were likely to characterize their work on the threat scale, they were most likely to identify that their work was under control (*n* = 117, M = 3.43, SD = .758), comfortable (*n* = 117, M = 3.33, SD = .820), and smooth-running (*n* = 117, M = 3.22, SD = .789). closely followed by more stress than I'd like (*n* = 117, M = 3.15, SD = .952). They were less likely to characterize their work as irritating (*n* = 117, M = 2.92, SD = .842), overwhelming (*n* = 117, M = 2.88, SD = .842), nerve-wracking (*n*=117, M=2.83, SD=.854), or hassled.

These respondents generally felt that their work was all the time (3.4%) or often (47.0 %) under control, with only very few feeling that it was never (1.7%) or rarely (7.6%) under control, and the balance indicating their work was sometimes under control. Slightly larger numbers of respondents noted that their work was never (.8 %) or rarely (18.8%) smooth-running. However, respondents did note their work was all the time (1.7%), often (20.5%) or sometimes (46.2%) overwhelming.

Practitioners reflected in their responses that they worked within a demanding environment that is often hectic. However, they also seemed to experience some semblance of order or control within that environment, a certain sense of comfort and of smooth-running process. Since one does not intuitively suggest the other, this was one area that was probed further in the interviews to try and better understand from practitioners themselves how they composed with these two realities.

4.7 Work-life Balance

To measure work-life balance, the scale developed by Hayman (2005) was used. It is a 15-item scale on a seven-point continuum ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 = all the time with a midpoint of 4 = sometimes. Within the scale, there are three dimensions of work-life balance measured which are obtained by adding up the scores for statements that are within those constructs. The three elements are: Work Interference with Personal Life (WIPL), which consists of seven items; Personal Life Interference with work (PLIW), which consists of four items; and, Work Personal Life Enhancement (WPLE), also with four items. Higher scores are indicative of the extent to which results are reflective of the titles of each sub-scale. I wanted to get an idea of the extent to which the three dimensions seemed to be a factor for public relations practitioners, as they might illuminate how public relations practitioners viewed these dimensions.

On the work interference with personal life (WIPL) dimension, I found M=3.7 once I removed cases where SPSS had calculated missing values as zero. On the personal life interference with work (PLIW) dimension, I found that M=2.0 once I removed missing values. And finally on the Work Personal Life Enhancement (WPLE) dimension, M=3.7 as well. Higher values are suggestive of a stronger impact in a particular dimension, so these results suggested that within the sample, public relations practitioners felt that work interfered more with their personal life, but also enhanced their personal life more than personal life interfered with work. As a reminder, these questions were asked based on a seven-point scale. The responses to the various dimensions suggest that all means were below the mid-point of 4=sometimes.

A review of a few of the individual questions suggested that while responses on two of the dimensions averaged out to close to the mid-point of response choices, there was a bit more granularity in looking at the details. It was very clear that respondents tended not to feel that their personal life interfered with work. For example, 72.4% of those who responded to the statement: “My personal life interferes with work” answered below the midpoint of 4, and 30.4% answered never. Similarly, the statement “my work suffers because of my personal life” elicited no responses whatsoever at the upper end of the scale, and 88.9% of responses were lower than the midpoint, suggesting that the impact of personal life on work was perceived to be lesser than the impact of work on personal life. For example, when respondents were asked if they were in a better mood at work because of their personal life, 84.2% of respondent answers were at or above the midpoint. Conversely, when asked the same question about whether they are in a better mood in their personal life because of their job, only 58.8% responded in the same way.

When asked to respond to the statement “I struggle to juggle work and non-work,” answers were distributed across the range of options, although just under a two-thirds of respondents, or 62.7% responded in such a way that they fell somewhere between sometimes and always in the response to this question. Some respondents also seemed to indicate they were unhappy with the amount of time they had for non-work activities, with roughly three quarters (73.8%) of responses falling between never (1) and just under the mid-point (3). On many of the responses, it was more difficult to imply a particular tendency, as the choices made were more evenly distributed, and likely reflective of each public relations practitioner’s circumstances. Responses on work-life balance were often clustered around the mid-point, with the exception as identified above. This demonstrated yet again that there would be value in further probing in interviews with practitioners to see why they might have responded in certain ways.

In a second instance, respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with their work-life balance on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 was not at all satisfied and 10 was totally satisfied. For this question I found that (n = 102, M =5.78, SD = 2.364) with a majority of responses (51.5%) in the mid-range responses of 5, 6 and 7. However, 25.2% of respondents showed a lower level of satisfaction with work-life balance with ratings from 0 through 4 and approximately the same amount (23.3%) identifying higher levels of satisfaction with their work-life balance, rating it 8 through 10. These numbers seemed to suggest that within this sample, roughly half of respondents were generally somewhat satisfied with their work-life balance, and that the remaining half were almost equally distributed between either more dissatisfied with their work-life balance or more satisfied.

A follow-up question asked respondents to comment on why they rated their work-life balance as they did. A review of the relationship between how respondents rated their work-life balance and what they say about that rating is covered in Chapter 5. I hypothesized that higher ratings would be reflected in positive comments about the respondent's relationship between work and life. At the same time, lower ratings I surmised would reflect greater dissatisfaction in the balance between work and life and might provide insight to what actually drove work-life balance for these respondents. However, it was also possible that there was some bias in the follow-up question being positioned immediately after the requested rating of work-life balance on a scale. The detail on responses received to this question is further elaborated upon in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.8 Use of technology

In order to better understand the technological environment in which public relations practitioners functioned, this research sought to know more about the types of technological devices and other equipment they worked with, and how much of this equipment was paid for by the practitioners themselves or by their employer. I felt it was important to know this latter precision because some ICTs come at potentially additional cost for practitioners and there may be some knowledge from the results that would be interesting for the practice of PR. It was understood that for those who are independent practitioners, it was more likely that whatever technology they had they likely purchased themselves unless a client provided it. The question presented practitioners with a number of types of ICTs, and asked practitioners to identify whether they had it, who paid for it, or whether they didn't use it. The technologies mentioned in this question included: laptop, desktop, mouse, tablet, webcam, ring light, second screen, microphone, headphones or earbuds and a scanner.

The tools that more practitioners reported they used for their work were laptops and smartphones and these were often provided by employers. Of those who responded to this question (n=99), 83.8% indicated that the laptop they used was provided by their employer or client, while 13.1% said they purchased it themselves, and 3% said they did not use a laptop at all. With respect to smartphones, roughly two-thirds of the responses (n=101), indicated that the employer (65.3%) provided the smartphone, while most of the remaining answers indicated the practitioner purchased the phone (32.7%) they used for work. Two percent of respondents indicated they did not use a smartphone in their work.

Other technologies that respondents reported tended to be provided largely by employers or clients including a mouse (77%), a webcam (73%), a second screen (66.7%) or specialized software (71.1%). In some cases, it was also instructive to see how many respondents said they did not use a particular technology. This was the case, for example with a desktop computer. While fewer respondents provided an answer to this question (n=78), of those who did, more than half (60.3%) indicated they did not use a desktop computer in their work. For those who reported that they did, 28.2% reported that it was provided by the client or employer while only 11.5% said they purchased the desktop computer. More than half of those who responded to the question (*n*=77) or 55.8 % said they didn't use a tablet in their work, while 18.2% said the client provided one and just over a quarter (26%) said they purchased one themselves. However scanners (*n*=82) were more likely to be provided by clients (35.4%), with 23.2% of respondents purchasing their own and 41.5% saying they didn't use one. Similarly, a second screen (N=93) was often provided by employers or clients (66.7%), while practitioners were less likely to purchase their own (14%) or not use one at all (19.4%). A microphone (*n*=85) was also provided by 60 per cent of clients or employers, while 16.5% of respondents purchased their own and 23.5% didn't use a separate microphone. However, earbuds or headphones were much more often used (and many of these do generally have microphones integrated within them). Respondents generally purchased their own (63.3%), or the client provided the earbuds or microphone (29.6%). Only 7.1% of respondents said they did not use this technology.

In the cases where specialized software was needed (*n*=90) usually clients or employers provided it (71.1%), while some purchased their own (14.4%) and another equal amount said they did not use specialized software (14.4%). An ICT that was notable because no respondents identified their employer or client purchased it for them was a smartwatch (*n*=76). For those who responded to this question, 39.5% said they purchased the smartwatch themselves while 60.5% said they did not use one to do their work. Another work tool that tended not to be supplied by employers was a ring light. Ring lights were made popular during the pandemic to help enhance lighting on collaborative work and other calls. Of those who responded (*n*=79), only 5.1% said their client provided one, 31.6% said they purchased it themselves and 63.3% said they didn't use one in their work.

In addition to the choices given, respondents were also asked in an open-ended question whether there were other technologies they used for their work. This question asked whether anything else was missing from the list, and whether this technology was provided by them or by their employer or client. Because public relations practitioners use ICTs for much of their work, it was not surprising to find other technologies and tools of the trade of various types. For example, several respondents mentioned such items as cameras, voice or video recorders. While these seemed to be mostly supplied by employers/clients (4 mentions), a few respondents said they purchased this equipment themselves (3 mentions) or did not specify who purchased it (1 mention). Several other respondents (4 mentions) said that they also used their personal laptop or smartphone to do work, sometimes in addition to the smartphone they already had from work. For example, one respondent mentioned they use their personal smartphone to take photographs because the camera on that phone was better than the one provided by their employer. Another identified that they used their personal smartphone on weekends to communicate with their CEO, and that this allowed them to set aside the work smartphone for that period. As could be expected, a number of other items were mentioned such as: computer dongles, charging cables, keyboards, smartwatches, ergonomic chairs, software and apps, a mouse, laptop stands, monitors, microphones, furniture like a stand-sit desk, broadcasting equipment and docking stations, among others. No further specific observations could be made because these were mentioned in very small numbers, however, the mention of the use of a second smartphone used for work purposes was of interest and was probed further in the interviews. However, one can observe that there is no standard that seems to exist for what employers paid for with respect to additional equipment. Sometimes the employee provided some of the equipment themselves to duplicate a work set up or set up their home office, at other times the employer provided the technology and peripherals.

Overall, this question supported that public relations practitioners used a number of ICTs and related items as part of their work, and that by and large, employers provided some of the key tools of the job. That said, there were instances in which employees needed to or chose to purchase their own items to use for work or used their personal property to support or supplement their work tools. There were initial indications this might occur most often with the use of a personal laptop, personal smartphone, or personal camera equipment, something that was probed further in interviews.

A follow-up question to the question of who pays for ICTs that public relations practitioners used then examined more specifically which devices employees used the most to do their work. This question employed a drag and drop form of question in the survey, where respondents were presented with options that they could then drag in order of use and place in a box. Respondents were instructed not to drag and drop any devices that did not apply to them. The choices in this case were: smartphone – provided by workplace; desktop; laptop; tablet; and smartphone – personal. I did not add such items as keyboard and screens because I specifically wanted to understand the nuances between the various tools that could actually store information for employees as they did their work. The purpose of this question was to better understand the nuance between these most-often used work devices by knowledge workers, to see whether there might be any interesting trends to spot and to also probe the extent to which practitioners would say they used their personal smartphones to actually do their work. The item identified with the most frequency was a laptop (91), followed by a smartphone provided by the workplace (63) and then a personal smartphone (42). Much fewer respondents indicated that they used a desktop (21) or a tablet (16) to do their work. This question was answered by the entire sample of respondents. Respondents were also given the opportunity to write in any other devices they used most often for their work. The write-in responses included: personal laptop; second laptop for travel; ring light; camera (2 mentions); webcam; MS Teams meetings and second screen.

Further specificity was also available for this question by looking at how respondents ranked the order in which they most used the devices to do their work. Of those who responded to the question, 91 respondents said that the use of a laptop was either their first (61.5%), second (30.8%) or third (7.7%) ICT used most to do their work. A smartphone provided by the workplace (*n*=63) was the first choice for 42.9%; second choice for 49.2%; third choice for 6.3% and fourth choice for 1.8% of those who responded to this portion of the question. A personal smartphone (*n*=42) was ranked first by 16.7% of respondents; second by 57.1% of respondents; third by 23.8% and fourth by 2.4% of those who answered the question. Both a tablet and desktop were the least often ranked as being used first, second, or third by any respondents.

Based on responses to these questions, one can again observe that the main ICTs used by public relations practitioners to do their work seemed to be 1. a laptop 2. a smartphone provided by an employer or client and 3. a personal smartphone. Both desktops and tablets seemed to be used with much lesser frequency to do work. This is likely also indicative of broader shifts in the workplace that have occurred in recent years with remote work. Laptops are far more portable than desktop computers, for example, so in a way it is not surprising that practitioners used these more to do work. It was also interesting that for some, the smartphone was the device they used most often to do their work. While this question didn't examine how many devices and software practitioners used at the same time, some of this was probed in the interviews to better understand practitioner experiences.

4.9 The Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health (SLOSH)

In order to understand more specifically the types of things that stressed public relations practitioners in their daily work life, several questions from the Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health (SLOSH) were chosen because they fit remarkably well with discussions on work-life balance and the subject of this research, particularly with respect to the question of conducting work outside of regular working hours. All questions started with the words: "New technology and more flexible working conditions have changed working life for many people. Technology can be a great help, but can also lead to new kinds of stress. Estimate the extent to which you are stressed by…." Immediately afterwards respondents were given five options to identify whether they were not at all; a little; moderately; significantly stressed (a fifth item was does not apply to my work) by such items as: too many calls, and e-mails; demands to be available on work-related issues during work hours; demands to be available on work-related issues during leisure time; demands to give immediate answers to emails and telephone calls that require a lot of work to write; constantly being interrupted by the telephone and email; computers and other equipment that fail to work properly.

Responses indicated that practitioners seemed most stressed by demands to give immediate answers to emails and telephone calls that require a lot of work to write (n = 101, M = 3.0; SD = .990); too many calls and e-mails (n = 100, M = 2.94, SD = 1.013) and by constantly being interrupted by the phone and e-mail (n = 101, M = 2.88, SD =.941). Results also indicated practitioners were only slightly less stressed by demands to be available on work related issues during leisure time (n = 101, M = 2.78, SD = 1.045) and demands to be available on work-related issues during work hours (*n* =101, M=2.48, SD = 1.137). Practitioners reported feeling the least stressed by computers and other equipment that failed to work properly (*n* = 101,M = 2.35,SD = 1.024). One wonders if this latter response may have been different at the start of the pandemic, when so many were trying to shift to work from home, were composing with new equipment, new software such as Microsoft Teams and meetings facilitated by collaborative platforms such as Zoom.

4.10 Technology activity

Two original questions addressed specifically what respondents did with their technology when they received or sent work-related messages. Respondents were asked to respond on a scale that included the following options: never, occasionally, about half the time, often, or all the time/always true. In the first of these questions, respondents were asked the following: “I find myself viewing and answering texts, tweets and emails related to work at all hours of the day and night – even if it means interrupting other things that I am doing.” Results for this first question (*n* = 97, M =3.06, SD = 1.265) indicated that just over four tenths of respondents either responded this was not true (10.2%) or occasionally true (32%), while the majority trended towards it being true half the time (12.3%) , often true (32%), or always/all the time (13.4%). There was generally a broad distribution but similar around the middle range, with about a third of respondents identifying it was occasionally true but the same proportion saying this was often true.

In the second question, respondents were asked to rate this statement with essentially the same scale: “When my smartphone rings, beeps or buzzes for work, I feel the urge to immediately check for tweets, e-mails, updates, etc.” This question tended to suggest that this occurred more often as the results indicated a higher mean (*n* = 97, M = 3.81, SD = 1.202), however the standard deviation also suggested a somewhat similar clustering of responses around the mid-point. By analyzing the responses, it was clear that more respondents indicated that this was the case for them either often (30.9%) or all the time (37.1%), which means this was the case for more than two-thirds of those who responded. Very few (3%) indicated this never happened, while 17.5% responded that this was the case occasionally and another 11.5% said it was the case half the time. Putting it in perspective, among the respondents almost eight out of every 10 respondents admitted to feeling the urge to check immediately for tweets, e-mails, updates, etc., which I translated to mean that the great majority of practitioners faced the spectre of constant interruptions within a day and may be challenged in their ability to resist these interruptions.

4.11 Technostress

As identified in the methodology section, I chose to make use of a number of sub-scales from the technostress scale. This allowed me to better understand this particular group of practitioners and what challenges they face in their work.

4.11.1 Role overload

Researchers on technostress have identified that ICTs include role stress (Tarafdar et al., 2007). These authors suggested that this is because ICTs are complex, lead to multi-tasking, create expectations for greater productivity, enable the extension of the work day, and create more work than can reasonably be handled, among other factors (p. 308-309). There were five items in the role overload sub-scale that spoke to role overload. I chose to look at these items more descriptively to draw a picture of what public relations practitioners were experiencing with role overload.

Item 1. I often have to do more work than I can handle.

The majority of practitioners who responded to this question (*n* = 114) indicated that they often have more work than they can handle. Almost three quarters (72.8%) indicated they either totally agreed (42.1%) or moderately agreed (30.7%), with another 13.2% agreeing a bit, 7.9 % somewhat disagreeing, 5.3% in total disagreement and one respondent (0.9%) identifying that this statement was either not applicable or they didn't know. For the most part public relations professionals identified with this statement.

Item 2. I am often required to do difficult tasks.

The survey did not define what might be considered "difficult," so the responses were entirely as defined by the respondents. Still the data showed that a similar percentage to the previous question either totally agreed (43%) or moderately agreed (30.7%) with the statement, and a further 13.2% agreed a bit, somewhat disagreed (8.8%), were in total disagreement (3.5%) or found this statement either didn't apply to them or that they didn't know (.9%). Almost three quarters of practitioners identified with this statement and found themselves in agreement with it.

Item 3. I often attend to many problems or assignments at the same time.

This question addressed how much multi-tasking practitioners did in their work. The numbers were clear on this question. More than 90 per cent of those who responded to this statement (*n*=115) identified that they either totally agreed (84.3%) or moderately agreed (7.8%) with this statement, while the remainder either agreed a bit (3.5%), totally disagreed (2.6%) somewhat disagreed (.9%) or found the statement not applicable/don't know. There was an appreciable difference in this statement in the number of practitioners who totally agreed to the statement, which would indicate that the life of the public relations practitioner did not seem to favour working on one problem or assignment at a time, therefore suggesting that practitioners were almost always juggling many items at once through the day and at any given moment.

Item 4. I often work beyond actually or official working hours.

In this statement, the word which the statement turned around was “often” and respondents identified what their own work looked like overall, from their experience. Again, practitioners largely indicated that this was a statement they related to, with two-thirds (63.5%) saying that they totally agreed with the statement and a further 13.9% noting that they moderately agreed. Just slightly over one-tenth of respondents said they either totally disagreed (1.7%) or somewhat disagreed (8.7%), while the remaining 12.2% said they agreed a bit with the statement. Not surprisingly, this sample reflected that practitioners perceived they often worked beyond regular working hours. It would be surprising if they did not, given that the selection criteria screened participants in part for this characteristic.

Item 5. I never seem to have enough time to do my work.

In this question, the key word in the statement was “never,” as this statement measured the extent to which practitioners felt they had enough time to get their work done. Responses seemed much more broadly distributed than for some of the other statements, with fewer as a percentage at the totally agreed end of the scale, although roughly three quarters again either totally agreed (51.3%) or moderately agreed (21.7%). That said almost a quarter either agreed at bit (10.4%) or somewhat disagreed with the statement (13.9%), with 2.4% in total disagreement.

4.11.2 Techno-overload

Separate from how the work itself causes stress or overload for employees, the technostress scale included several items that spoke to the overload workers may feel that is directly related to the technology. This is of importance in today’s ICT-enabled work place because the technology itself does facilitate multi-tasking and the ability to work anytime and anyplace. The technology also facilitates a certain speed, both of transmission and of response. As the results showed, relative to other factors on the technostress scale, it seemed that it was less likely for PR professionals to blame the technology itself for the stress they experienced.

Item 1. I am forced by this technology to do more work than I can handle.

Almost half of respondents to this question (*n*=97) either totally disagreed (24.7%) or somewhat disagreed (22.7%) with this statement. Only 11.3% totally agreed, while another 15.5% moderately agreed and 23.7% agreed a bit. This suggested to me that more than half of practitioners acknowledged that while technology may be a factor in their workload, they didn't see it as a major factor.

Item 2. I am forced to change my work habits to adapt to new technologies.

I wondered whether this question might strike a chord, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, where so many had to shift to using Zoom, Teams or other apps and software. The results seemed to indicate again that while practitioners perceived to some extent that there is a process of adaption with respect to new and changing technologies, some didn't feel they have had to change their habits (13.4%) or somewhat disagreed with the statement (14.4%). For those that agreed with the statement, 16.5% agreed totally, while a little more than half of respondents either agreed a bit (32%) or moderately agreed (22.7%). A further .8 per cent of respondents said this did not apply/don't know. Again, the results seemed to suggest that while technological changes were a factor for seven out of 10 practitioners, there were varying degrees of agreement to the statement.

Item 3. I have a higher workload because of increased technology complexity.

This statement measured whether the complexities of technology were perceived to lead to a higher workload for public relations practitioners. The answer appeared to be yes to varying extents. Almost half of practitioners who responded to the survey either totally (22.7%) or moderately (25.8%) agreed with this statement, with a further 21.6 per cent agreeing a bit. On the relative disagreement spectrum, some (12.4%) totally disagreed with the statement while another 17.5% somewhat disagreed.

4.11.3 Techno-invasion

The techno-invasion sub-scale measured the extent to which the technology interferes with one's personal life. Accordingly, it gets at some of the work-life balance concerns that may be part of what it means to feel "always on." Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with a series of statements that began: "Please indicate below your agreement with the following statements about the technology (smartphones, laptops, tablets, applications, etc.) you use for your work."

Item 1. I have to be in touch with my work even during my vacation due to this technology.

The results to this question seemed to indicate that things may be more nuanced for some practitioners, and that the suggestion that all practitioners are always on – even during vacation – did not reflect the reality for some. For this question, more than four out of 10 practitioners who responded said they either totally disagreed (22.7%) or somewhat disagreed (21.6%) with this statement. This would suggest that some clearly felt they could disconnect during their vacation. There were also those who totally agreed (25.8%), moderately agreed (17.5%) or agreed a bit (11.3%), suggesting there were others for whom it was more difficult at times to not be connected to their work via technology, even during vacation times.

Item 2. I have to sacrifice my vacation and weekend time to keep current on new technology.

This statement met a high level of disagreement relative to others in the survey, suggesting that learning about new technology was not something that practitioners by and large did on their own time. It is a statement that was interesting to ask, however, because public relations practitioners, particularly in the age of social media, have borne much of the organizational responsibility for implementing new and rapidly changing channels into the communications mix. If practitioners were learning about these new technologies, it was at another time it seemed than their vacation and weekends, as three quarters of those who responded (*n*=97) indicated they either totally disagreed (53.6%) or somewhat disagreed (21.6%) with this statement. Among those who did agree, a small amount (5.2%) totally agreed, while 7.2% moderately agreed and 11.3% agreed a bit, while one per cent responded don’t know/does not apply.

Item 3. I feel my personal life is being invaded by this technology.

The response to this question (*n*=97) indicated a range of responses, with almost the same proportion of practitioners either totally disagreeing (20.6%) or totally agreeing (21.6%) with this statement. The remainder seemed closely distributed across the remaining choices, with some agreeing a bit (22.7%), agreeing moderately (17.5%), or somewhat disagreeing (17.5%). This seemed to suggest that there was a breadth of feelings among practitioners about the extent to which their personal life was being impacted by technologies. Some generational differences were also observed. It was interesting to note that both older and younger practitioners in this sample were least likely to totally agree or moderately agree with this statement, but that practitioners born in the sixties, seventies and eighties, and in particularly those born in the seventies were most likely to totally agree or moderately agree with this statement. There were no significant differences noted between how men and women responded to this question, with responses well distributed for both men and women across the response choices.

Item 4. I spend less time with my family due to this technology.

The results seemed to indicate that practitioners did not universally feel technology impacted significantly upon their family time. Almost half (48.5%) either totally disagreed (28.8%) or somewhat disagreed (19.6%) with this statement. Another 20.6% totally agreed, while a further 6.2% moderately agreed and 24.7% agreed a bit. While this statement did not resonate with practitioners as much as other statements, there were still a fair percentage for whom technology did impact family time.

4.11.4 Productivity

As was identified in Chapter 2, technology cuts two ways as ICTs have both positive and negative attributes. For example, ICTs allow workers to not be tied to a desk and to still be able to work. There are many tools that are also available through laptops and smartphones that support employees in their work, for example editing tools, design tools, software, applications and others that are helpful to PR practitioners. These tools might be viewed as helping improve productivity and/or quality of work. If employees feel that they can better do their work, do it faster, or to higher quality because of the technology, this may be a factor that mitigates the more negative aspects of stress that flows to employees as a result of technology.

For this section, respondents were again asked to indicate their agreement with statements about the technology (smartphones, laptops, tablets, applications, etc.) they used for work.

Item 1. This technology helps to improve the quality of my work.

Results indicated (*n* = 97) that PR practitioners did substantially feel that technology helped improve the quality of their work. Roughly 9 out of 10 practitioners either totally agreed (37.1%), moderately agreed (33%) or agreed a bit (19.6%) with this statement. Only a small percentage (1.0%) totally disagreed with this statement or somewhat disagreed (8.2%) with it. This suggested that respondents valued the contribution that technology makes to helping them produce high quality work.

Item 2. This technology helps to improve my productivity.

Practitioners were also largely in agreement that technology does help improve their productivity, with numbers reasonably close to the previous statement. Again, a very small percentage totally disagreed (2.1%) with the statement while a further 11.3% somewhat disagreed. On the side of agreement, 38.1% totally agreed while a further 29.9% moderately agreed and 16.5% agreed a bit. The balance of 2.1% responded do not know/does not apply. Overall, it would seem that practitioners viewed positively the contribution that technology makes to their productivity.

Item 3. This technology helps me to accomplish more work than would otherwise be possible.

This statement helped provide some specificity surrounding the ability of practitioners to get more work done with the support of the technology they leverage for their work. Responses again reflected some variety, although more than two third of practitioners who responded (*n*=97) either totally agreed (39.2%) or moderately agreed (30.9%) with this statement, while 11.3% either somewhat disagreed (11.3%) or agreed a bit (16.5%). No one who responded totally disagreed while two responded does not apply/don't know. These responses suggested that many practitioners felt that technology enabled them to get more done than if they did not have the technology at their fingertips.

Item 4. This technology helps me to perform my job better.

As with the previous question, there were no respondents who chose "totally disagree," suggesting that on some level, everyone who responded (*n* = 97) felt that the technology somehow helped them in their work. This included those who totally agreed (43.3%), moderately agreed (30.9%) and agreed a bit (16.5%). Only 9.3% somewhat disagreed with the statement. The responses reflected the belief that technology is useful to the performance of work.

4.12 Strategies

If practitioners are faced with these situations, one might wonder what they can do with their technology in order to help them manage. To answer research question 2, respondents were then asked to comment on what strategies they used to restore balance. In a first question, they were presented with a series of strategies that might be used to get a break from the technology. The options presented included: I don't look at my work messages and e-mails after working hours; I block out times where I don't look at or check my e-mails and messages; I don't look at my work technology during in-person meetings; I don't look at my work technology during on-line meetings; I turn off my work technology past a certain time to get a break from work demands; I turn off notifications to get a break from work; I put my phone out of reach during meals or when I'm not working; I turn over my work phone or tuck it away, so I won't be distracted by it during personal time; I don't look at my work messages on weekends.

The results showed that the strategy that practitioners seemed to use the most involved not looking at work technology during in-person meetings. Of the responses recorded (n = 97, M = 2.77, SD = 1.411), a majority (51.5%) said they used this strategy either half the time, a lot, or always, with roughly the remaining half roughly split between not using the strategy and using it a bit. However, the results suggested that behaviour was different when asked the same question but with respect to online meetings. In this case (n = 97, M = 2.0, SD = 1.127), where a smaller percentage (32%) said they used this strategy half the time or always, with a much larger group saying their either never used the strategy (42.3%) or used it a little bit (24.7%). This suggested that practitioners were less likely to look at or reach for their phone in the actual presence of others and that the online environment may make it easier to do so, although one would need to probe further on this point.

Some of the other responses provided some interesting insights about what public relations practitioners "do with" their technology. Responses seemed to indicate that many of the strategies mentioned in the survey were not used significantly by practitioners, which makes one wonder how practitioners manage to catch their breath and get a break.

For example, when practitioners were asked if they used the strategy of not looking at work messages and e-mails after working hours (n = 97, M = 2.09, SD = 1.164), a relatively large number (42.2%) conceded they didn't use this strategy and therefore might continue to access work messages even during their "home" time. However, others said they did this a bit (24.7%) or about half the time (16.5%), with a further 14.4% saying they did so often. Only 2 per cent said they used this strategy all the time.

Another strategy that can be used in the workplace is to block off calendar time – periods in a day where workers do not look at e-mails or messages in order to get uninterrupted writing or work time. If one works within an organization with a shared calendar, this can show as block where the person is busy, which might explain the lack of an immediate response to an e-mail or message. Responses to the question clearly suggested that this was not a strategy practitioners used in large numbers (n = 97, M = 1.77, SD = 1.056). The answers were clustered (n = 97, M = 1.77, SD = 1.056) very much to suggest practitioners either did not use this strategy at all (51.5%) or used it a bit (33%), while much fewer respondents said they used it about half the time (6.2%), a lot (5.2%) or always (4.1%).

A couple of questions also asked to what extent practitioners chose to deliberately turn off their technology in some way. The first of these questions asked whether respondents turned off their technology past a certain time to get a break from work demands, while the second asked the extent to which practitioners turned off notifications to get a break. On the first question (n =97, M = 2.0, SD = 1.242, almost half of respondents (49.7%) said they did not use this strategy at all, while roughly one-fifth said they did so a bit (21.6%) or and another 14.4% said they did so half the time. Meanwhile, 8.2% said they turned off their technology a lot while 6.1% said they did so all the time. On the question that asked if a strategy practitioners used involved turning off notifications to get a break from work, there was a slight upward shift in the numbers of practitioners who used this strategy a lot or always. In this case, 47.4% said they did not use the strategy at all, while some practitioners used it at bit (22.7%), and some used it about half the time (9.3%). Of the remaining respondents, 12.4% said they used this strategy a lot while 8.2% did so always.

There were also a couple of questions that asked practitioners about strategies that involved removing their smartphone from their field of vision. The first of these questions asked respondents whether they put their phone out of reach during meals or when not working. One can observe (*n* = 97, M = 2.31, SD = 1.245) that while this was not a strategy adopted by a majority of practitioners, there appeared to have been greater distribution among the various options. In this case about a third of practitioners (34%) said they did not use this strategy, while another 26.8% say they did so a bit. However, there was more uptake for this strategy noted as 19.6% said they used it a bit, another 13.4% said they did so a lot, and another 6.2% said they used this strategy always. Responses were somewhat similar to the second question on this point that asked practitioners whether they tuck away or turn over their phone so they won't be distracted during their personal time. For this question (*n* = 97, M = 2 .27, SD = 1.303), 36.1% said they did not use this strategy and another 30.9% answered that they did so a bit. Of those who used it half the time or more often, 11.3% said they used this strategy about half the time, 13.4% said they used it often, while 8.3% indicated they always used this strategy.

The final question practitioners were asked was whether they utilize a strategy of not looking at their work messages on weekends. The responses (*n* = 97, M = 2.01, SD = 1.381) seemed to indicate, relative to the other strategies practitioners were presented with, that this was not a strategy generally adopted. Of the responses received more than half (55.7%) said they never used this strategy, while 17.5% used it a bit, while only 5.2% did so about half the time, 13.4% applied this strategy a lot, and another 8.2% did so all the time. While the question was not presented in this way, the response suggested that almost three quarters of practitioners who responded to this question either never used this strategy or used it only a bit, which meant they were looking at work messages on weekends.

There was also a question in this section intended to identify whether respondents were paying attention to the survey. This was part of an analysis of insufficient effort led by another colleague, as part of their PhD thesis. The topic of insufficient effort and how it related to this research was addressed in Chapter 3. On one of the items, instead of a strategy in this group of questions, respondents were presented with the statement: “Please answer I do this a bit” from among the choices presented. Results indicated (n = 96, M = 1.99, SD = .177) that while the great majority (96.8%) answered the question as indicated, there was suggestion of insufficient attention to the question by 2.1 per cent of respondents, who answered that they did not use this strategy, and by another 1.1%, who said they used it half the time. I then returned to the data set to see whether there was any other evidence of insufficient attention in responding to the survey by these respondents. In all cases, I found they made it all the way through the survey and that there were no significant other irregularities that I could notice.

While I will return to the findings on this question in the discussion section of Chapter 6, the observation I draw from these survey responses is that about half of practitioners seemed to not limit, for the most part, the flow of messages and communications that emanated from the workplace, even during their personal time. This means that they may not have applied the strategies available to them with the technology itself. That said, in all cases there were some practitioners who did apply these strategies, although they were not generally in the majority. This does not mean, to my mind, that practitioners as a group did not use any strategies with their technology to balance work and life. It indicated, however, that they did not generally make overwhelming use of the ones asked about. It was important to probe much more deeply on this point since it related so closely to Research question 2. Accordingly, this was a topic looked at extensively in the interviews as well, and the findings from these are detailed in Chapter 5.

Respondents were also given the opportunity, via an open-ended question, to write down any other strategies they may use to manage their use of technology. The question they were asked specifically was: “What other strategies do you and/or your employer use to help balance or otherwise mitigate demands that come to you and your co-workers through the technology you use for work? How often do you use these strategies and how successful do you feel they are?" This portion of the response was analyzed in Chapter 5, in order to group it for analysis along with detailed answers that were given about strategies in the interviews.

4.13 The right to disconnect

Around the time that the survey was being administered, the province of Ontario was in the midst of promulgating its right to disconnect legislation as identified in Chapter 2, which included regulations that would potentially allow some employees to be free from the intrusion of work outside of regular working hours. Also as identified in Chapter 2, several countries around the world have right to disconnect laws. My research questions - in particular questions 2 and 3 - led me to inquire of respondents on their "right to disconnect," a topic I considered highly relevant to the discussion of technostress among public relations practitioners as much of the right to disconnect legislation around the work is framed around the right to disconnect from work technology after hours.

In a first instance, I felt it would be interesting to assess whether public relations practitioners in Canada were aware of the discussion in Canada and of the legislation in Ontario. Therefore, the first question on this topic inquired directly on the point by asking: "Were you aware, prior to this survey, that Ontario is the first province in Canada to have legislation that requires companies with 25 employees or more have a policy by June 22 outlining the right of employees to disconnect from workplace technologies after hours?" The response options given were "yes" or "no." Of the 95 responses ($M = 1.35$, $SD = .479$), more than two-thirds (65.3%) responded yes to the question, while the other third (34.7%) responded no. Given that many respondents were from Ontario, it was not surprising that awareness levels were respectable.

A follow-up question inquired in a broader way on what actions (or not) respondents' employer/client had taken with respect to the right to disconnect. The question was: "regardless of where you live/work, please indicate whether your employer/client" followed by four options, of which the respondent would answer one. These options were: has implemented a right to disconnect policy; plans to implement a right to disconnect policy within the next year; doesn't have a formal plan or policy but does have work practices that support a right to disconnect; does not have a policy or practices that support a right to disconnect for employees. There was a smaller number of respondents to this specific question (n=73). Of these, the distribution was as follows: 26% had implemented a right to disconnect policy; 13.7% planned to implement a right to disconnect policy within the next year; 26% did not have formal plan or policy but had work practices that supported a right to disconnect; 34.3% did not have a policy or practices that supported a right to disconnect for employees.

These two questions were followed up with two open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The open-ended questions were framed in such a way to better understand first, how public relations practitioners felt organizations would support a right to disconnect for PR practitioners. This first question was:

Do you believe that organizations would be supportive of public relations practitioners who wish to exercise a right to disconnect?

The second that immediately followed was framed as follows:

Regardless of how organizations view this question, what are your thoughts on whether public relations practitioners and managers should be able to disconnect from demands of the workplace (for example, by not responding to work requests via smartphones or computers or not checking social media after certain hours of the day) and whether this is possible in PR?

I saw both these questions as informing the ways in which practitioners may resist or emancipate themselves from their technological devices. The first provided context on how practitioners thought organizations viewed this question. The second question also provided the opportunity to see how practitioners themselves viewed this question in the context of discussions about the right to disconnect. In Canada. I chose an open-ended format for both of these questions because it was important to me to understand how practitioners thought about this question and felt that asking for a response on a scale may not elicit nuances in thinking.

To analyze the responses on these two open-ended questions, I first read all responses to the two questions several times. After I had done this, I then looked for patterns in the responses. I chose to do this manually, through an exercise in which I used Post-it notes to see what patterns or coding emerged. I began with no pre-conceived notions or hypotheses about what I would find. This was important to me as I reflected on this question because I did not want my own past professional experiences to colour my views of what I might find. However, I was hopeful that the exercise would help me go beyond the simple answers of whether or not organizations and practitioners supported the right to disconnect. I was looking for the nuances that would help me better understand the why behind the responses.

I used coloured Post-It notes to identify the various codes that emerged. I started with the first question. I was able to identify fairly quickly by walking through each answer that a few isolated respondents felt their organizations would support a right for PR practitioners to disconnect, but that this was perceived to be a rare occurrence.

> My organization would be very supportive; however, I don't know about other organizations (Senior communications advisor, public sector).

> Supportive to a degree. If there is an issue brewing, you may have to be reachable (Director, private sector).

This latter answer highlighted the nuanced nature of the great majority of responses. I noticed the majority often framed their answers in what I concluded was a variation of "it depends." In fact, the use of the words "it depends" or the suggestion that this was a more complex situation was so common that it became the largest category of responses. As I delved deeper into that specific category of responses, I found that the next level provided further information on what practitioners saw as these conditional situations. Some practitioners felt it might depend on whether an employee was unionized or non-unionized, which I took to mean that unionized employees might be more likely to be supported; or management or non-management, which suggested there might be support if employees were non-management; in a smaller organization or larger one – where it was noted smaller organizations may not have the resources to allow for the right to disconnect; or whether the employee was in a PR discipline or engaged in an activity such as crisis communications or media relations; finally, it was noted that organizations might be supportive of the right to disconnect for employees if they knew that someone was on call watching over public relations files. These answers were typified by these examples of responses.

> Il y aurait certaines réserves surtout pour les équipes en relations médias, gestion de crise et des urgences car des incidents peuvent survenir n'importe quand (Director, public sector).

> I believe it would depend on the sector or industry of the organization, and the public relations resources available within it (Director, Private Sector).

> It depends - sometimes we're needed after hours. We can't ignore a crisis because the traditional workday is done. I think my workplace is generally supportive of disconnecting when the day is done if there are not pressing items. I would answer this survey a lot different if I was at my previous employer in healthcare communications.

> There was an overbearing intrusion into personal life that lead (sic) to my finding another job (Senior executive, public sector).

There were also those who felt the right may be partially supported subject to certain caveats - the most often being that there is an expectation practitioners will be available to respond to crises or emergencies. It was clear that practitioners felt there would be little flexibility to disconnect in such instances.

> Depends on the work in question. If it is crisis response or on issues that affects (sic) public health and safety, there should be no limits. For non-essential work, it varies. Is OT (overtime) required because it is an operational imperative? Then OK. If it is to make a manager look good - no! (Senior consultant, public sector).

> Limited. Public relations practitioners, particularly issues managers have little control over what happens in a day and if we have an issue below up at night, I doubt we will be able to say we are exercising our right to disconnect (Executive, public sector).

> I think it would be very hard to do this. I think they would sooner compensate for extra time vs. give us the break. Given issues/crisis can pop up anytime it's tough to let your team disconnect (Principal advisor, public sector).

When coding the responses, it was also clear that a number of respondents felt the right to disconnect may not apply at all to public relations practitioners or the practice, and that practitioners felt organizations would categorically not extend this right to those in PR, particularly because of roles in areas such as crisis communications, issues management, media relations and/or social media. Some practitioners also seemed to suggest they didn't think it was either possible or advisable to disconnect.

> I don't think it is possible. The PR profession often requires professionals to be available 24/7, especially during a crisis (Supervisor, public sector).

> Very difficult in our role. Often immediate and urgent pressures from media and social media that require after hours responses (Manager, public sector).

> Not at all. It is expected that the media can contact us when they want to and that if a senior manager sees something concerning in the media or on social media at any time, they can contact PR to address it. PR tends to be immediate - especially in a crisis or a perceived crisis. Those who do not work in PR see crisis everywhere and want it addressed immediately. They don't get it (Manager, public sector).

> This sounds dangerous as we want to be part of the decision making which is not always done during working hours (Senior executive, not-for-profit/NGO).

Where practitioners did see some opportunities to change the current situation, the solutions they noted tended to be in the realm of management or human resources actions – and not actions practitioners perceived they could take themselves.

> It is good practice for any company to have a back-up plan for the PR functions. There should be a plan in place to allow PR practitioners to have down time. Even for those of us self-employed, I have a colleague that I cover for when she's away and vice versa (Senior Consultant, independent practitioner).

> Our organization has a “weekdays before 6pm” policy, which encourages disconnecting after 6pm and on weekends. However, often things do come up that need to be dealt with. My supervisor is excellent at saying, "this can wait until Monday" in most cases (Coordinator, public sector).

> I think that's a good idea for organizations. I also believe employees should be able to have flexible work times that may mean they're not plugged in during the day (due to personal and family commitments), but catch up later or in the evening, provided they're able to manage deadlines. Some jobs require you to be on constantly (media relations for example, responding to inquiries or supporting high level individuals who travel or attend meetings outside of regular work hours). I think these positions wouldn't be eligible for no contact but for other positions they may be open to it (Consultant/instructor, independent practitioner).

That said, responses did seem to describe a certain perception of the work of PR practitioners and possibly a culture within PR itself of near-constant availability. It is difficult to tell how much of this came from the expectations organizations placed on PR practitioners vs. how much practitioners identified these requirements as part of their role and identity. One respondent, whose company has established a right to disconnect policy, put it this way:

> I received the right to disconnect policy. It just means an apology comes with the after-hours/weekend asks. I'm still expected to be available on demand (Director, private sector).

Another commented on the fact organizational cultures may need to change in order for PR practitioners to be able to disconnect.

> I think there will need to be a significant culture shift in many organizations for this to truly happen. People are use (sic) to having their communications professionals available at all times (Manager, public sector).

The second question, which more narrowly focused on practitioners' views, elucidated this question somewhat further. In this second question, respondents were asked to comment on their own views on the right to disconnect for public relations practitioners as separate from organizational views. As with the first question, I read through the answers several times and then sought to sort and code the answers into themes or categories. As with the first question on this subject in the survey, I did find that there were a few practitioners who did not feel that an absolute right to disconnect was possible at all in PR. They made sense of this by linking it to effectiveness, trust and reputation issues for the PR team. That said, these responses were not in the majority.

> I don't feel it is possible to disconnect and still be effective in public relations (Manager, public sector).

> I feel they should have a right to disconnect but realistically it is not looked at favorably in our field (Manager, public sector).

> As so many of our issues and activities may come out of the blue, it would be challenging for an entire PR team to disconnect and remain relevant or valued if something were to come up (Senior executive, not-for-profit/NGO).

There were also a few responses that suggested that the ability to disconnect should be an absolute right for PR practitioners, but again, this did not reflect the majority of sentiments.

> It should be a right. If not people will get sick and it will negatively impact their lives (Manager, public sector).

> Public relations professional (sic) absolutely must be able to disconnect. The work we do often has us on the hard end of disgruntled customers (disrespectful complaints or attacks through social media that, while usually directed at the organization, feel personal) and we need breaks from that to stay positive, get perspective and recharge (Manager, public sector).

As I coded the responses, I found that many respondents did feel it should be possible to disconnect in PR. However, the response was also nuanced by saying that the right was somewhat dependent on what was happening at the time. As with the previous question, the sense was that PR practitioners did need to be available to respond to crises or emergencies, suggesting that some practitioners may need to stay connected in order to be available to do so.

> The reality is the PR practitioners NEED to be responsive and timely in certain situations i.e. crisis communications, staying on top of social media engagement, being available for media and in high pressure scenarios (Contractor, independent practitioner).

> I think everyone should be able to disconnect from the demands of the workplace. Everyone needs downtime in order to get enough rest to feel refreshed and be able to operate at 100%. I think this is possible for PR practitioners - with the proviso that emergency situations fall outside of that scope (Director, public sector).

> I believe that PR practitioners should have the same rights as everyone to disconnect from the workplace. However I don’t believe that will ever be the reality due to the perceived pressures of the function and the needs of leadership and clients (Director, public sector).

As with the first survey question, respondents also suggested that the ability to disconnect may be dependent on industry or role or other factors, making it more difficult for people in certain situations to disconnect.

> In the education industry, I believe this is possible. There have been only a handful of true emergencies where evening and weekend work is necessary. My organization respects my vacation time as well (Coordinator, public sector).

> I think for some positions this may be possible but not all. And clients or employers may just look for employees willing to continue to be "on" all the time (Manager, public sector).

The majority of respondents acknowledged this truth about public relations, but suggested there may be a number of ways in which the practice as a whole could remain responsive in the case of emergencies without all practitioners being required to be available at the same time, leaving room for disconnection of some practitioners, some of the time. However, as with the previous question, solutions they identified seemed to be largely in the realm of how the work is organized within teams or organizations and therefore the approaches largely human resources-based and not necessarily within the control of individual practitioners. The strategies most-often mentioned were on-call schedules, more staff, paid overtime or time off in lieu and policies, plans and protocols, including better defining what might constitute an emergency or crisis.

> I feel it is a right of PR practitioners, like any worker, to be able to disconnect. Organizations simply need to have coverage plans for employees to clearly know who might have to monitor an emergency line on different days of the week 24/7. If plans and policies are clear, then every employee would have clarity on the times that they can and can not disconnect (Senior consultant, consultancy/agency).

> There needs to be balance, but ultimately you are there to protect the reputation of your client or organization. Reputation hits have a funny way of happening outside of office hours. It's not a job that can be done in banker's hours. What we can try to do is implement some protocols to mitigate the stress and burnout, and only lean on PR staff outside of regular hours when absolutely necessary (Director, public sector).

> Absolutely possible. There are very few things that are truly an “emergency.” I work for a municipality and an emergency is defined as “lives are in danger.” If there is no immediate threat or harm, there is no need for after hours work. I think that the definition of a crisis / issue / emergency needs to be clearly established. If an employer wants or needs a 24/7 issues management function, they should staff that appropriately and not expect a single practitioner to do it all (Manager, public sector).

What was noticeable is that when one considered the idea of public relations practitioners having agency over their time or implementing resistance, emancipation or other strategies to allow them to not be connected at all times, the responses were few and far-between. It wasn’t clear based on the responses that practitioners didn’t feel they has the choice, or whether they simply had not acted. This was also probed in the interviews. Only a couple of responses to this question in the survey related to strategies practitioners could/have leveraged that utilized technology.

> I think it should be realistic that you can set an autoresponder on your emails that state everything will be dealt with during the business day and triaged in order of importance. If it's an emergency to call but no text or emails or private pm's (private messages) (Manager, private sector).

> This is very hard in PR. I have worked hard to set boundaries with my mercurial boss to only contact me on personal time for emergencies. It’s hit and miss. Sadly- I have to be passive aggressive which I hate and not answer his or other C-Suite calls/texts/emails during personal time (Executive, public sector).

In the end, practitioners' views of whether they could disconnect suggested that while many thought this was possible in PR, they also concluded it was logistically difficult. In order to do so, there were certain conditions that needed to exist – such as more staff, having someone on-call at all times, and policies and plans to define expectations. As a result, practitioner views of their ability to disconnect did not differ all that much from whether they thought organizations would support the right to disconnect for them. A few also linked the importance of being able to do so to wellness, mental health and other outcomes for the profession and for practitioners.

> Public relations professionals absolutely must be able to disconnect. The work we do often has us on the hard end of disgruntled customers (disrespectful complaints or attacks through social media that, while usually directed at the organization, feel personal) and we need breaks from that to stay positive, get perspective and recharge (Manager, public sector).

> Il est nécessaire et surtout sain de pouvoir décrocher afin de faire le vide et se changer les idées. De plus, le risque d'erreur augmente lorsque la fatigue s'installe. Les praticiens seront plus performants si on leur permet de recharger leurs batteries (Director, public sector).

Practitioner views on the right to disconnect as well as on other issues raised in the survey were also probed in greater detail in the semi-structured interviews in Chapter 5.

5.0 Interview Results

5.1 Introduction

As noted in the methodology section in Chapter 3, participants had the opportunity to indicate at the end of the survey whether they would be interested in being interviewed. If the answer was yes or maybe, they were then asked to provide their contact information so that they could be contacted via e-mail if they were selected. Twenty-four of the twenty-five participants in the interviews were selected based on criteria identified in the methodology section. A twenty-fifth participant, as previously noted, reached out to the researcher and it was agreed with the thesis supervisor that they would be included in the sample. The interviews took place between February 1, 2023 and March 17, 2023.

5.1.1 Process

Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Of the 25 interviews, 24 were conducted in English and one in French. As noted in Chapter 3, software was used to then transcribe the interviews (Otter.ai for English, Sonix for French). Once the interviews were transcribed I initially used NVivo software to analyze the responses. However, while I was working on the project there was a period where NVivo was not available to me. I made the decision at that time to move the analysis to the Atlas.ti platform, where I loaded the interviews for analysis. As previously noted, my analysis followed Braun and Clarke (2006) protocols. I used a variety of means to consider the data. I used electronic tools to code, I read in detail, I made electronic and hand-written notes. I extensively also considered information from printed versions of quotations.

To conduct my analysis, I read through the interviews several times and made notes electronically in the software of my thoughts and of the points made by each person. I also used the Stickies application in my computer to then roughly sort what I was reading into the general areas of my three research questions, with one stickie (like an electronic Post-It note) per question. I also created, separately, various codes in Atlast.ti under which I sorted quotations from each interview. I identified 945 unique quotations to be coded. These were then sorted into 23 original codes I chose from what I saw in the data. In a number of cases, quotations were sorted to more than one code, depending upon the content. This was because I felt that thematically, responses often came under more than one code at a time and it was difficult therefore to separate these without losing context or meaning. As a result, some quotations were coded uniquely to one code. In many cases, quotations were sorted to two, three or four separate codes, and then I looked at which themes emerged from within the codes.

To analyze each of the codes, I then either printed or read the quotations in each code individually once or twice, by code. This allowed me to see what tendencies I saw in the data. Were there areas that were often mentioned? Were there nuances in the points made? Did it seem like there were a number of people saying the same things or covering the same topic, or were some of the lines of thoughts limited to one person? Were there underlying themes? As I read through each code, I also manually entered identifiers in the margins, by hand and if needed, recoded some of the quotations to other codes. This process also allowed me to manually create sub-codes that often then became the various identifying headers or themes for the data in this report.

5.2 Descriptive statistics

5.2.1 Interview length

The 25 interviews were designed to be roughly an hour long. They were audio recorded and lasted between 44 minutes and 76 minutes, with a mean of just over 58 minutes. The statistics for the remaining areas in this section represent the 24 interviews that were completed with practitioners who responded to the survey. I did not include the 25th interview in the remaining descriptive statistics because they did not officially meet the criteria for the survey and did not complete it.

5.2.2 Gender, language, province

Of the 24 people who met the criteria for the interviews, 13 identified their gender expression as man and 11 identified their gender expression as woman. This was a higher percentage of men than was noted in the surveys, where 70% identified their gender expression as woman and 30% as man. Only one of the interviews was conducted in French, the other 23 interviewees chose English as the language of interview.

This work was conducted as a national study and participants were asked to identify their primary province of work. The survey sample did include more participants from Ontario, and this held true in interviews as well, where 21 identified Ontario as their primary province of work, with one each from Quebec, British Columbia and New Brunswick.

5.2.3 Age

The survey questionnaire asked participants to provide their year of birth. Year of birth for those interviewed who met the criteria ranged between 1955 and 1994, with a mean of 1971, or approximately between 51 and 52 years of age for this sample, dependent upon the time of year interviewees were born. This is slightly higher than the mean age of overall survey participants, which suggested a mean age of about 47 years of age. However, this was consistent with an overall sample for both interviews and survey that suggested the research was done with mid-to-senior level career participants, as was confirmed by the years of experience noted below.

5.2.4 Years of experience in public relations

The range of experience in public relations among this group went from five years of experience in public relations to a maximum of 41 years. The interview sample included a majority with more rather than less experience. Only five had 10 or less years of experience; six had 20 or fewer years of experience, with the remainder, or 13 practitioners, reporting 24 or more years of experience (there were no practitioners who said they had between 21 and 23 years of experience). This meant the sample was in the majority comprised of practitioners who would have been working in public relations at the time of the introduction of the smartphone in 2007 at the very least and would have likely seen and experienced many more technology-related changes in public relations and the workplace in general. This allowed for some valuable insight from the participants about the evolution of technology in their work. The mean years of experience for this sample was 22.1 years, reflecting once again an experienced sample of PR practitioners, and higher by a few years compared with the survey results which showed a mean of 18.3 years of experience.

5.2.5 Employment sector

A majority of the 24 interviewees reported they worked in the public sector, with 15 identifying themselves as such. This was also found in the survey with 55.4% identifying that they worked in the public sector. In the interviews, it became clearer that this included not only those who worked for various government levels, but there were also several interviewees who worked in the education sector or for other organizations that derive their funding from taxpayer funds. Six interviewees reported that they worked in the private sector, while three reported that either they were either independent contractors or consultants. Although some survey respondents also reported they worked in the not-for-profit/NGO sector, this was not the case for any of the interview respondents.

5.2.6 Public relations role

The interview sample was composed of practitioners at various management or senior consultant levels. This is assumed from how the group self-identified in the survey based on some of the categories provided in the survey, using titles such as manager, director, executive and related titles. Even in those cases where practitioners identified themselves as consultant, contractor, or senior consultant, the years of experience noted for this were of 30 or more years of experience, with only one identifying they had five years of experience in public relations.

From the interview sample, eight identified their role as manager, seven identified their role as director, with another three identifying their role as executive or senior executive, two noting their role as chief executive, chief operations or chief communications officer, and the remaining four noting their role as some form of consultant or contractor. The 25th interviewee indicated in the interview that they worked as an independent consultant, although they were now largely retired.

Since those interviewed were selected based on the number of hours per week they worked in PR, one might possibly surmise that practitioners at the management or higher level might be more likely to work longer hours. However, this may simply reflect the reality that existed in the sample for this study and may not necessarily apply across the sector. The issue of hours of work and the experience of technostress is dealt with in more detail in this chapter.

5.2.7 Education

Of the 24 participants who were interviewed and provided detailed demographic data via the survey, half reported they had completed studies at the Bachelor level (n = 12) and the other half reported (n = 12) that the highest degree obtained was a Master's degree.

5.2.8 Table of interview descriptives

In the remainder of this chapter, the voice of practitioners will be heard significantly in order to respond to the research questions and tell the story of the experiences they have with ICTs in the performance of their work. In each case where interviewees are cited, the following information will be made available. I have chosen not to add further information (years of experience, age) in order to respect the privacy of participants.

(Table 5 is on the following page)

Table 5

Interview participants: titles and sector in which employed

Interview	Title/role	Sector
1	Independent practitioner	Consulting
2	Director	Private
3	Manager	Public
4	Director	Private
5	Chief Executive Officer	Consultancy/agency
6	Director	Public
7	Manager	Private
8	Executive	Public
9	Manager	Public
10	Contractor	Independent practitioner
11	Executive	Public
12	Manager	Public
13	Manager	Public
14	Chief Communications Officer	Public
15	Manager	Public
16	Manager	Public
17	Director	Public
18	Senior consultant	Public
19	Senior consultant	Public
20	Manager	Public
21	Director	Public
22	Director	Private
23	Senior executive	Private
24	Director	Private
25*	Independent consultant	Consulting

Thus of those interviewed, fifteen identified they were from the public sector (this also included the education sector), six were from the private sector, three were consultants and one identified an independent practitioner. Titles for those interviewed indicated that five identified as executives, seven as directors, eight as managers and five as consultants.

The choice was made to include a number of quotes from those interviewed in this chapter, perhaps more than one might normally encounter. It is recognized that this might create the impression at times that points are being made more than once or that reflections may be redundant. However, the motivation to do so was for several reasons: first, I wanted to very clearly show the extent to which public relations practitioners reflected on certain experiences and sometimes this can only be done by showing several responses. I also wanted it to be clear that while I made certain choices around coding and themes, there was a certain amount of 'saturation' in the data flowing from the interviews. Finally, I felt it was important to truly hear the voices of practitioners, and this could only be done by focusing on what practitioners had to say.

The choice was also made for purposes of this thesis to not conduct a detailed analysis of responses by gender. Given the amount of data collected in this thesis, the choice was made to focus on what unites practitioners in their experiences of using technologies for work purposes, and many things were found that were not gender specific. While it is recognized that women, who have traditionally made up about two-thirds of practitioners, may face some particular work-life challenges, generally this research found that they were not necessarily always alone: men also spoke of having to rush home to pick up children from school or sports, for example. I agree that it would be valuable to conduct more analysis in this area to better understand what differences exist between genders, or other demographic factors. This may be the subject of future research that might further mine the rich data gathered for this study.

5.3 The experience of technostress

This section covers the interview responses received that related to research question 1 on how public relations practitioners experience technostress. It includes a broad variety of topics that were initially asked in the surveys, but that were further discussed in the interviews. There is a broad range of areas that were grouped in a number of codes that included everything from technology tools to work satisfaction, and from hours of work to resources and staffing. In all cases as I examined the quotations within each code, I sought to identify the salient information that emerged from them.

5.3.1 What the work entails

Early in the interviews I asked the interviewees to talk a little bit about their work and what they did. This section reports on some of what practitioners said. While not specifically focused on technostress and technology, it does situate the interviewees in their work environment and how they themselves define it.

Practitioners generally described their titles in traditional management terms. Words like director, vice-president, executive, manager or consultant were almost always part of what practitioners said about their role before mentioning further specifics about their title, the name of the organization they worked for, and their mandate. In responding to the question, most practitioners first responded by naming the role, or title, they occupied within their organization and then naming the organization, as shown by the following examples (names of the companies suppressed to respect privacy).

> So my role as the assistant vice president, External Relations at […] has a number of components in it, I have a, a team that's got several units in it (Interview 1, executive, public sector).

> I'm a vice president of government Corporate Relations at ….(Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

> So I, I'm the Director of External Relations for the …. (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> So I'm the Communications Manager at a school board (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Secondly, when practitioners described what areas fell under their mandate, they generally spoke in terms of various functions within public relations or that have been integrated within it – internal communications, external communications, content management, strategic communications, media relations, crisis communications, speechwriting, issues management and the like. It was the rare practitioner who spoke of their mandate and role in terms of broader objectives to support their organizations and society. While this is not surprising given the fact that many organizational titles are still aligned to functional roles, more recent scholarly definitions of the public relations role (Flynn et al., 2008) speak in terms of managing relationships rather than functions. That said, several also commented on the pace and business of the job.

> So again, we're providing services, or we're providing communications support for everything the city does. And we provide, you know, media relations support, communications, planning, advertising, social media, we even do the customer service on social media, all that we have - customer service channels, or staff, they don't own that

> part. Because we own social media, we own the website, issues management, we lead the issues management for the city (Interview 25, independent consultant, consulting).

> So in my current role which is senior manager of internal and external communications for…, no job, no two days ever look the same. And I think that's pretty standard for a lot of communications people. So I am responsible for all of the internal communications, employee communications, and engagement as well, you know, events and touch points and connections to really help drive our culture. And then I'm also responsible for us from an external perspective. So managing any media, or issues or crises that might come up and also working with the brands to be more proactive in positioning our brands through earned media, through influencers, you know, through those routes (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

Practitioners reflected that their day routinely included a number of meetings with clients, colleagues and stakeholders that took up a significant amount of time. Some meetings were in-person, others used online technology.

> Most of my day is filled with meetings. So I try as best as possible to make good use of that time, or to ask a lot of questions about what those meetings (are), the purpose of those meetings, what I can contribute. Or maybe, maybe I can skip a few of them or send someone else from my team or anywhere else. But for the most part, I'm in meetings all day long (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> Like today, this is probably the fourth video chat, I've had had a couple (of) in-person meetings. And that's a fairly typical day (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Several practitioners reported that they worked within a global or national environment that could impact on the length of their day. This was further commented upon in the section on work hours.

> And so part of being a global company changes the dynamic of, as you say, the techno stress, because the reality of work hours are not, you know, you're not paid to sit with your bum in a seat at a job in an office for, you know, nine to five, it's, that's not the reality of my role (Interview 4, director, private sector).

It was noted that in addition to their communications responsibilities, some practitioners managed areas that may or may not routinely be included within the communications role in an organization. For those working in education, this might include areas like recruitment or marketing, government or community relations, or alumni relations. Others mentioned areas like record management, translation, customer service or sustainability and governance.

Also as referred to further, some practitioners reflected that while discussions on hybrid and remote work have been more common in recent years, in fact some communicators had been working this way for some time, as evidenced by this practitioner who started their own communications agency.

> That was in 2010, it was actually purpose-built to be all virtual, which today is not, you know, it's like what everybody's doing. But it was always virtually, I did not want bricks and mortar, and didn't necessarily want employees, I wanted senior independent consultants that I could call upon based on the work that I would, that I would take (on) (Interview 5, chief executive officer, consultancy/agency).

Practitioners therefore generally described their roles in traditional management terms, with responsibility for a variety of functions that have been reflective of communications functions such as internal and external communications, issues management, and others.

5.3.2 Technology tools

> Yeah, they're incredible tools for communicators, but they can also, yeah, there there's pitfalls with them for sure (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

As noted in Chapter 4, public relations practitioners reported that they used a variety of hardware and tools to facilitate their work – tools that are used by many knowledge workers. Laptops, desktops, smartphones, and to a lesser extent tablets and other tools such as cameras, printers, and other technologies were all reported as being central to the work of public relations practitioners, and this was supported in the interviews. Practitioners reflected that these tools were crucial to them in completing their work. Practitioners also used a variety of applications and software to complete their work, and were often multi-tasking with them: Outlook, Teams and other applications were reportedly frequently used and open at the same time as other software. One observation flowing from the responses was how quickly and to what extent Teams had become part of the practitioner's toolkit for communicating among colleagues and with clients.

> I usually have two browsers open - Google and Microsoft Edge. I have my email open. And I have, I have two ways. I have the Outlook that comes with the computer and the Outlook app. Because they're not the same, and they can each do different things. And then I have Teams and Zoom in the background at all times, and people call me on Teams or message me on Teams, sorry, throughout the day, and I do the same with some

individuals. It's easier than email, and more conducive to informal conversations Interview 13, manager, public sector).

> Yeah, so I have double monitors, Teams is always going so my colleagues can always reach me. And then I of course, always have my phone. You know, Google Alerts, messages from friends. But I always keep my phone handy, because there are instances where sometimes you could be in a meeting with someone and you want to look something up real quick. So that's always happening. Yeah. And my laptop, of course, but it's the Teams running that keeps me the busiest. Yeah, and you can set yourself to private and or do not disturb, which I never do. Because I'm not in a role where I shouldn't be available (Interview 24, director, private sector).

The fact that practitioners utilize so many forms of technology seemed an advantage for completing their work but also appeared to be a challenge when seeking to balance work and life. It made for many points of potential connection. At times practitioners reflected it could be difficult to catch a break if clients or colleagues were trying to reach them. It also seemed that organizations tended not to have protocols and etiquette around what tools to use when, and practitioners mentioned this.

> I think it's tough to (balance) because like I said, you know, we have Teams, like there's email, there's your phone, they'll do the rounds to like, if they don't get you on Teams, then they'll go, you know, like, they'll call you on your phone email, like they will, then they'll try another member of the team […] And I mean, sometimes you're just not able to answer like, I'm on a call, or I'm, you know, like, you can't be available all the time. So, you know, those different channels, like and then how do you turn all of them off? Like,

you can't turn all of them off. And so, you know, like, I'm sure you could hear it at the beginning of the call. I had somebody like, you know, pinging me on teams, right, Ding, ding, ding (interviewee makes a pinging sound) (Interview 22, director, private sector).

Now, there's chat features that come up if you use the Google app system, there's, you know, all kinds of ways of pinging people. People are not shy, right, they'll like send you a text message […] It's those newer technologies, like chat in particular, where you can see that the person is in a meeting, and you're interrupting them in a meeting which you would never do physically, right, you would never go into a room, knock on the door that somebody was having a meeting with and say, I need you for a second to ask you something that's, you know not rush. But they do that using these chat features. Or there's Slack now there's all these different ones, and they, people will send those at night. You know, somebody sent one to me 9:30 at night two nights ago, which was like, Oh, I didn't think you'd answer. I'm like, well, why are you sitting on chat then like, to me that suggests it's rush. It's urgent. If it's not rushed, send it to me by email, but the etiquette around which technology type to use hasn't really been fully established yet (Interview 4, director, private sector).

It's the whole etiquette thing and using the technology properly, (that) should be better (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

As in the survey several practitioners also reflected on the complexities, and at times the cost, of using smartphones for work not only during but also outside of regular working hours. Some practitioners reported having more than one phone – one for personal life and another for work. Others had only one phone. Some people had phones that were paid for by their employers, others not. Several also reflected on the fact that the ability to do work on a smartphone didn’t approximate the tools available on a laptop or tablet. Finally, some reported that they applied a strategic filter to who can call them on their cell phone. One area of note is that there did not appear to be a standard as to whether public relations practitioners had separate work and personal phones in order to allow them to separate work and life, nor a standard that identified whether organizations would pay for a work phone. This was left to individual organizations and the practice seemed to be all over the map.

> (They) used to provide us with a smartphone to be able to, you know, if we were required to be on our phone or to be responding, and then they stopped because of funding. So now we have to provide our own smartphone or, or whatever phone we can have (as) our device. But it does have to be smart, because we have to access certain apps on our personal phone to be able to do our work to be able to unlock certain applications. […] So again, on our personal cell phone, we get a $50 reimbursement every month, which is wonderful. And I don't mean to begrudge it, but it's, it doesn't pay the full cost of the cell phone, of course, of the phone that we're required to have (Interview 6, director, public Sector).

> Although increasingly, my staff, I set up work phones for them. And then they have their own personal devices. But yeah, I've always had mine on the same thing, I guess, just more out of convenience. But I can see the point of having one that you can just shut off and not, you know, have going off, you know, in the midst of your personal time. But I've just never done that (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

Others also reflected on the personal impact of having a smartphone with them at all times. Some found it quite difficult to unplug. One referred to their phone as a “dark cloud” that can hang over them.

> But it's and then of course, you carry the technology with you in your pocket all the time. So in normal times, when there's not any issues going, that's fine. You're able to go home, you're able to unplug. But when you're mired in some kind of controversy or crisis, that phone in your pocket is kind of like traveling with a dark cloud over your head a little bit, right? Like you cannot escape the messages, the social media, the emails, and all that type of communication that's coming your way and it can be very difficult to put the technology away at home as well (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> My smartphone is with me all the time. You know, like I've, you know, read about all the things that you should do with your technology, after hours, like, you should not have the phone beside your bed, you just go stick it in another room. I mean, there's been a couple of times (I’ve) been called out at night, like, one, two or three o'clock in the morning and once was at 11 o'clock at night. […] So I need to have it beside me. (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

One practitioner shared the following advice about sharing their cell phone number, when talking about the number of potential managers who might try to contact them, and the varying degrees of understanding of what might constitute an emergency that would warrant contacting a communications practitioner outside of regular working hours.

> And if I had to give advice to anybody entering my role, I'd say: be careful who you share your cell phone (number) with […] It may be useful in a given emergency to have a cell

phone shared. But you know, your boss may have a really good understanding of what's an emergency, but people down the chain may not so much (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Still, practitioners embraced technology and welcomed and appreciated it as an enabler in their work, improving communications with audiences and supporting the work of public relations practitioners. They clearly saw benefits to using technologies in their work.

> But when, when a technology comes through, that is something that is, that's helping our work in communications, and too, for us to be more efficient and more effective or better at our time. I'm all for it (Interview 5, chief executive officer, consultancy).

> Technology has made communication […] to our target audiences much easier. So we have a much more robust ability to reach out to our school communities, for example. So when I started in this role, we had very few ways to send out a system message that went to all families. And now that's just part of the ongoing process (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Overall, practitioners reflected that the technology is quite useful to them. Many practitioners reported multi-tasking when they worked, and that this had been amplified by the use of such applications as Teams. Practitioners were also aware that the constant connection they endured could feel like a "dark cloud" at times. They also identified that the lack of protocols for use of newer tools such as Teams and for funding of work smartphones by organizations made the environment quite challenging at times, particularly when it came to the people they worked with understanding what might constitute an emergency requiring practitioners to be contacted immediately.

5.3.3 Resources and staffing

While the survey and interview questionnaires did not focus specifically on resources and staffing, there were several interview respondents who talked about the shortage of resources, be it dollars or staff, that they said chronically plague the practice. These comments informed how public relations practitioners perceive their practice is viewed by the organizations and clients they serve and are linked to work-life balance and whether employees perceive they can disconnect, at least some of the time. It also highlighted the frustration some practitioners appeared to feel with the situation, and its impact on them and their teams.

> While as communications, often it's overlooked or underfunded as a team, private or public sector. Because it's kind of an afterthought. Most of the time communications, it's always like: Oh, what's the meat and bones? Oh, we'll just have them communicate it, they'll figure it out. But if communications was better integrated in workspaces, and work organizations and how decisions were being made, maybe they could be more proactive, maybe they'd be able to plan more efficiently (Interview 19, senior consultant, public sector).

> It would be nice if we could be resourced so that we'd have enough in-house expertise so that we could balance off one each other. But we tend to have setups in communication departments where there's a manager or director, and they oversee tactical people. So they oversee somebody like a comms officer or social media coordinator, or people who have generally a little bit more of a specific limit to their job description. So even when you have the staff, major decisions are still likely going to go through the top position there (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> So it sure doesn't help that we have been short staffed for like two years, we, just we've had a lot of turnover, we re-organized, we were filling positions after the re-org a number of people left so like, I just feel like we're in constant hiring mode. That too, usually involves me so it means that I'm spending hours and hours on recruitment which is just another thing on top of all of the other things on top of you know, so yeah, so I don't, I mean I do really make an effort to fully disconnect when I'm able (Interview 20, manager, public sector).

> So like, we were actually being asked to do way more with way less year over year, right. So that can hurt satisfaction, job satisfaction significantly, when most of the time people are just kind of disappointed and upset with the quality of work that they're seeing, including myself (Interview 13, manager, public sector).

Practitioners also reflected this situation was compounded by the fact that the demands for communication support were seemingly endless. Some practitioners said they had resorted to saying no to new work or pushing back to suggest something needed to come off the plate if additional work was being expected of teams that were already stretched thin.

> But there's potential funding coming in for an exciting new program that we're having. But it's not enough to do any marketing of the program. And so I say, well, how are we going to get the people to come in if we can't do any marketing or communications of this program? And their response is, I don't know your staff, we'll just have to take it on. And I said, hard, no, hard. No, we've taken on and taken on and taken on and taken on. They can't take on more, you know, they're already quietly quitting whenever they can, because

they're so tired of taking on more and more and not having the resources to do so (Interview 6, director, public sector).

So maybe there's just something there that could be tweaked a little bit so that the rest of us can disconnect truly, and truly, on weekends and, and evenings. I don't know, I also say like, broader public sector, not all, but many of us are just too short-staffed. There's too many projects for too few people. So then we run that risk, we've started to get better, I think, as an institution, or as, or maybe just, I'm starting to get better at saying: Okay, if we're going to start that, what can we stop doing? Because we cannot do it all or we could, but we're going to do a really terrible job of all of it. But if we could focus better then we could be better (Interview 6, director, public sector).

We are currently working on getting help, because I joke that I get paid not only for what I do, but also for what I don't do. Because I have to continually prioritize, and say: nope, I'm not doing that because I have to do this (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

You can't, you cannot keep asking the same people to just continue to take on more without stopping something. You have to stop something (Interview 6, director, public sector).

Et ça, c'est difficile de dire non, on ne le fera pas ou on le fera pas dans la dans le format que vous voudriez qu'on le fasse, à moins que vous me donniez plus de ressources. Mais là, sur les ressources, même si on a plus de ressources, il va y avoir plus de demande.

> C'est, c'est comme ça, règle pas le problème, c'est ça, donc gérer, puis d'être conscient des forces aussi et des faiblesses qu'on a dans nos équipes aussi (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Overall, one had the sense that practitioners were unhappy with the resourcing situation, and in particular the fact that in some environments, there was neither the budget nor the people to do the job the way they felt it should be done. Some resorted to saying no to additional work, but one can sense the frustration practitioners felt from their comments. That said, some also recognized that the demands might be endless regardless of what resources were provided.

5.3.4 Work-life balance

In the survey portion of this research as reported in Chapter 4, about half of practitioners were generally satisfied with their work-life balance, with the remainder generally equally split between either being more or less satisfied with their work-life balance. Interview results also suggested that work-life balance could be a challenge for PR practitioners. As found in other parts of this research, technology facilitated the ability to conduct work or to be contacted to do work anytime. Practitioners felt a responsibility to be informed and responsive. The interviews allowed for a deeper probing of how practitioners felt about their work-life balance. Many reflected that they had not yet found the right balance and were unsure of what to do about this. As in other portions of this research, practitioners reflected that public relations can be a career choice that is all-encompassing and all-consuming.

> Comms is definitely a sweatshop, like there's no change, that always has been, it's one of the areas where if you're, you know, a strong, effective comms person, you're on 24/7, because there's no theoretical limit in terms of how good that presentation can be, or how much research you can do into that particular, it's kind of like you, you're exercising your

> own judgment in terms of how deep a dive you want to take on any particular issue at any point in time (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

Regardless of how they responded, practitioners seemed aware of the challenges of work-life balance in their work. For some, having no balance between work and life was a choice, even if for a time.

> So right now we are in a season of, I'm in a season of my life, where it is intense work-wise and intense, family-wise and family responsibility-wise. So definitely you know, I do not feel like I have found the right balance. And that may change, right, it may require, to be honest, a job change, which is something I'm considering (Interview 4, director, private sector).

> I don't shut off […] I need an off switch. Like, I'm looking for it. It's got to be somewhere. I wish I could turn my brain off. I don't know how I really, I really don't. It's a challenge (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

> But yeah, sometimes I've, I've just not been willing to put my own needs before that of the office (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

More specifically, practitioners identified that the technology made it difficult to set aside the work day and have balance, because the technology was there all the time and that work demands could potentially flow through them at any time.

> And so when I come home, what I really like to do is put the day aside and engage with my family. But I have a hard time turning off that side of work just because you bring it all home with you with your device. So, so much of your stress is connected to the

connectivity you have at work and you're almost, oh, when you're always connected to work, it's really hard to turn that off (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

So we, like most of us are carrying our phones essentially 24/7. We are constantly watching the news. We're constantly looking at social media, reading up on the content that we are working on just so that we are apprised of relevant issues, the different dimensions around it, so that we are doing our own jobs as effectively as possible (Interview 19, senior consultant, public sector).

But kind of, as I mentioned, where a phone can be a blessing or a curse […] It's a blessing if you can leave early and go to the beach, and maybe somebody needs to get a hold of you. But otherwise you can kind of have your afternoon. But it's a curse if you had a long day and then you get home and they can still get a hold of you (Interview 21, director, public sector).

I carry it (the smartphone) all the time. Yep. And I always check it first thing in the morning. Like, before I go to bed, I always check it, you know. I do have it with me all the time. And I did separate my personal phone and my work phone. I try. I try unsuccessfully to have that separation (Interview 22, director, private sector).

I think when I started in communications, it was a much more nine to five, kind of kind of role because I didn't take a laptop home, you know, I left my work at the office at least when I was working for the university. And so at the time, it was very much, there was a

> structured beginning and an end point to my day. But in the last, you know, 20 years as technology and (as) personal Tech has become more intertwined with what we do, it feels like my work has spread out a lot more into my personal time, as well. (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

One practitioner also identified that hybrid work conditions may have increased the expectation that practitioners would respond at all hours beyond the regular office day. It's unclear whether the work day had been extended because employees themselves were integrating their personal life commitments into the work day, which then extended the working hours, or because employers felt the expectation of response at all times.

> We have young mothers who, who, in their accommodation, ask for example: I'll be out at 3:30 I'll be back at 4:15. I gotta go pick up my kid at daycare. So for 45 minutes, that person in a frazzle is going to jump in their car, drive to daycare, make their way through the crowd of parents, grab their kid, make sure that he's okay, strapped into the back of the car, drive home as quickly as possible. Get the kid in front of the TV or you know, playing with Legos or something. And then they can get back on to finish their workday […] But the reality is that that there's an expectation that you will be reachable outside of what would normally be hours when you were in a physical office (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

Others reflected back on positions they've held in the past where they felt there was a lesser balance than in the positions they had now. The sense is that practitioners gained some comfort from the fact that things were relatively better in the new jobs, although they wished their former employers took more seriously just how hard practitioners worked. One recounted that when their former employer didn't want to lose them, they counter-offered with a plan that would have had two people doing the job the practitioner had, in order to alleviate the load. The practitioner chose in the end to take the new job where they would now enjoy what they called "decent work-life balance."

> Why wouldn't that have been offered to me beforehand, given they knew the amount of overtime I did, and how little work-life balance I had? (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

In the midst of this, there were some who identified they have made life choices consistent with a desire for better balance, or have organized their days to have better balance or at least some time set aside for their personal lives.

> And I've always said I'm not a city girl. If I wanted to be a vice-president, I'd be, you know, going downtown every day. And that wasn't, that's not the career choice and the path I wanted. So I have specifically chosen roles that I feel will give me some work-life balance. So yes, I do work a number of hours during the week, usually, you know, at least the solid eight, if not some more, and really only weekends if there's an issue, if there's something coming (Interview 24, director, private sector).

> I struggle with depressive episodes, and I need to balance like, you know, work life. And so it's easier for me to put in like an eight, nine, 10-hour day, and then take the evening to rest and recover (Interview 20, manager, public sector).

One participant also identified that work-life balance is a real challenge for working mothers in particular, and that burnout is an issue.

> I think the reality is, I hope the reality is this societal pendulum will swing, I think people will start to realize how unbelievably burnt out they are. And I think I, certainly amongst

> my cohort of, you know, I hate to say it, but middle-aged moms, and particularly those with younger kids, who are in professional roles, and whose husbands or partners are also in professional roles, there is a sentiment of burnout that is unparalleled. You know, I don't think it's anything like we've ever experienced before. Because it's the number one thing all my friends talk about all the time. You know, just how burnt out we are the fact that you know, we work a full day of work, we take care of our kids, we go back online, like the number of friends that I have that literally start work again at 7:30 or eight o'clock at night, and like literally log back onto their computer and start to do full work. Whereas I don't do that, I will reply to emails and just shoot things off. But I find I make so many mistakes at that point. And I'm so tired that I just have to fix all the mistakes the next day, so it's not worth it for me. And that is a boundary I guess I set and that's the difference between an iPhone and a computer. Right? Like I wouldn't go back into my office and turn on my computer and start to work again except under rare circumstances (Interview 4, director, private sector).

Overall, the interviews suggested that practitioners perceived there was work to do surrounding work-life balance. How much of it belonged to the practitioners and how much was something organizations needed to recognize far better was unclear. Several practitioners talked about how burnt out they felt. They seemed to long for a day where things would be different.

5.3.5 Work satisfaction

In the survey and as reported in Chapter 4, respondents indicated that they were quite positive when it came to agreement on such statements as whether they like the things they do at work and feel a sense of pride in their job. They were only slightly less strong in their agreement when it came to rating their job as enjoyable. The interviews allowed for further probing to understand where practitioners sat on work satisfaction. In particular, it allowed for better nuancing not only of how people felt about their work, but also of where they derived their satisfaction from.

5.3.5.1 PR practitioners love their jobs. Of the 25 interviewees, about a third used the word love or a variation of it in characterizing how they felt about the work that they do, and several were effusive in their characterization. Others also used language that suggested they get significant satisfaction from their work.

> It's a busy, busy profession, but you know what, I love it […] (I) thrive on it, thrive on learning new things every day, because I learn something every day (Interview 5, chief executive officer, consultancy/agency)

> I love what I do (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

> I've never worked with anybody in this field, who isn't really, really, happy that they're in it. It's not like you're sitting at a desk doing, you know, a drudgery, or finance, (or) accounting job, this is exciting work. And it attracts people who are generally creative and interested in society and societal issues. So they're curious people. And, you know, they tend to love their jobs (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

Another practitioner, who spent several years supporting a senior political office put it this way:

> If you're going to support (X), you know, you're not gonna have much free time. And you're going to lose a lot of yourself. And it's like in everything a season. And so I was happy to do that for a few years. And I loved it (Interview 9, manager, public sector)

Practitioners reflected overall that they loved or at the very least, liked their work and value the variety that it brings, and this was generally found both in the surveys and in the interviews.

5.3.5.2 Satisfaction is derived in many ways. As practitioners talked about their satisfaction it was interesting to probe about what drove satisfaction for PR practitioners. Prior to each interview, I had also cross-referenced to individual interviewees' responses on the satisfaction scale. As a result, there were instances where I probed specifically on why a respondent may have rated their satisfaction at a certain level to better understand their thinking on this point.

There was no single factor that drove high levels of satisfaction for practitioners. However, for some, there were certain aspects of the work they found particularly compelling, and this helped them reconcile some of the challenges that came with working after hours and making sacrifices surrounding work-life balance.

> If you really enjoy your work, and you enjoy the people that you work with, helping them, which is what I consider I'm doing when I'm working, it's actually for me, like it fills my bucket. So yes, there are times when it's, you know, eight o'clock at night, I'm like: oh, my goodness, like I have to send this person this thing. And I really don't want to log back online and do so. But actually, I think it is, you know, rooted fundamentally in the fact that I really enjoy my work, and I derive pleasure from it. Right? My work isn't a job that I hate and I resent and that I'm angry about. It's a job that I choose. I'm intentional about that choice. So part of it is how I view being available. Right? (Interview 4, director, private sector).

> I had no idea how I was able to do this, but you know, a series of factors come together, maybe by chance timing, interests, and it's like, oh, that's interesting. I can do something and make living from it. And so that's why I don't mind working long (hours) because I like it so much (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting)

> So I've been hiring a lot of people over the course of the last few years. And I've discovered that I just I love, I love leading a team and building a team and like mentoring young people at the different points in their career. I just, I had no idea. And I think a lot of it comes from the fact that I've had really great mentors, and now I feel like I know what to do to help, you know, pull them along, and, you know, show them, okay, these are the options of what you can do to give yourself more chances in your career. So I love that. I like that my job is very different every day. It's not boring, which is great (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

Some even seemed to identify that they derived satisfaction exactly from the things that seemed to intrude into their personal lives and were part of being hyperconnected, even if they had some cynicism about part of it.

> But I think to myself, who gives a shit if this thing happens, or doesn't happen, it's all just, you know, grass growing, you know. I kind of, with age, I sort of get a little more cynical about that stuff. But I like to be in stuff that's making news, I like to be in the middle of the play. I like to do that. So that's where I draw the satisfaction. And part of that is inherently rooted in the immediacy of the urgency, and therefore the disrespect for people's times and calendars (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

Interviewees seemed to indicate that they do like – even love – their work, and that in some ways this can mitigate – at least some of the time – some of the demands that are placed on their personal time and helps foster stronger satisfaction levels.

5.3.6 Technology and training. Public relations practitioners are often at the vanguard of using various technologies for their organization and by virtue of their role, lead with respect to the use of various social media and productivity tools. They not only use the tools but are also sometimes asked to explain them to their clients and colleagues. As noted in Chapter 2, training has been identified by technostress researchers as a potential mitigator of technostress. Respondents were asked what, if any, training they had received in using various technological tools and software. The responses generally suggested that public relations practitioners were largely left on their own and received little to no training related to the technologies they used, even though they were sometimes asked to respond to technology questions. Further research would be needed to better understand whether this was an issue of resources, whether practitioners simply didn't have the time to do extra training, whether this was a broader issue of technology training in organizations, or whether public relations practitioners were simply forgotten when training was rolled out and their role poorly understood within their organizations.

> When I got there, for my first day of work, they sat me down in front of a laptop and said: just wait for an email to come in. And that was my training. So everything I've learned about that platform has been through, off my own back, going into LinkedIn learning, looking or following the vendor's website or how-to guide. Those sorts of things. So a bit of a gap that we were communicating about a technology platform but had not received

any training on how to actually use that technology platform (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

I don't think any manager in government has received training on how to properly communicate or use technology. I don't, I've never seen it (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

So, you know, even in our organization, we have tools and things we can use. And not everybody knows how to use them. There's, you know, so, and comms tends to be this resource that people come to because they think we know everything. So, like, we get called by people to ask how to book a meeting in Outlook (Interview 20, Manager, public sector).

You know, so nobody's ever said to me: hey, like to make sure you don't contact your team or other people. You can use like the scheduling tool, or you know, this, like, nobody's ever talked to me about that. I'm not a super tech savvy person. So to be honest with you, like when you say that, I'm like, oh, yeah, I totally could do that […] And we don't you know, there are all of those like online, like tips and tools or courses about you know, how to be more productive and I'm sure there's also ones on hey, you know, to ensure you're not contacting your employees, these other things available to you. If they are, I've never heard about them, and we're certainly not sharing them within our organization (Interview 22, director, private sector).

> And well, and you know, in my previous role […], we offered I think it was a suite of about somewhere between six, eight different software packages. And there was comprehensive training on all of them. But for developers, not for users, so lots of information about the tables and the back end and support structures and things. And we don't mandate that all staff do this training. And so it was something like 14 hours of training that meant nothing to anybody except for a developer. And even for a developer hitting them with 14 hours and effort (for) two weeks when they haven't even had the chance to pop the widget. Not the most effective. So I definitely think that's an area we could improve in (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

Practitioners generally reflected that there was little training provided in organizations in how to use technology tools for productivity or other means. This may be an issue broader than the public relations function. However, it is one that practitioners themselves identified as a gap in support, an area that may require more focus to ensure consistency and not leave practitioners or other employees alone to learn how to best use the technology they use for work.

5.3.7 What causes stress

The survey conducted as part of this study used various scales as identified in Chapter 3 to assess the stress environment in which practitioners operated. In all cases, these provided an indication of how practitioners perceived their environment and the factors that were most likely to stress them. The interviews provided an opportunity to hear the voices of practitioners and gain a sense of those things they said were most stressful to them. The responses documented seemed to fall into the following areas.

5.3.7.1 The technology. Irrespective of the work itself, there were certain technological challenges that proved to be a source of frustration for some practitioners. Multi-tasking and having to attend in real time to messages on more than one platform at a time, and issues with technology not working seemed to fuel stress for some practitioners across all demographics. Much like the survey, responses did not generally seem to suggest this was a huge issue for all practitioners but could be a problem for some, some of the time, and that the problem largely revolved about not being able to deliver on their goals and objectives.

> Yeah, I mean, everything that we do is technology reliant. We had a system failure a few weeks ago, where all of our everything was down, basically. It was down and we all just sat there looking at each other. There was nothing we could do. We were absolutely paralyzed. And so when you're in, especially in a crunch period, where you're trying to get something to work or you're trying to figure something out, and something goes sideways, and you don't even know why it's super stressful because you know, people are relying on you (Interview 24, director, private sector).

> I would say that, you know, the only time I do find that you can get stressed is if there's an issue with sort of, again, some software (or) hardware stuff, which actually has to do with connectivity (Interview 5, chief executive officer, consultancy/agency).

Others also described the stress of having to keep up with all the different technological platforms, a comment that may be linked to the issue of training in use of the technology. Consultants in particular noted this as a significant challenge for them.

> And, you know, by the time you master one, like there are two new platforms that everybody seems to be flocking to. So yeah, some level of stress, I guess, just trying to keep abreast of all these different changes and trying to apply, you know, your skill set

> and knowledge base and see how that translates into a new communications platform (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

One practitioner communicated their frustration in a way that related less to the technology but had more to do with the difficulty and stress of seeking to measure the success of complex digital communication campaigns.

> I'm still not comfortable with the strategy around digital communications in terms of measurable results. And I understand how you measure all that stuff, but how does that translate to impact? And so if we have a call to action, I'm much less confident in the messaging until it's out there, and we see it working. So that's, I find that, for me, the most disconcerting piece […]. Until we launch and start, and then it's tweaking it during, when you're already in flight, which from a management standpoint is nerve-wracking for me, because I prefer to have more certainty going into the campaign (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

From these comments, one could observe that there were several elements of technology that could potentially be stressful for practitioners: reliability, the requirement to keep up with constantly changing platforms, and the challenges inherent in measuring results among them.

5.3.7.2 The job. For the majority of practitioners interviewed, aspects of the work itself and the way in which it is constructed – including the element of technology – were likely to stress practitioners. Social media and other tools to communicate with audiences were also a big factor, and practitioners had a number of thoughts and experiences to share on the topic.

Some practitioners described an almost toxic environment that existed when they communicated with audiences using social media tools, an environment in which the amount of negative response they received could at times be crushing and highly stressful. This was amplified by the fact that with the advent of social media tools, many more people had access to the information and were not shy to respond. One practitioner described how they regularly sent a message to tens of thousands of people and described an "inherent anxiety just knowing that that message is going to be consumed by that many people at a given time" (Interview 12, manager, public sector). They continued:

> It's hard to explain, though. So you spend all this time just kind of worrying about oh, did I get the message right? Did I have any typos? How's it going to be received? Am I going to have a flood of social media content? Are we going to get media calls, things like that. It's kind of an ongoing anxiety when you have the power to reach so many people (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Several also reflected on the nastiness that was sometimes conveyed by people who responded or wrote to an organization on social media, and the stress this brought when people sent vulgar or inappropriate messages. Communications practitioners seemed to sometimes be the first line when it came to receiving such messages.

> You know, it's gross, they make you feel a little bit unsafe. So if it's really I say this, because it's related to technology, and how social media has changed things. So there's that aspect as well, that adds an additional strain or additional, I guess, toll on what you do. And you can (feel this) even if you are the type of person who dismisses those, it's still gross and not good (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

Some reflected on the fact that social media and even the traditional news media environment impacted on the well-being of their teams.

> Because when a news story is one sided, or when, you know, they take part of the information that we provide, and present an article that maybe, you know, doesn't paint

> the city in the best light or doesn't paint the employer in the best light, I think they (the team) feel like they've failed, and they also feel attacked, and then, you know, they're really supportive and proud of their colleagues, they know their colleagues are doing good work. And so they take on this emotional burden (Interview 20, manager, public sector).

This same practitioner reflected that in the current environment, their view was that the news media often churned out clickbait headlines that reflected unbalanced stories in which the facts were not always checked, adding to the stress of PR practitioners. Others talked about the crippling exhaustion they sometimes felt as a result of their work.

> But when you hit sort of weeks at a time where it's just so draining like that's where I'll tank (a) little. And that means that all I do when I'm not working is sit on the couch and watch TV, because I don't have the energy to do the things that I want or like, whether it's socializing, or like hobbies, and reading. (Interview 20, manager, public sector).

Others chose to change the type of work they did because of the stress it created. Several talked about previous jobs that were far more stressful for them than the jobs they have now, as typified by the following comment:

> You know, I've been in roles where issues and crises were all I was doing. Like it was just constant taking hits, taking hits, and I was sleeping with my phone on the pillow next to me. Now, I don't do those jobs anymore, because it's way too stressful. (Interview 24, director, private sector).

When asked, the same practitioner described what happens to them when they feel overly stressed in the workplace.

> I feel my heart rate going up, I feel my body temperature going up, I feel very hot. I have had panic attacks before, where I've had to run out of the workplace, which was very stressful, because you don't want to be that way at work. But I've also allowed myself the space for those because if you don't go through them, then that stress lives in your body and builds up and builds up. (Interview 24, director, private sector).

The occasional practitioner also reflected that there could be an ebb and flow in communications where there were busier periods and others quieter times, which then allowed practitioners to catch their breath and recover from some of their stress.

> Il y a des journées tu pédales plus parce que t'es un peu en maudit, parce que la journée était pas bonne. D'autres journées, c'est plus relax. Il fait beau, je m'en viens tranquillement, j'ai plus de temps. Donc pour moi c'est un gros, un gros facteur pour permettre de faire sortir la pression (Interview 17, director, public sector).

In summary, practitioners reflected that of the many factors of the job, one that was likely to stress them was the incivility that was sometimes encountered in communicating with audiences in the era of social media. Tools have allowed messages to be disseminated more broadly, however that also means that there is greater interaction with audiences and not all of it is necessarily pleasant, according to practitioners.

5.3.7.3 Fear of missing information. For the occasional practitioner the sheer amount of information available proved to be a source of stress. Practitioners described how they worried about not knowing enough or not having enough information to support their clients.

> What's most likely to stress me is that I haven't read enough because the volume is incredible of news and information. And the pace of change is incredible, hasn't stopped or slowed down. Probably since the beginning of social media. I tell students, that there

> was a time when I knew how to do my job. Like I knew everything I needed to know about doing my job. At least I felt that way (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting)

Practitioners were also concerned that they might have missed receiving information they needed because the algorithms were not serving up the information to them.

> Like, a common one is like if I Google something, and it doesn't show up, but it shows up for somebody else. And I'm like, I know it exists in the world, I just can't find it. (Interview 19, senior consultant, public sector).

The idea that information practitioners needed was not available to them and that others may have had access to it is something that a few practitioners reflected they were concerned about. No doubt all practitioners deal with this to some extent given how information is organized through the technology. One could argue that this risk existed even in the past when most of the news was delivered via newspapers or a limited number of media. The issue today may be that there is so much information, delivered in so many different ways, that it can be hard to keep up.

5.3.8 What does it mean to feel connected

As part of the interviews, one of the questions that was probed a little further focused on better understanding what the experience of technostress felt like. What did it mean to practitioners to be potentially available to do work anytime? How did they define that sense of constant connectivity? While there were no clear overall patterns that emerged among the majority of practitioners, several talked about what the experience felt like to them.

Some practitioners described an environment in which it was literally at times never possible to shut off, even during sleep or when participating in other activities with family. They described a state where work and private time were enmeshed, or indistinguishable. One practitioner mentioned that the night before the interview for this study, they were answering e-mails at 3 a.m. when they woke up to go to the bathroom.

> Like, I woke up and I was like, and you say to yourself, don't check your phone, check your phone, it doesn't matter, right. Like, it's just, I'm just getting up to go the bathroom in the middle of the night. But then I feel this draw to check it, which is like a weird psychological thing […] And then before you know it, you're sucked into that vortex of the work world. And so this idea that, you know, there's work times and family times, like that is indistinguishable in my life (Interview 4, director, private sector).

The presence of the technology itself was also as a reminder of constant connection, which made it difficult for some to be fully present in their personal life.

> But let's start with that in its worst form, it means instead of coming home and compartmentalizing my day, I feel like I always have one foot in the office wherever I am (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Another described a situation that had occurred when playing with their child and how even if they did not respond, messages took up mental space. These types of comments suggested that the inability to totally disconnect in the personal sphere created an environment where practitioners did not feel fully present at any time in one or other sphere, whether or not they engaged in responding to the communication, as described below

> And even if it's not something that I need to respond to right away, once it comes in, and I see it, (I'm) thinking about it. And sometimes it is something that I need to respond to right away because the people I work with, they're always on (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

Practitioners also talked about how difficult it was to turn off. A consultant who always had their technology with them described the reality they worked with daily, where they did need to be constantly available.

> And then, of course, the other thing that it does is it forces you to be constantly available. We're in a two-person consultancy, you know, we have to juggle multiple clients. We have lots of retainer clients who expect us to be available, that's part of the bargain, then we'll have project clients that may require an immediate urgency because they brought us on because they have a problem and it's moving on a clock. Whatever it is a combination of those things tend to force me to be, you know, pretty attentive, pretty responsive at all times, and technology enables me to do that. But then, of course, it has all the stress factors that that you would expect. And sometimes it can be a tension as you're trying to juggle a home and other stuff (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

The sense of the constant need to be responsive is one some suggested had been fuelled in part by a global world in which events anywhere can trigger a communications practitioner to start thinking about whether their organization should respond, or how it would handle a similar event. One education practitioner referred to earthquakes far away, or school shootings reported upon in the media, as examples of how the thinking loop started and a state of hypervigilance took hold:

> Like there's, you know, there's always something going on (in) social media and even things like that are happening in another part of the world […] So something can be happening across the world, and it still has, you know, an impact on the comms team, or the, you know, the shooting in in Michigan (where there was a mass shooting at Michigan State University in 2023), like it's, it's not that it impacted us, but it started to

> have me thinking about oh my god, what would we be doing if we had a shooter on campus? (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

This same practitioner described what in practical terms it meant to their use of technology after hours and how it affected them. Their comment around the fear of missing something also touched on other comments in this chapter about social media and the potential impact that viewing divisive comments may have on practitioners.

> So I have to scan because I want to make sure that I don't get caught out that I've missed something. So it is, it is, you know, pretty constant. And I know, like, even before I go to bed at night, I might just, you know, quickly go through the regular sites that I follow on Twitter, just to make sure nothing's happening. And it's not necessarily a good thing, because you know, Twitter is really toxic. So, you know, you look at that before you go to bed. And, you know, not that great for you, for your mental health. (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

A couple of practitioners mentioned that the constant and heavy flow of information made them feel like they were drinking from a firehose, an expression that suggested a constant and strong stream of unending water coming at them with little opportunity to temper or control the flow. One practitioner talked about how they found it more difficult to focus, and the difficulties that state created for them.

> And I do think technology is a big part of that. Like, we're just we're constantly drinking from a firehose, you know, the Internet and social media. The way we get our news now, it's just, it's constant information. And I don't know if our brains evolved to deal with that much all the time. So yeah, I think I'm struggling to deal with that sometimes (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

Another also used the same expression to describe a position they held just prior to their current one, which afforded them a bit better balance.

> What's the expression, drinking out a firehose? That's where I was before. Now it's nice just to focus on a few things and trying to ace them (Interview 9, Manager, public sector).

For the most part, practitioners reflected that they saw both sides of the equation in that technology allowed them to respond anywhere, anytime and therefore also provided flexibility. One practitioner even defined the ability to be available at all times as part of practitioners' "value proposition," one that hopefully would allow for more private time eventually as a career evolved and their work became so good that people would be willing to wait for it rather than always expect immediate response.

> And if you're really talented, you hope, but young and inexperienced, you will hope that your work ethic will provide you with the opportunity to demonstrate your talent. And then over time, your availability may not have to be quite so ubiquitous, because you'll have shifted your value proposition into the work that you provide, not just the fact that you are available to do that work whenever asked […] Like there's that, that hope and expectation, you know. Of course, it implies that the marketplace can distinguish between good and bad. And sometimes I question that (Interview 10, Contractor, independent practitioner).

They also identified that the job is busy, and that the day could consist at times of one long string of meetings.

> Most of my day is filled with meetings. So I try as best as possible to make good use of that time, or to ask a lot of questions about what (are) those meetings, the purpose of those meetings, what I can contribute. Or maybe, maybe I can skip a few of them or send

> someone else from my team or anywhere else. But for the most part, I'm in meetings all day long […] And I might get a break for lunch. But lately, we've been booked over lunch as well. And then I'm running into meetings. I try to have them end the day by four o'clock so that I can then just, you know, keep track of moving forward some of the key points, the key projects or priorities that I'm trying to work on, getting back to the more urgent emails or forwarding them off to other people who can better respond to them. And then my day ends, usually between five and 5:30, if I'm lucky (Interview 6, director, public sector).

In describing what it was like to feel connected, practitioners described a sense of business, constant connectedness and a certain frantic quest to always be as informed as possible. This is consistent with what researchers described as characteristics of the hypermodern society as identified in Chapter 2 and discussed in Chapter 6.

5.3.9 Hours of work

5.3.9.1 Flexibility. It might be tempting to assume that most practitioners began to work remotely with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, but this would be misguided based on the responses received from those interviewed for this study. Consultants, for example, said they often worked remotely to one extent or another, unless they were on-site at a customer location. Several of those interviewed also indicated that their companies had been functioning remotely or in a hybrid model for a number of years, even before the pandemic, most often with some kind of hybrid model or even remote model.

In a country as large as Canada with six time zones, it is also not surprising that some practitioners’ work was impacted by the fact that they dealt with different time zones not only domestically, but globally, as they completed their work. Many practitioners commented on the fact that they liked the flexibility that came with technology as it facilitated the ability to do work anytime and anywhere. Those interviewed conveyed significant appreciation for this as it was something they valued greatly in their jobs. At the same time, practitioners critically reflected upon the corollary and the two-edged nature of what flexibility has brought. It has meant that practitioners may always need to be available to work. For some this was seen as an issue, for others, it was perceived as part of what came with being a public relations practitioner.

> The flexibility that I have here is what I like. A big bonus of this job for me. So again, I work a lot, online a lot, but there's nobody kind of monitoring my comings and goings. No one's walking by this office at 8:30 or nine and registering whether I'm here or not. (Interview 2, director, private sector).

> We are gifted, and I do consider it a gift, the flexibility to work the hours that work best for us. But as part of that the expectations are extremely high (Interview 2, director, private sector).

> What I do like about working from home is that you know, I can get up and I can be at my computer at eight o'clock. And I'll go right through to one and then have a meeting. But then I could take an hour or two in the afternoon and just do some other stuff. So in between doing meetings, maybe I'm doing laundry or I know I can make my lunch because I'm at home so I like that flexibility (Interview 3, manager, public sector).

> And what you buy in flexibility, you lose in terms of it feels like you can never truly look away (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

> So it can result in added pressure, it depends on how you frame it. For me being more connected all the time is better, it's better for me to do my job, it's better for me to just always know what's going on, and to always be reachable (Interview 24, director, private sector).

> So like, I could go to my parents out of town for a week if I wanted to, if I needed to be with them, and work from there. So that's a plus, right? It's given me more flexibility in that sense. It's also given us more ways to communicate with people. And then, you know, on the downside, I mean, it really does make me available all the time. It also for me, like there's a digital equity piece that sure we have technology, but not everybody has the same skills or access to this technology (Interview 20, manager, public sector).

Another practitioner who said they very much appreciated the flexibility in work hours and the ability to pick up their child from daycare or take them on an outing was conflicted about the number of extra hours they worked as part of the bargain.

> I have very mixed feelings about it. I don't like it, I feel like I should either get paid more, and to recognize the additional hours that I work. Or I should (get) or I need help. I need somebody else working with me. On the flip side of that we have a three-year old and she's in daycare. And when I say that I need to leave early to pick her up for whatever reason, or if I need to start later and I don't have an in-person meeting, nobody says a thing. (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

A number of practitioners seemed to have learned to embrace a work day that was molded throughout the day by both their work and life commitments. They appreciated the flexibility technology brought. They also seemed to compose with it and to a certain extent understand that it is part of the work, but they were aware of the downsides in terms of their time. Some did have mixed feelings and a sense that perhaps the current arrangement was not equitable.

5.3.9.2 Evening and weekend work. As part of the interviews, practitioners were also asked to talk about their work schedules, in order to gain an understanding of what work engagement was required on their part in the evenings and on weekends, and to probe more specifically on questions around work hours that were asked in the survey and reported upon in Chapter 4.

While there were not many quotations specifically referencing weekend or evening work, it seemed generally understood by practitioners that weekend and evening work was part of the work of the public relations practitioner as described in other sections. Where it was mentioned, it seemed to follow the following broad themes:

5.3.9.2.1 Availability. One respondent harkened back to about 20 years ago, where they said it was possible to work 9 to 5 in communication, go home afterwards, and enjoy weekends off. Now practitioners spoke of responding to e-mails from facilities around the world at all hours, answering messages during their children's sports practices or games and firing off multiple responses to e-mails on the weekend.

> But in the last, you know, 20 years as technology and personal tech has become more intertwined with what we do, it feels like my work has spread out a lot more into my personal time, as well (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

Practitioners said they sometimes felt that the requirement to be available could be a bit of a one-way street, with some employers expecting after-hours work, but not granting employees the flexibility they needed during the work day. Practitioners felt this applied in particular to certain industries and environments, such as in education, where teachers worked on site so the expectations were that other staff would too.

> So when I talked about the tether versus the access, there's a general notion that I should be there between eight and 4:30. But then they can still get me after hours. Whereas I think, personally, anyway, there's a little bit of an argument to be made that, okay, what if it's slow, and I leave, you could still get a hold of me, and I can still do my work, basically, with a phone. I mean, I can even update our district website with my phone. But there's still that kind of like, well, you should still be in the office, you know, but you still have your phone because later we might have to get hold of you. So it's one way maybe (Interview 21, director, public sector).

In a number of instances, interview responses reflected in general that the world of the public relations practitioner requires availability beyond the regular work day.

5.3.9.2.2 Lack of options. Practitioners also painted a picture of a profession where there were few options when it came to responding to evening or weekend work, and some described a work environment of “soft pressure” to be available and get work done during personal time.

> They need things by certain deadlines. Sometimes it's even outside of their control. They ask me for help. And they're like, this is the deadline, and you do the work back plan. And you realize this is not possible if I don’t work evenings and weekends, right? So it’s soft pressure (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

> Well, comms is kind of like an always on function, right? So if something comes up, you know, you kind of have to drop everything (Interview 22, director, private sector).

Sometimes weekend and evening work was something practitioners willingly engaged in or had difficulty resisting. Practitioners said they chose to be on to keep up with what was going on in the world and in their workplace. They did this as part of their job, while recognizing that being available all the time may not necessarily be healthy and did blur the boundaries between work and life as was noted earlier. Some also learned to adjust as they gained experience, as identified by the interviewee below.

> And however, if something, you know, is urgent, or if there's a big project that I just cannot manage to get done during the work day, I will use that time to work on that project. But I try really hard not to, I used to, I used to work at night after the kids went to bed. But then just again, you know, the pandemic just kind of helped to show me that, you know, hang on a second here, I'm already working 12 to 15 hours, and I like to go to bed early and wake up early. So you know, I'm going to do that and communicate that with people (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> Well, right now, I don't have any time to do my own work during regular business hours. I am so busy managing people, responding to them, reviewing their work, filling holes, and staffing, in some cases, taking all the things that just come in that I can't get to my own, like my inbox right now, it was a nightmare. And I'm like, okay, well, I'm just gonna have to work after hours to sort out my inbox. Because if I can't get on top of that, I don't know what else I'm missing. So there's definitely a need to do lots of things after hours. And I tend to do that by logging in early, working through lunch and signing off late. Because I still want to be able to disconnect at some point and not have to come back to the work in my evening (Interview 20, manager, public sector).

In their responses, practitioners communicated a certain frustration with being available at all times to respond to work demands. Even if they did have limited choices, the choice was to continue to work in certain ways. They made decisions about how their day would flow to allow for disconnection, some of the time, even if the disconnection times fell at different times. Sometimes they used evenings to get ahead of demands that occurred during the day. Either way, they communicated that the work for some practitioners definitely could not routinely be constrained into regular work hours.

5.3.9.2.3 Technology as enabler. Some practitioners felt the technology could help them to be more efficient, even when it did interfere with personal time after work hours.

> Like, okay, I'm sitting here at my kid's, son's basketball practice, and I'm sending emails, but like, when I was his age, my parents dropped me off at the door. Like we'll see you in an hour. I don't know. Am I stuck in the technology or am I trying to be efficient with my time in the midst of a very busy stage of life? (Interview 2, director, private sector).

> Yeah, so it's often, you know, like that catching up on emails, because that is the only time that I can do it. So going through my stuff or reviewing stuff that I was supposed to get to the week before, so that my staff can continue going, like continue their work. I don't want to hold them up and make them late on things when we have processes in place that require me to do reviews, and they're waiting on me. So I always try to like I prioritize their deadlines. And those are driven by the organization. So again, that just means that all of the work I need to do and even organizing myself and planning my week ahead to try and make it less messy has to happen outside of my work hours (Interview 20, manager, public sector).

Some practitioners also voiced the hope that as the number of female practitioners at higher management levels increased, there might be a greater understanding of the pressures that many practitioners faced.

> But even now, like there are male VPs who don't seem to grasp that people have lives outside of their work hours. But I do find that our female ones do, like there's more of an understanding of, you know, family demands and work-life balance from female leadership. And hopefully what that means is well, as we get closer to equity in leadership positions, there will be a greater grasp of that. Yeah, because it's, it's, I just think it's wrong to expect people to respond at six o'clock in the morning. Like, unless the building's on fire, it can wait. We need to have that perspective (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

Practitioners communicated that the technology was an enabler, in that it could help them be more efficient, either with respect to their own work or that of their staffs. A lot of this work was done outside of the regular work day. But practitioners also spoke about the expectations of response that some managers had, suggesting that it may be one thing when practitioners chose themselves to use the technology to their advantage to enhance productivity and efficiency, but that it may be more of an intrusion for them if there was an automatic expectation of practitioners being responsive, no matter the time of day.

5.3.10 Vacation

One can posit that the ability to detach from ICTs during vacation time also reduces the extent to which work interferes with life. More recently and as noted in Chapter 2, there have also been some studies around the idea of employees taking vacations in harder to reach locations or even in “dead zones” where one cannot be reached at all. What public relations practitioners do with their technology while they are on vacation is relevant to discussions of technostress and work-life balance. Therefore, this study sought to better understand what practitioners' relationship was to the technology they used for work purposes while they were exercising their right to vacation from the workplace. How well were practitioners able to detach or resist? How strong were the boundaries between work and life during vacation time? What strategies, if any, did practitioners use to be able to focus on vacations and not work? These were some of the questions that motivated a desire to probe deeper on this question as part of the interviews.

5.3.10.1 General thoughts on vacation time. No respondents indicated that they did not take vacation. Everyone, when asked, was able to provide more information about what they did with their technology and for work during vacation. A few also provided some general context on their views or concerns surrounding vacation in general.

> I have this many (vacation days) in a year and I will make sure that I take all my vacation days because I do value that time away from work, even liking my job, I still want to be able to go away, go on vacations, spend time with family. So I do make sure I do that (Interview 21, director, public sector).

Another practitioner, who routinely got contacted while on vacation, spoke longingly of a time before cell phones.

> You know, talk about the days like, oh, my God, what did we do before we had cell phones? Well, it was nice, because you could actually go on vacation and somebody couldn't contact you. Whereas these days, that does not happen at all. Like a vacation is not sacred time anymore? (Interview 22, director, private sector).

The same practitioner reflected that working in public relations made it far more difficult for practitioners to disconnect, even during vacation time, because of the management expectations of the job.

> So it's just at this level, it's expected that you are available, even though you know, the company says: no, everybody take care of yourself. You're expected to be able to do that. And it's, it comes with the turf. So there are ways that I, you know, cope with it. But it's very difficult at this level to disengage and go dark for very long. (Interview 22, director, private sector).

One practitioner noted the timing of when they chose to take vacation, in order to allow themselves a break from the work. It was interesting to hear that this was an exercise of the will for this practitioner, not something the employer considered.

> I planned my vacation around times that would also support me having a break from being always on. But that was me, on my own without the university's support. (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

For some, learning how to disconnect from the technology while on vacation was something that became easier with experience and the desire to set clearer boundaries.

> Oh, you know, some people can draw that boundary and say, you know, no, I'm on vacation. I've gone both ways. I've worked full vacations, and I've sat there, you know (in a relative's house outside the country), taking phone calls. For work, I have done it. I think I did that when I was younger in my career. I think I draw that line a little bit better now (Interview 24, director, private sector).

Others identified that they took vacation only when they were near the point of burnout and exhaustion. They recognized it would be better to be more proactive about taking time off.

> So I'm taking a vacation next week for no other reason than I need to use up vacation time. And it would be good to have a break, like stopping that practice of I need a vacation because I'm exhausted and burned out and grumpy to more preventative, preventing that kind of feeling and taking them (vacations) pre-emptively (Interview 13, manager, public sector).

Overall, there seemed to be recognition that the practice and society have evolved in such a way that technology for work purposes has creeped into personal time, even while on vacation.

> So it's a little bit more, I think intrusive into what used to be just totally personal time. But we've, it's happened. So gradually, we've just kind of become or I've become used to it over time. And I think it actually becomes a little bit more difficult when you go on vacation to completely extricate yourself from the work world because we're just so used to it being woven into our day-to-day lives (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

Practitioners reflected that the intrusion of technology demands into vacation time were a factor, although the extent to which this was an issue for practitioners varied. Practitioners did take their vacations, but their ability to get a break from work was something they recognized as potentially difficult. The remainder of this section will examine further the specific strategies practitioners used (or not) when they took vacation, and how some of these strategies allowed them to resist of emancipate themselves from the demands of their work.

5.3.10.2 Leaving the country or vacationing in harder-to-reach zones. In concert with more recent writing on digital-free tourism and technology dead zones, there were several practitioners who reflected that they strategically chose to vacation in places where they were either harder to reach or so far away that they could make the case that they would not be reachable. This appeared to be a form of emancipation that involved practitioners removing themselves geographically and very intentionally from the hub bub of day-to-day demands as a PR practitioner. Many practitioners seemed to see the geographic distancing as a way to make sense of the message they delivered to their organizations about their vacation time, even if some of the locations they vacationed in might sometimes have Internet or Wi-Fi access they could use.

> That's how I disconnect, I would travel. I said, you need to know I will not be looking at my email, you will not be able to reach me I will be out of the country. I'll be on a ship […] And they survived (Interview 3, manager, public sector).
>
> We went to Brazil for two and-a-half weeks in the summer [….] I said, I will not be reachable. And people said: okay. And I was not reachable. I had like, didn't answer my phone (Interview 15, manager, public sector).
>
> Yeah, I actually took three weeks last fall, and it was overseas. So like, if I'd brought my work phone, it would have cost them a fortune. But I was like, no. I am on vacation for three weeks. And I am not thinking about any of you or checking in. And I said and if you do reach out to me, while I'm on vacation, we better see the fire from space (Interview 20, manager, public sector).
>
> I definitely disconnect from the need to (access technology), especially if I'm traveling overseas, and on a spectacular holiday or something where I just don't want to be bothered. I actually send a note to all my clients: I'm going to be away from this time period to that time period. And I only have limited access to Wi-Fi. So I won't be

> responding much. I will, I will look at them when I have Wi-Fi but I let them know it's not going to be fast (Interview 25, independent consultant, consulting).

> I can say, like, we go to a place in Algonquin Park every year, and it is a no, doesn't have any signal at all (Interview 5, Chief executive officer, consultancy/agency).

That said, sometimes even when trying to disconnect, for some the connection to society and in particular technology intrusion was hard to escape.

> I'm trying to think of an example of where I've been completely and totally off the grid, and I can't really think of them. I'm a hunter. So I do try to take a week off in November and go out into the forest and disconnect. But I'm not far enough in the wild that I don't have a cell phone connection (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> Unless you've completely unplugged, and we are really good about making sure people take vacation and (are) really unplugging, like, that's kind of a cultural ethos that we have on our specific unit that we've tried to build. So that's important. It's just when you're away, but here, like in country, it's, there's sort of an expectation, you have like, oh, yeah, if I needed to talk to this person, I know, I could get a hold of them. (Interview 13, manager, public sector).

Responses seemed to reflect an almost unwritten rule that may exist in the PR workplace in Canada, one that suggested that even in organizations that valued time off, it was acceptable to reach out to someone on vacation, especially if they were a manager and if they were vacationing within the country at the time. This might also help explain why some practitioners strategically removed themselves to take vacations outside the country, a way to strategically mark themselves as truly “absent” and therefore unreachable by the workplace.

5.3.10.3 Turning off the technology. As found in the survey research that examined the technology tools practitioners used, some practitioners had only one phone that they used for both work and personal purposes. Others had both a work phone and a personal phone and sometimes made decisions about connection during vacation by turning off the work phone.

> I have a personal phone and I have a work phone because I like to keep them separate. So I said I'm not bringing my work phone with me. And I did that like. I turned it off, let the battery drain for two and-a-half weeks. I was just completely, completely disconnected from work. It was awesome. It was, it was awesome. Like I felt like I was off for over a month. Like it just felt like you know freedom for a long, long time (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

> If you take a few days off at home or a week off at home, and you're you know you're around, people are like, well, I can call you if I need you again. I turned my work phone off. So even if I'm off for one day, I turn the work phone off. If it's so urgent, again, people have my personal number. And I just find that shift for people makes them think: oh, how much do I really need to tell (x) this right now? Why do I need to reach out to (x) on her day off on her personal phone to say this? Like even that is just a little bit of a pause and consider moment for others in how urgent it really is (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

However, the strategy of simply turning off the work phone was more the exception, with other strategies more commonly used as noted below.

5.3.10.4 Providing limited access. Several practitioners indicated that where possible, they unplugged from work technology during vacation to the extent that they identified one person who could reach them in the event of an emergency, delegated work to other staff members during their vacation or would respond to staff and clients only if it was a last resort and others couldn't resolve the issue on their own.

> And for the first time, I will be going away next week, where I've said to everyone, I'm not going to be reachable, I'm not going to be. I'll have my phone with me to take pictures sometimes. But I'm not going to check into email. And I've got backups in place of staff and various other people that people should be able to reasonably go to. And if they just absolutely wouldn't, cannot figure something out. Like if my, if one of my managers cannot figure something out, and she gives me a text saying, I cannot figure this out, I'm so sorry, then I would pay attention to that (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> During the COVID pandemic, I was able to get approval to hire a communications officer. So when I'm away on vacation, or when I'm out of the office, we can, I can delegate, certainly a lot more than I used to be able to. But because I'm at the managerial level, they're still levels of crises that require my expertise. And that may be required while I'm on vacation, or while I'm otherwise supposed to be off (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> I would say I try very hard again to model good behavior and not check email. But people, my assistant for example, knows how to reach me and I try to tell people (to) just go through her […] There'll be fewer messages and fewer distractions. And I won't really

> have to look as often, but I know if she's calling that it's important […] I think a strategy is to try to identify right a point person and that's sort of how I handle it (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

> The other strategy is to use the opportunity when you're away to give someone else a stretch opportunity. So I'll try to name not just here's who you can re-route email to, but here's who is acting in my absence. So that people can feel like, Oh, I got a chance to be in an acting role, even if it's for a week. But I found that helps, too. Because then people, you know, they really save up the requests for when you're back if it's something big. But you know, 90% of the time it can really be handled (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

Those interviewed on this topic suggested that having extra staff, having back up support while on vacation, and identifying a point person while on vacation who could reach them if necessary were all strategies employed by some public relations practitioners.

5.3.10.4 Taking advantage of slow times. This strategy was reflected particularly by those working in organizations where there were periods of time where work was less busy or when there were organization-wide pauses. Practitioners working in education, for example, found that generally it was much more possible to disconnect during vacation in the summer given that the rest of the organization was experiencing downtime, although practitioners could still be called to do work occasionally during their vacation time.

> During the two pandemic summers, those were years, those were summers, where my professionals in my sector normally do a lot of our disconnecting and do a lot of our staying away from the office. And those two summers were unique in that a lot of

> information was still coming out during the summer. And our families remained engaged in issues that they generally like a break from as well. Families, parents, educators, unions, everybody likes a break in the summer in education. So very typically summers are, are much better. And even in the end, I can have the occasions where I'm not interrupted. I still bring my technology and I might fit in a call or two (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> And I have to say that there's a big difference when you're on vacation, or when your entire company is on vacation. When your entire company is on vacation, you get to relax more, 10 times more, because nobody's looking for you. Everybody's off. It's a great feeling. It's very freeing (Interview 24, director, private sector).

> I do have the same phone and I can be reached. That said, I mostly plan my vacation around what would normally be the school year anyway. So I predominantly take my time in the summer, I take some time at Christmas, I'll take a week at spring break. And so they are generally times that things shouldn't be busy anyway (Interview 21, director, public sector).

The idea of taking vacation at slower times organizationally was a practice that some practitioners in some industries could take advantage of some of the time. For example, those working in political environments such as the Government of Canada could choose to take vacation while the House of Commons was not sitting, although this might limits peoples' access to when they might take vacation time. As identified by the practitioners themselves, those working in education may have better opportunities to have a break in the summer or at

Christmastime, although the pandemic and other crises demonstrated that there is not always the opportunity for managers to globally disconnect and have certainty they will never be contacted. Another factor that was examined in the interviews was what practitioners did with their work technological devices when they were on vacation.

5.3.10.5 Presence of technology. A majority of those interviewed did reflect that they had their technological devices with them, and were available to do work if needed, even during their vacation time. This was largely to respond to emergencies.

> And the reason why is because if I had to respond to an emergency, or while I, while I'm on vacation, it's easier to have the tools that I know how to use (rather than) to try to scramble and ask somebody else to use their computer or if I'm at a hotel or something scrambling. So I tend to bring my board assistive devices, my laptop, and my phone with me wherever I go, regardless of where I am on vacation (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> I take my phone with me. And I usually, I usually take my laptop with me, because I'm part of a group that if we have some kind of an emergency situation on campus, then I would need to be involved in emergency messaging. So I go on vacation, but I might be called back in. I tend to take my laptop to a cottage too if we go up there on the weekends. So I'm, I guess I'm not very good at shutting it off (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

Those interviewed reflected that having their work technology with them could be an advantage at times when needing to respond to emergencies. This allows practitioners to still largely be on vacation but to be available should the requirement arise.

5.3.10.6 Use of technological features. A number of practitioners also made use of the features available through the technology to reduce the extent to which they may feel connected or called to respond during their vacation. This included turning off apps they didn't plan to use on their vacation, turning off notifications, blocking out time, or marking themselves away in software such as Outlook or Teams. This didn't necessarily mean practitioners wouldn't respond while on holidays, but it made it more likely to reduce the number of requests or inquiries that came in.

> So I have to just remember, if I'm going on vacation, I have to like remember today, I need to turn off Outlook on my phone, or that thing's gonna keep pinging. And depending on the nature of my vacation, there's a potential to get sucked into something. But again, that's like twice a year, I have to be like, oh, yeah, I'm just going to turn off my, like, turn down the notifications on that (Interview 2, director, private sector).

> And when I'm on vacation, I do go into my settings, and I turn the notifications off (Interview 6, director, public sector).

That said, turning off notifications or other settings didn't necessarily mean practitioners wouldn't respond, just that there were safeguards in place so that the technology was not constantly beckoning.

> I will do things like set my status and chat to away, I'll block off the entire period that I'm away so that everybody cannot drop a meeting on top of it, or at least not without realizing that I'm not around for it. I will for about two weeks, before I go on vacation, I will put a note in my signature to say that I will be on vacation between this date (and) this date, and reach out to my boss, if you have an issue. Tackling outside that date, I also have an automatic reply set up during that period [….] To those strategies, I guess,

minimize the amount coming in. But when something did come in, I still responded to them (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

One practitioner also mentioned that they set up their e-mail so that many non-urgent items would simply go their junk mail, items they may or may not have looked at later on upon return.

Donc j'essaie d'automatiser au maximum certaines fonctions comme ça j'ai pas besoin de m'en occuper. Même chose quand je suis en vacances. Il y a des affaires que ça monte tout de suite dans la corbeille. Je sais pas, je regarderai, les regarderai même pas. Je suis en vacances (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Finally, the occasional practitioner made a concerted effort to not respond while on vacation because they felt it was important to role model behaviour to other staff, so that they would be encouraged to disconnect entirely while on vacation.

I really try to model good behavior, if I'm on vacation, especially now that we're not in lockdown. Even if it's just for a day or a half-day, I will not get back to emails. I won't, (but) if I make a boo boo and check my email while I'm on vacation, which I shouldn't do [….] then I don't let anybody know. Because I don't want my staff or other staff members or other people to think, oh, that's just what we're supposed to do while we're on vacation. We're supposed to check emails, she checked emails, right? I don't like that. I don't like it when I get an out of office reply saying I'm on vacation. Oh, here's a reply to our email. We should respect one another more than to expect them to reply to an email while on vacation (Interview 6, director, public sector).

However, this approach was reported very infrequently. As will be seen elsewhere in this research, practitioners at the management level tended to more often continue to respond even while away from the office in order to unburden more junior staff from the requirement to do so. What was far more common was that practitioners took their technology on vacation with them and would at least occasionally check their technology. One practitioner even noted that having their technology with them at all times was an advantage, in the cases when they were called to respond.

> But those calls are actually stress reducing, because I can easily manage a quick situation with a phone call, or by dialing in to a quick video chat, and then unpack and go back to my vacation type of thing, right? So sometimes the technology, the ability to take your technology with you is a benefit. And it does reduce your anxiety. Because you're able to do your role, but then quickly get back to your vacation or get back to disconnecting. (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Overall, while some practitioners found ways to be less available to respond to work demands during vacation time, there were times where having technological devices available was seen as useful and advantageous. And while taking vacation could not in and of itself be considered a form of resistance or emancipation from technological devices, some of the ways in which practitioners set boundaries or safeguards so as to not be constantly at the beck and call of their technological devices I feel were a form of resistance. The strongest form of resistance to my mind was embodied by the practitioners who deliberately chose to vacation in places they could not be reached, so as to be totally free of intrusions. About 1 in 5 interviewees indicated was a strategy they had used. For the rest it seemed that practitioners were available in some way, even in a reduced capacity, during their vacation time.

5.3.11 The right to disconnect

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the idea that employees should have a right to disconnect from technological devices during non-work times has become more prevalent in recent year, with discussion occurring in various countries around the globe. While data was gathered in the survey on whether a) practitioners felt organizations would support a right to disconnect for PR practitioners and b) whether practitioners felt, independent of what their organizations might indicate, whether there should be a right to disconnect for them and reported upon in Chapter 4, this question was probed further in the interviews to gain additional insights into this topic. Some interesting insights emerged with respect to how practitioners viewed this right, not only for them, but for their teams. The following lines of reasoning emerged.

5.3.11.1 Views on the right to disconnect. Most interview participants indicated that they thought it should be possible to disconnect, at least some of the time, in PR and were supportive of this right for their employees. Some were already familiar with the Ontario legislation but as will be seen further, some organizations also seemed less committed to enforcing it than others.

> And so, so yes, a senior executive, even in the PR field should be able to disconnect if he or she is properly developing their staff. Now, there are times when you you've got to be around and you should be on the phone. And if the CEO needs you, you need, it's part of the job. But it should be the exception. Right. And I don't think that's necessarily technology driven. I think that’s the way it is, I think that's the way that modern managers, you know, have been trained (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

That said, practitioners indicated disconnection can be logistically difficult for several reasons and communicated that some of the strategies used were ineffective.

> So we've been struggling, people want to have, like in emails, add a line to the email signature that says, you know, I choose to work flexibly, and, you know, don't respond to this, if you're not working, or whatever. Well, first of all, the bottom of an email, that's useless. Second of all, not everybody in our organization gets to choose the hours that they work like, we are a city, there are lots of people on shifts, and lots of people that need to be available during certain hours. So it seems like it's just the luxury afforded to some (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

The same practitioner also talked about the lack of equity that on-call systems can have, and that managers are often those who did not get much chance to not be on call.

> And then a municipality, we need people available all of the time. But does everybody need to be available all the time? Can we set up parameters, can we have shifts, so even you know, we have an on-call rotation on our team? And because those are unionized staff that are on call, the managers have to be backup on call just in case something bigger comes up, or they don't know how to deal with it. And there are only two managers on my team. So basically, my co-manager and I are on call, like, often on call every two weeks or backup on call. So then we're really not able to disconnect. Right. So yeah, technology. Great. It helps and, and it doesn't (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

So while respondents believed that PR practitioners should be able to disconnect, one could also observe clearly from these initial comments that there were logistical and other challenges that made it difficult. The following identifies several of these difficulties that were identified through the interviews.

5.3.11.2 Resources. Technology has allowed organizations and employees to be responsive at all hours and to respond in cases of emergencies. However, for the most part, it would seem that organizations still function with traditional core hours of work that do not take into account time zones, the global environment, a social media world that operates 24/7, climate change and other emergencies or crises that do not respect formal hours of work. Communicators have also long felt that they are under-resourced and under-appreciated for the work they do. Several respondents reflected upon this in their comments as was previously expanded upon in the section on resources and staffing.

5.3.11.3 Union vs. non-union status. While not a new issue, the right to disconnect seems to have highlighted, in the Canadian workplace at least, the fact that this right may be in practice more feasible and enforceable for unionized employees. This was linked by some respondents to the issue of resources, as collective agreements usually have provisions for after-hours work that require employees to be remunerated, and if the budgets aren't there to do so, the expectation to respond then falls upon non-unionized employees.

> And you know, there's the right to disconnect policy, or, sorry, law in Ontario. And we've got a policy that supports that. And I feel like it applies to union employees, specifically, because the union is so clear about working hours. And you know, anybody can file a grievance if you're expecting them to respond on weekends or whatever. But for anybody not in the union, even though we have this right to disconnect policy, I don't think it's really honoured or embraced (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

> You know, so my, my management team often do a lot of work over lunch hour. Some of that is to avoid having to work at night. But the unionized staff, which we have quite a

> few, they're on a pretty, you know, they have their lunch hour, they'll leave at noon, I'll see them again at one o'clock. And they're not, you know, they're not sitting at their desk, which is pretty smart. Right? (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

> We do try to balance work life in an appropriate way. We have two managers in our department, and then everyone else is kind of a unionized staff member. And we are not allowed under the collective agreement to communicate with the unionized staff members after five pm. So that just doesn't happen. But as managers and our director, or if there's an emergency, we are in contact with each other, as we're outside the union (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

In some organizations, staffing decisions for after-hours work also seemed directly related to a funding decision. When asked about the right to disconnect in their organization, one practitioner put it this way:

> We're handpicked because we're not unionized. I started in the union. I was asked to put this program in place. And then I was approached and (they) said: Would you like to not be in the union anymore? Because you're going to be working weekends? I said, well, okay. And if you're not in the union, you automatically got an extra two weeks' vacation. Okay, so I joined that group, I thought I saw that as something desirable. And it meant that I was always thinking about work. So even if I was never called that weekend, I was always thinking about work because I could be called. I always had my phone on (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

That said, the point was made the ability to disconnect for union staff may also be a stressor for those who had this right.

We also have a split so our communications officers are in the union. So their hours are like tight and if they work outside those hours, they have to get permission, management approval for overtime. And we only do that if we're sort of like well, there's no other option. You know, in part because we're trying to spend public money well, right. We don't want to, we, I mean, we could work 20 hours a day and probably still have more work. But because they need approval, they, they actually face more pressure, because they have to do all of that work in this exact set time. And you're not going to get approval for overtime [….] Our advisors are more flexible, they're not in the union. And so, you know, they can sort of give and take an ebb and flow and it's like, today's really heavy, I'm going to work late. But you know, maybe I can leave early on Friday, then. So it tends to be a bit more flexible. There's no union rules, preventing them from doing their work (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

I know that my staff in the bargaining unit can do it, because, number one, I can't pay them overtime, because we don't have the budget. And, and it's in the collective agreement that they don't have to work after hours unless we either compensate them at the time in lieu or money. And both are problematic. Like if you have to, you know, give people time in lieu and then they decide to take time off at a very busy peak period or something, then that's not great, either. So the onus then, of the after-hours work, when you should have the right to disconnect falls on management (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

On this question, practitioners reflected an environment where regardless of the reason, the onus was most often on the management staff to be responsive, meaning that their ability to disconnect could be at times very limited.

5.3.11.4 Organizational leadership and culture. Respondents reflected in their responses that management culture played a large role in whether the organization embraced a right to disconnect of any sort. Notwithstanding all the public discourse surrounding mental health and wellness, one of the areas in which senior leaders outside of the communications function seemed particularly poor in was the setting of boundaries over the length of their work day. This meant the expectation was that those who worked with them would be responsive at all times. Senior leaders did not seem prepared for a world in which employees could disconnect. For public relations practitioners, this created difficult situations. This was reflected by one public sector manager, who said that employees at their organization, when asked if they could place a note about their right to disconnect in a signature line, were told they could not. Others also reflected that organizations haven't quite sorted out where they sit on a right to disconnect. This was reflected by respondents in both the private and public sector.

> The problem is that many people, like you create an environment, and then you're surprised that people behave a certain way within that environment. But the environment that we have at our company, and the unspoken culture is, and I keep saying high performance, but it's so true, right? (Interview 4, director, private sector).

> But the overall feeling was we're always on. How do we change that? How do we have a culture change? And we're looking at that as the subject for (an) upcoming senior leaders' retreat. I'm part of the group planning it. Because the overwhelming feeling is we need a

culture change. We need to, we need to pace, not so much slow down as pace (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

If we, as senior communications leaders, could uphold it for ourselves, and we try but having to work the weekends. And, you know, just having, uh, you know, some senior leaders who are just a little bit more fearful of, you know, what if an issue, what if the next issue happens, and there's no one watching the social media or what, like manning the phones back in the day? You know, what, if something happens, and we miss something, you know, it's just it's hard. It's much harder with that kind of overall leadership approach (Interview 6, director, public sector).

And honestly, the senior leaders laugh at it (the right to disconnect), as well. My bosses laugh at it, and they say: “Isn't that hilarious? Wish I could disconnect. But I can't. So you can't either”. You know, it's not everybody, I think that it's also the higher in your role that you get, the greater the expectation that you're working around the clock, or that you're able to respond around the clock, to certain things that are not house on fire issues, but someone does perceive them as such (Interview 6, director, public sector).

And I don’t think I’d get very far if I said: Hey, I’m, you know, like I’ve got a yoga class. I’ll see you later (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

And I think we could sort of, like, spread that load so that they can disconnect. And because we have three managers, maybe one of us is the person for a couple of weeks,

> and then another person for a couple of weeks. I mean, I'm already backup on call for the officers. So maybe when I'm backup on call, the general manager can disconnect. And (the) executive team knows that they can reach out to me, right, so I just think we need to get better, we also need our leadership to lead by example, when they are sending us emails at midnight every night (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

On this issue, interviewees reflected that the ability for practitioners to disconnect was in large part a leadership issue. Senior leadership in organizations will set the tone. Their fears and preoccupations, justified or not, will dictate the pace at which the rest of the organization responds. That said, practitioners also recognized that their responsiveness was also self-directed, which prompted one interviewee to reflect as follows, although they were the exception.

> So there's something wrong with me, as a VP, if I feel I have to, you know, call in on my holidays. And, you know, all of that thing is because, you know, the logical question to me would be, well, why aren't you grooming your staff? And why aren't you, you know, training your staffs or developing your staff, so that you don't have to do that. What if you get hit by a bus tomorrow, you know, the whole world's not going to stop because you're sick. So you know, it's your responsibility to ensure that you're you can disconnect, and the place won't skip a beat. And so I've done that. And I've always done that in my career, but I hate to admit that they don't need me, you know, but they don't (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

5.3.11.5 Risks. For some practitioners, the threat of somehow being considered less committed or less willing to do whatever it took to get ahead loomed large. The question of whether it was possible to get ahead and not always be “on” is one that practitioners were acutely aware of, not only for themselves but as they observed the environment surrounding them. The perception was that they would be seen as less committed and therefore less valued if they were not present and available at all times.

An associated line of logic identified in the interviews related to the importance practitioners placed to "being at the table," where important decisions are made. This related to work done by Grunig et al (1992) in the excellence study, which stressed the importance of public relations managers striving to become part of the "dominant coalition," the small group of managers who are responsible for making major decisions in a company. Having worked so hard over the years to position themselves to be at the table, practitioners seemed reluctant to do anything that would lead to them losing credibility at senior levels, and this seemed to include exercising and advocating for a right to disconnect.

> So I guess that comes back to the question, should a person in my position have the right to disconnect? And I would say I, I mean, it's easy to complain about being, about having your expertise and your opinion valued, (so) that you're needed, right, and you're needed in these big situations. So I would probably not tell you that, you know, I wouldn't want a crisis to go by where I wasn't in the room and I wasn't providing my expertise. So it's a bit of a double-edged sword because in order for me to do my job to the best of my abilities, I have to be responding to those situations. But it also comes at a cost of being on call, but I mean, we're not the only profession that is (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> At the same time, you want the comms people like (to have) that seat at the table with the lawyer and the finance person and you know, the whole C-suite objective of the excellence theory to be, you know, reinforced and to be one of the first calls if something

comes up or to do the calling. So that as a profession, I don't know. If we take that away, if we take that away from communicators, I don't think we're as useful to organizations. So that's sort of where the sword is double edged (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

It's impossible to disconnect without some consequences. And sometimes I'll bear those consequences, and sometimes I won't (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

So you know, there is a fear that, hey, if you are not on all the time, then you don't get a promotion, maybe you don't get a raise, maybe you get a poor annual review next year, because you will not be adhering to the kind of soft skills that any company would expect you all to adhere to, which includes being practiced, and being present when they need you to be. And I don't think that's specific to where I work (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

I think a lot of the senior executives kind of wish that they didn't have to do it (send requests to staff after hours) but they are doing it. I think a lot of people who are very career oriented are going to open those emails, and they're going to answer them. And I think others who kind of really value work-life balance won't answer them. And I can tell you, over time, those (that) have answered emails and respond are the ones getting promoted, not the ones who said my work-life balance matters too much (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

> And I think sometimes it's situational as to when we are. So if you start saying no, then do you lose the ground that you have gained in being brought in, in critical business situations? Because you're disconnecting. And that that's, I think, is a major challenge that so many people are dealing with, right, like, you fight so hard to be at the table. And then do you say, well actually no, because that, you know, table is happening at 10 o'clock at night? And I'm just not available. Right, like, so. It's, it's, yeah, it's a tug of war for sure (Interview 22, director, private sector).

Practitioners perceived that the risk of losing their position in relation to other decision-makers was very real. The underlying assumption was that practitioners at management levels did need to be available at all times and be responsive, regardless of the time of day. That being the case, how did practitioners manage to use the technology and what decisions did they make to allow them to have some semblance of private life? This question was handled in the responses relating to vacation and the right to disconnect but were also further examined in the following section.

5.4 Resistance/emancipation strategies and technology

Research question 2 sought to better understand how practitioners managed to function in a world where they seemed to sometimes have jobs that required almost constant connection. The underlying assumption to this question was that practitioners might exercise a number of strategies to be able to balance their lives and ensure their health and well-being and assist them in getting a break from the technology. This question also reflected the researcher’s point of view which is that organizations equip their employees with technological devices so that these employees can be contacted at all times – although employees recognize the ability to work anytime and anywhere can also at times be advantageous to them. The fact that some countries have felt the need to legislate the right to disconnect suggests that few organizations have established guidelines for how and when employees could or should be contacted after work. The comments of the practitioners themselves on the right to disconnect suggested that even where legislation existed, its application was uneven and arguably absent when it came to employees at management levels.

Responses on the variety of ways in which practitioners resisted or emancipated themselves from the technology were received in the interviews both in relation to the right to disconnect, and in general when participants were asked about what strategies they thought could be applied or that they had applied to allow them to disconnect, some of the time. This section also covered the various ways in which the responses seemed to be grouped, as identified by four main areas or themes: Resourcing strategies, technology strategies, life management strategies and communication strategies.

5.4.1 Resourcing strategies

These strategies primarily related to the ability of people to disconnect sometimes from the workplace. The theme of resources is one which practitioners raised often, as they felt that if public relations teams were properly resourced, then there would be greater opportunities to disconnect, the corollary being that there would be less of a need to have strategies to catch a breath. A number of respondents mentioned such things as on-call, back-up systems, or the ability to provide temporary opportunities to staff at higher levels as examples of what organizations might do. The idea of having an on-call or rotational system was most often mentioned, although there was also the recognition that even with on-call systems, some practitioners may not be able to disconnect if a crisis emerged, as was also identified in the responses.

But the system that we have where there are dedicated PR and comms people on call, really, truly should mean that the rest get rest. And I think that if implemented in the way in which it's supposed to be, I think that could really help. Because then it's not just the same person over and over again, getting burned out every weekend getting a message from I don't know, (a) vice-president, this person saying, ‘did you see that thing on social? How are we responding to that?’ You know, and we can distribute the work a little bit more, but not every organization is going to have that, that benefit of having more than one person to do that (Interview 6, director, public sector).

You shouldn't have people working around the clock or again, if someone says something crazy on social media, you gotta have people on call, like, if it's a security related thing, but if not, like, I don't know, the government can't be everything to everyone (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

This weekend, it definitely required communication support because of (a serious situation). So I couldn't say like, I'm not on call. I'm not dealing with this. That would not be allowed to disconnect from that. Yeah. And I don't think that there would be a lot of support for it (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

It should be possible because we all know that certain people are on call that weekend. So they're covering things. So they truly should be the people that are contacted if something happens, or if there's a question, you know, so maybe we need to do more in that regard, like maybe on our auto replies, or, I don't know, there just needs to be more

> communication or more understanding of, if you have a big issue or you spotted something, you send it to that person, so the rest of them can disconnect that weekend. You know, maybe we need to work on that a bit better, because you think of anybody, when we have people connected, the rest should be able to disconnect (Interview 6, director, public sector).

One manager, who had some back up support from another employee, noted that even having an on-call system did not excuse them from being responsive if a crisis occurred, meaning that they perceived that they did not have a blanket right to disconnect at any time.

> So I cannot sit here and honestly tell you that I have a right to disconnect. Because at any given point, if there is a crisis that has to involve public relations, or our communications, I'm going to be involved in that conversation (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

The responses seemed to identify that having on call systems where people could disconnect some of the time was important, but one could also see that practitioners felt that even in the presence of on call support, it was not always possible to disconnect in the cases of crises.

5.4.2 Technology strategies

As identified in the vacation section as well as in the analysis of the responses to the second research question, for the purpose of this research technology strategies were those that made use of the features available in the technology itself to disconnect. This might include such things as being available to a manager only via a text message on a smartphone, rather than through productivity software such as Teams. However, an issue seems to be that practitioners themselves sometimes had difficulty or didn’t really actively disconnect from work, regardless of whether there was an emergency or not.

For example, one senior communications manager said they're very careful about not sending e-mails to their staff in the early mornings or after five in the afternoon, and "certainly not on weekends." However, they identified that their own work habits included "long hours, and I'm on my social. I'm on email, you know, all weekend, all evening until I go to bed. And I do respond to emails, you know, usually within, you know, very quickly once I get them" (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

However, the data suggested that many practitioners exercised many different strategies to disconnect from the demands of the workplace and that, rather than being connected all the time, practitioners utilized a wide variety of tools at their disposal to allow them to emancipate themselves from the demands of work at least some of the time. It was interesting that a number of practitioners had to be prompted somewhat in the interviews to discuss these. It was observed that a large percentage had indicated there were many strategies they didn't use in the surveys. It's unclear why this might be the case, but in such cases it was found that simply by probing a little deeper, the strategies began to be mentioned.

The responses were coded against a Strategies code and then re-read in order to identify the types of themes that seemed to be in the data. There were clearly some specific strategies that emerged most often and these included the use of technology tools to moderate connectivity, making choices about whether to have technology present and strategies that involved judgment about when/whether to respond.

5.4.2.1 Use of technology tools to moderate constant connectivity. Practitioners utilized a number of approaches to manage work demands and better balance the boundaries between their work and personal lives. The types of strategies used included turning off their work phone; turning off notifications; and putting their phone on sleep mode. Practitioners seemed aware that it was important to find ways to use the technology to disconnect or partially disconnect some of the time, especially to help better balance work and life and to have some measure of control over their lives.

> They've, they're brilliant people who have learned how to, you know, take every moment of our focus and time away as much as possible. So when you limit the badges, I think it feels it feels like a bit of a sense of control that I now control when I'm going to go and look at new engagements on social media. The technology is no longer telling me that it's there waiting for me and trying to nudge me into engaging with it (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

The same practitioner talked about the various things they did with the technology to regain the upper hand.

> So all of the social media badges I've turned off. And it just means my phone isn't so much an enemy as it once was. And I took that strategy during the height of the COVID pandemic, where no matter what time I peered at the board's social media account, there was a long stream of engagement that I could enter into at almost any given point. And so I just had the practice of turning off the notifications. So you know, if you let your Twitter manage you, Twitter will tell you, on the badge, that there's 12, 15, 20, 36, 50 new engagements. If you don't know that. it feels a little bit better, and you actually (have to) actively go to the app to look at that. And the fewer times you're doing that the fewer times you're engaging in that kind of technostress (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> It does charge beside me. I do have it after 10 o'clock I have it, the iPhone actually has a lot of settings that you can control who can get a hold of you, you know, like on the you

> know, they have the do not disturb mode. And that you can allow certain numbers to get a hold of you. Even if it's on do not disturb. So I use a fair bit of that when I set it up. So I also have things like turn off unwanted callers so that the only people that can actually phone are people that are in my contact list. So that that helps more with those, you know, the CRA ads and those you know, somebody's going to your house and I don't get those (Interview 21, director, public sector).

Others echoed how they used the tools available in the technology to manage the use of their smartphones or computers.

> And so when I mean little, like I don't turn the computer off necessarily. It's a Mac, I don't need to so I just leave it on, but I'll turn you know, put it on sleep, or I'll have it so that it's silenced. So I'm not hearing the things coming through. Same with my phone, other things like that (Interview 5, chief executive officer, consultancy/agency).

> And when I'm on vacation, I do go into my settings, and I turn the notifications off (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> But yes, during, during vacation and weekends, I turn the notifications right off, and then I turn them back on the first day back. And I find that I also often move the icons into a separate folder, and I'll bury it on the last page, and I'll bury it onto like the third page of a folder, you know, as best as I can to just so that I don't see anything […] I use Teams as well, like the messaging system, you can put a little message there to just manage expectations about when you're on campus. So I will use that also same, like to be able to manage expectations (Interview 6, director, public sector).

I would just say, like with my, my Microsoft Outlook, if the light is red, and I don't respond and it’s urgent, call me. If not, I'm not looking at my phone for an hour. I'm just, if I'm meeting with someone or hearing something else, like I will, I'll just be, I'll be focused on that. And I'll get to it afterwards. Call me if it's urgent. If it's not urgent, then I don't need to hear from you (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

Turning off notifications on my phone, which is the biggest source of my connectivity to work and stress and taking very strategic breaks away from connecting with work, email, and things like that (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

So I do try to block every day at lunch. And again, it's not so that I can go have a long lunch, but it's just so that I can catch up or have a dedicated time. That's there for last minute stuff if I needed a place to fill it in. But it does give me something to look forward to as a downtime in the middle of the day (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

Je regarde ce qui est rentré pendant la journée avant de finir, avant de fermer tout ça. Moi, une chose qui m'aide beaucoup sur les courriels, j'ai des codes de couleur. (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Donc ça oui, là, tout ce qui est l'automatisation de certaines fonctions, je l'ai même au niveau de mes, de mes boîtes courriel. Il y a des trucs qui s'en vont dans des fichiers et je

> les regarde juste quand j'ai le temps de les regarder parce que je sais que c'est des nice to know, j'ai pas besoin de m'en occuper, donc j'essaie d'automatiser au maximum certaines fonctions comme ça j'ai pas besoin moi de m'en occuper (Interview 17, director, public sector).

> I will actually turn the phone off. I can use like Teams to set do not disturb on my, like I book focus time, I use the Viva insights to book focus time during my week. Now in a week like this week, all of it gets booked over somehow. So I'm not getting any work done. This is one of those weeks where I will have to work after hours. You know, some weeks I just go, this is gonna make it easier. But this is one of those weeks where I have no way around it. Because I am literally in meetings every day all day. And so you know, using, but generally using Viva insights to book myself focus time is good. And then when my focus time is off, it shuts my Teams down. So it won't give me notifications. It won't ring through. People can see in my calendar that I'm unavailable. And again, if they really really need me, they can call my mobile phone because that is on. But doing that do not disturb lets all the little things wait. So I tend to get a lot of like, oh, can I call you about this one little thing? Or can I just check in about this? And like none of it’s ever urgent. So it also gives people an opportunity to find answers for themselves (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

One participant in the interviews also talked about how their colleagues used the technology to remind them to disconnect.

> But, you know, the technology like some people find that, you know, they really organize their lives using their tech, you know, they, they have their schedule, they have reminders

> and beeps. So I find a lot of people in my cohort group are now using their iPhones in the health, different health apps to remind them to get up and go for a walk and stretch your legs and, you know, do all of these different things safely, you know, so I guess in some instances, the tech is helping them find, you know, a somewhat healthier lifestyle and that they're kind of being reminded, do all these different things (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

Through their responses, practitioners identified that there were a number of things they did and implemented with their technology to control or moderate their connectivity. It was not all practitioners who seemed to do so, but a large number at least seemed to use some of the features available to them within the technology to gain the upper hand in the constant flow of information and work that came to them through their technologies. This allowed them to have some measure of control over how their time was used.

5.4.2.2 Making choices about whether to have technology present. Sometimes, practitioners freed themselves from the technology by choosing to have it absent from their presence and from their minds. This didn’t necessarily involve manipulating anything with the technology itself – such as turning on or off certain features – but was more likely to include the setting of boundaries surrounding whether the practitioners chose to be present to respond. The most often cited strategies in this regard included not answering beyond certain times of the day, removing the technology from view, or choosing not to have the technology present at all. For example, some chose to have periods in the day that purposefully did not involve cell phones.

> We have a no cell phones at the table rule when we're eating dinner, and we do eat dinner together. I mean, with a few exceptions like tonight I won't be home, but we eat dinner together (Interview 6, director, public sector).

But some days, if I'm working consecutively in the office, I leave my laptop here to force myself to not check my email and things like that or to not do work. If something urgent were to come up. I have a computer at home, I could log on mail and do it (Interview 6, director, public sector).

I'm just not responding to them. Like I'm making a conscious effort to only reply during more normal hours. Like I used to be that type of person that would you know, if somebody sent an email at nine o'clock at night, and I could very easily respond to it, I would. I'm not (now), because I think it sets that, you know, expectation, and, you know, like, I was guilty of that before, for sure, you know, that you're always available, and I'm tired of being always available. And I think they absolutely take advantage of that. So I don't carry my phone with me as much as I did. For sure (Interview 22, director, private sector).

After a certain point at night, generally about nine o'clock, I'll stop looking at social any social media and any emails. And that's kind of the line in the sand saying, There's nothing I can proactively do after nine o'clock, that's going to be good for me or anybody who's trying to email me that night (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Like for example, when I go to bed, also during mealtime, like I'm very conscious, to, like, that's a safe space, like, that's a not a safe, but a well-protected space where I like to connect with my family and eat meals together and interact with people. So I will never bring a phone to a table, because that's my time, private protected time when I really want to connect with my own family (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

I bring no technology if I don't have an obligation, and I learned that the hard way […]. Well didn't (you) know the early cell phones, that was 24/7. It's taken me till now, to literally learn how not to be a slave to the technology and unhook, like, let go. And I tell my boss, like if you want to get a hold of me at night, call my personal home phone, or I'll be happy to answer. But that work phone and the computers stay off when I'm not at work. I have no obligation to be on call (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

I do put it on silent mode. For sure. But like yesterday, I just stuffed it in my backpack. I didn't even take it out. So yeah, but I do use like the do not disturb functions. So like I don't, I don't hear those notifications (Interview 22, director, private sector).

Like, where all the technology is so mobile, now that we are, there's seldom an excuse not to be available, even though I'm a bit of a more of a traditionalist when it comes to working and like going to the office and having my work there. So I do make it a point sometimes of not bringing, unless I have a plan, not bringing my laptop home with me, just because I was wanting to pretend work is work. And that's where that is available (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

> I also, I don't, my phone is not on my bedside table. I have a lot of friends who are like text, text, text. Sleep. This thing is downstairs, I don't bring it upstairs with me anymore. I don't take it when I walk the dogs. My phone is not with me (Interview 24, director, private sector).

For many practitioners, refusing to answer or removing the technology from view was an important strategy for regaining some sense of balance. For others, the technology was nominally present in case of an emergency or to check occasionally, which gave them a sense of comfort, but that also at times freed them to have their focus on other activities, most often family or rest.

> I also have certain points when I go home, where I'm not going to look at my phone. I might have it within earshot. So I know that if a text or a call comes in, but I'm putting it physically away from myself so that I have a period of time where I'm disconnecting, and I'm engaging with my family (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> Oh, I usually have my phone not too far for me, and I'll check it maybe once an hour, I think before bed and then no notifications […]. I have silent mode on while I'm asleep. I won't be woken up for any reason (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

> I intentionally keep it (the phone) on a different floor, like I keep it in my kitchen when I go to bed, and that's where it's plugged in, the ringer’s on. So if there's something really, like, if there was an emergency, somebody would phone me in the middle of the night, not text, I think or call, but yeah, I, I do not keep it by my bed. I really try to sort of when

> I go to bed that is it. I don't want any screens around me. (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

> I have access to a work laptop, but I basically, I have one at home as well. So what I do is work stays on that one. I try not to take it home, even if I had to, like if there is a really urgent situation, because our, a lot of our software's all Microsoft Office 365, like, I can access that from anywhere, so I can get on with my work, or sorry, with my own laptop, if needed. But generally, I try not to make it too terribly easy in that I, you know, I try not to put the apps on and stuff I just access by the web browser, use it as like, this is sort of an emergency only, you know, break glass if needed kind of thing (Interview 21, director, public sector).

The choices practitioners made around whether to have technology present and what kind of technology they allowed to be present were important elements identified as a way to moderate constant connection. Another set of strategies involved the practitioner making their own judgment call about what to do about an incoming request. This implied to some extent that the practitioner did not remove themselves entirely from the conversation, but that they chose whether to be in it at all, as well as the timing and response, as noted below.

5.4.2.3 Strategies that involved judgment about when/whether to respond. This was a significant line of response, which spoke directly to practitioner power over the constant lure of connectivity. It seemed to be a significant element in the ability of some practitioners to regulate the amount of time they were connected. It was also a theme that directly spoke to how practitioners viewed their relationship to others – colleagues, clients, and staff, and their relationship to time. Many practitioners identified that they didn't necessarily automatically respond to everything that came in, particularly after hours or on weekends. Rather, they identified a range of approaches that may have included everything from ignoring messages past a certain time to filing messages for later distribution, to strategically deciding which messages to respond to / or not, and when.

> It depends on the client. So like, if my director is reaching out, I know I need to get back to her straight away or certain individuals, but I mean, where you can? It's No, I don't think there's anything wrong with spending an extra day or two responding. We had a nasty note from a terrible client one of my team members (received) the other day, and I said: No, I said, she doesn't deserve the respect to respond to her email, that's a letter, like, let it sit. It's not urgent. She's just blowing off steam. That she should not have written that, give it a day and-a-half and then respond. And it should be very short and high level just acknowledging it because she's in the wrong and you're not. I try and be close to zero emails at the end of every day where I can, but I also am able to, like, it doesn't mean I have to action, everything but I like to be, I like to know what's what I have in my in my inbox. But then you prioritize what? What has to be actioned immediately? And what can sit and wait for a few days, or for a few weeks, even (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

> You know, like if somebody has sent me an email at 10 or 11 pm allowing for you know, time zone, so that can be a factor in my calculation. But if they're on my time zone, I don't, I try not to respond at three or four in the morning because I don't want to. I don't want to run the risk of interfering with their schedule or, you know, causing that sort of Pavlovian impulse to reply if they happen to see it or something like that. So I'll often

wait. And then when I get up for work at 5:30 a.m., I try to time it. So I'll then sometimes, I'll just stick stuff in a draft folder, and then I'll just kind of like go boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, and rattle off a bunch of emails in reply. Just shortly before I take my kids to school. So it's, you know, not disturbing people at 5:30 am or something (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

But I will, I will actively decline to reply, I'll shove the, you know, the response to another period, I'll shove a request to meet or talk to the next day or whatever. Unless, unless the nature of the file or the request or the event means that it has to be prioritized. And that's been true (in) my life period, like since the nineties (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

So let's say it's a faculty member saying, oh, I want this website of mine updated. And it certainly doesn't sound like an urgent request. I won't even acknowledge if it comes in after hours. And I'll just acknowledge it the morning of and then assign a staff, a staff member to do it, and make sure we have a projected turnaround time. So they know kind of when to expect a completion of that project. So generally, I know that they're mostly just sending emails after hours, because that's when faculty have time in their day to just sit down and think on things they would like to have, because they're teaching all day, or doing research or attending meetings. So I don't view that as an after-work sort of emergency, that’s just par for the course of getting those requests. (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

But one of the senior partners taught me something that's always stuck with me, which is you have to train your clients. And so, you know, I remember that discussion very clearly. And technology is an important dimension to the intrusion. And so if I'll get clients that are demanding in ways that are unnecessary, then to them, it will look like I'm not checking my phone. But I'm not. I'm teaching them to not bother me if I think it's frivolous. And I will sometimes exercise my judgment as to whether or not I think something is frivolous by pretending I didn't see it (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

There, what I do is I make a judgment call. I see, I always see what comes in. And then I make a judgment call whether or not to even look at it and respond. If it's not coming in from someone that I know to have urgent needs, I try not to look at it until work hours (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

So there's a very different kind of, you know, skill set, you have a network that you have that really lets you look at what's hitting your desk and understand is this really an urgency or not? Like, I'll have a more critical kind of take on it. And I'm also able to push back on very senior people, when they're telling me they absolutely need this, it's kind of like that. I can just say no and explain to them why it's not an urgency and provide them context. They usually accept that. (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

> But mostly, I don't open the email if I don't have to. So I kind of just have that quick look like: who is it from? That can wait. That can wait. And I just sort of get rid of the notification as it comes in. There's a few you know, like, if the superintendent, you know, (writes) call me right away, (they'll) often put that just in the subject line. So I can see that that's an urgent one, obviously. Same with a text message. If a text message comes in, that might be that it's an urgent matter that someone really needs to get in touch. But otherwise, I do try to just differentiate like, oh, I can look at that tomorrow (Interview 21, director, public sector).

> So I don't tend to check emails in the evening. Like my phone is on but unless it rings I'm trying not to look at it. Yeah, yeah, I even try to steer clear of news media on my off hours because I will read a story on the weekend, I'll get onto work email and then it's like a rabbit hole (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

The ability to exercise some judgment over when and whether to respond to messages is what seemed to allow practitioners to have some agency over the situation. They decided what was urgent and what was not, what required immediate response and what could wait. One might also infer that practitioners were confident in their ability to tell the difference. Part of what some practitioners communicated they were doing is helping train their clients, so that they too better understood what constitutes an emergency.

> And it goes back to my point about training your clients. What I want to train my clients in (is) to know that I will always be conscious and alert to things that affect them and matter to them. And I will always be responsive, when there is a matter that is urgent. But I implicitly without being explicit want to teach them, I may take my sweet time if this is

> not a genuinely an urgent matter. I'm not going to walk out of my cousin's wedding because you know, you're having a hissy fit (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

When practitioners were responsive, they also indicated that there were things they did to maximize work productivity and efficiency as they used the technology. These different strategies are considered in the next section.

5.4.2.4 Time and work management strategies. These seemed to speak to two areas: some practitioners used calendar features in their technology to block out time in their calendars and away from technology to do more intensive tasks, such as planning or writing, or to spend time with family. Some made it known they would be away. Others talked about partitioning their day to allow them to optimize their efficiency for the different types of tasks they undertook. Some learned to do this during the pandemic. At times, this meant working outside of what would be considered normal working hours, or sometimes choosing not to work at certain times.

One practitioner identified that they blocked time in their calendar during the long hours of work during the pandemic to identify when they were having dinner with family. They noted this allowed them to feel far less overwhelmed and gave them some measure of control.

> So I started putting some pretty strict boundaries and just blocks in my calendar, saying, okay, like, I get that the work has to get done. But I know that you're in a meeting right now to get information for these decisions. So I'm going to make dinner for my family and enjoy it. And I know that you're going to check in with me at about 8:30. So I'll be back with you at 8:30. But from seven to 8:30, I'm going to enjoy my family (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> Like I know, my directors will try to block time as well. I mean, they may not get one call a whole afternoon. But they do try to block time. Because it is helpful to be able to do that. It does, I wouldn't say that it's, um, you know, those are locked in stone, because like, I could have like a morning and my admin assistant has blocked off two hours for, like, let's say, my calendar desk time. But then my boss might call me and maybe says, Can you come to a meeting? And like, that's all out the window (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

As noted, some practitioners also blocked time for specific work activities at certain times of the day, to allow them to be more focused on those areas and possibly “catch” some time that they could reallocate to other things.

> Je me bloque du temps pour faire la rédaction, j'ai la rédaction de discours à faire, j'ai des fois des trucs à relire, donc je me bloque des périodes de temps (Interview 17, director, public sector).

> But if I have four hours’ worth of writing to do, and I can start at 5:30 in the morning, I can get it done in two hours. So (if) I've earned myself two hours when I do it, I just know that I'm that much more brisk. And I can move that much more quickly. And I'm undistracted by the intervention of phone calls, emails, and so forth […] So I can make more use of those two, three hours. Then I can add (them to) another part of the day. So that's a huge part of my strategies I employ, and they tend to be rooted around the labor intensity of writing (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

The ability to indicate blocks of time in their calendar where they would not be available seemed to be a strategy that was valued by interview participants, although there was also a realization that doing so may not guarantee no interruptions.

5.4.2.5 Life management choices. Similar to the practitioners who blocked time using technology to spend with their families, others identified periods of time where they focused on various life priorities. In some cases, they went back to their work commitments after these periods had ended. In others not. One practitioner described how they spend time with their aging mother in the early evenings. Others talked about how they carved out time for other priorities.

> So that's time where I usually don't check my phone. So I will pick up and do whatever work after like from nine o'clock on (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

> But I thought I'd carve out some amount of time with the kids usually, before they go to bed or first thing in the morning, that's when I've carved out time with them. That's, that's a priority. They're only young ones. And now I have a lot more time with them now, which is, which is quite good in this new role. But some roles are just always, are always nuts (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

> I mean, there will be circumstances when you can bet you're not going to get a lot of me like, tonight, my son will be playing a hockey game from 8:10 to 9:10. And unless it's a really important matter, I'll be conscious of a text or an email I get during that period. I'll

glance at it, but I will not reply to it. And I won't engage with it (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

Je suis pas pompier, ni policier, ni médecin là, mais dans le travail qu'on fait quand on est là, il faut être là à 100% parce que des fois c'est ça, on a oublié. Et puis souvent c'est la faute qui fait qu'on en fait une nouvelle. Donc quand on décroche pour être capable de décrocher plus, moi j'ai de bonne capacité là d'être capable de décrocher. J'ai aucun problème à m'asseoir dehors sur une chaise, à lire un livre pendant une journée complète (Interview 17, director, public sector).

I enjoy my baseball, the only thing that I'll find the big imposition is if I'm doing my baseball pool, all the phones are off, nobody's going to bother me for my four hours of that baseball pool (for) the world. (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

So there's a lot of times that I probably, you know, consciously and subconsciously unplug. I volunteer (at the) Farm Sanctuary. There's no cell phone service there. So, you know, there is TELUS, Bell doesn't work there. And I'm on Bell. So I could switch to Telus us but I'm not going to (Interview 24, director, private sector).

Yeah, well, you know, when I come off hours, not as much as I used to, when I come home from work, I, you know, I have my dogs, I gotta take them out. That's an hour, hour and-a-half of my time. I don't have my phone with me. It's on silent when I get home. So it's not going for me, but it'll only vibrate. So again, when I go to bed at night, I don't

> have my phone with me. […] Remember when the blackberries had a clip, and you could clip it onto your belt? That's what it was like for me. And you'd feel it vibrate? And you'd pull it out every time (Interview 24, director, private sector).

The above reflections demonstrated that practitioners did have times where they chose to resist and not be interrupted. These were choices practitioners made that were under their direction. As their own comments indicated, this seemed to involve a willful choice to set aside time for specific life choices in which practitioners would not be interrupted.

5.4.2.6 Communication strategies. In relation to communication strategies, one of the more interesting and consistent themes that emerged surrounded the way in which managers composed with after-hours demands and role modelled (or not) disconnection. Multiple interview subjects identified that they fiercely protected the right of their employees to disconnect from the workplace after hours and on weekends but were less protective of their own boundaries. They would continue to respond so more junior staff could get a break. They seemed to recognize that to do so role modelled that at certain levels, constant connection to the workplace was acceptable, but made sense of it because of their higher levels and because they genuinely wanted to provide support to and respected their employees. They were quite open with their employees about the fact that while they were not great examples themselves of boundary-setting, they wanted their employees to learn to do so.

> I don't know if I'm doing it but I'm supportive of it (the right to disconnect). That's a really do as I say, not as I do. When we had someone else on my team who reported to me, I really encouraged her to have strong boundaries about it […] but I didn't want her to see me doing it and feel like she had to. So I would always just say, like, don't let my neuroses influence you (Interview 2, director, private sector).

That's why with my staff, I always tell them don't follow my example. Listen to what I'm telling you. Take the Friday afternoon off the books, don't worry about it, you've worked really hard, I will do that for my team. And my boss will do that for me too, sometimes. So it's, you know, it's, I think we need to be caring and compassionate. And we have to have more patience. I think technology has really shortened our patience. It's made us less compassionate, I think it's like: oh, why do they write that email? Or, like, you know, people just get in a reactive mode, you have to step back (Interview 3, manager, public sector).

It's interesting, because it depends who you're communicating with. If I'm talking to other vice-presidents, I don't mind sending messages early in the morning or an evening or on weekends. But if it's, if I'm working with staff that are reporting to me, or who are lower in the company, I won't do that. Because it's, it's not fair to them. And then they would expect that I would expect an answer from them. And so I wouldn't, so I don't do that (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

And the other thing too is like I try and maybe this is something I shouldn't be doing, but I try not to bother my own team after hours. Like it's something that I can take care of. I would rather just do it myself and let them not have to work. I'm on my own. I have a dog. That's my biggest demand on my time. I don't have a backyard. So I have to walk my dog four times a day. But I have, I have staff who have young families and have, you know, activities to get to and stuff. So that's where I sort of, I just need to call that it's a lot quicker for me just to, to deal with something than to have to bother them after hours (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

Souvent, je trouvais que j'en prenais beaucoup sur mes épaules, mais moi je trouvais important de permettre à mes employés d'avoir ce temps là parce que je disais toujours quand quelque chose va arriver, là, je sais que je vais scrapper le weekend du monde (Interview 17, director, public sector).

So I try to lead by example. And so that if I am sending those emails, after hours, I'm scheduling the send for the work week. Again, people will say, Oh, you don't need to be online, but when they're emailing me all weekend, how can I feel any other way. So you know, my senior leadership will do it to me, but I don't do it to my staff, because I want them to disconnect, I do want them to be able to walk away. But again, that just means that they feel like they're running at like 120 miles an hour during the workweek so that they can check out for the weekend. And I don't think that that's a whole lot better. (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

And I would never put that on my team. Because, you know, that was not the expectation when they were hired. To me that's, you know, a more senior level expectation. So, you know, that's me. And if that means you, you know, sometimes you're working, like I've worked well past midnight, like, I'm sure you know, and worked all weekend (Interview 22, director, private sector).

> This is why that scheduling feature on Outlook is so important, because if they check their email, I don't want them to start thinking about a project before they come back on Monday. I want them to have that weekend to just completely separate and be with their kids, you know (and) with their dogs (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

> I tried to take, you know, the work off of the team, so they don't have to work extra hours. I try to take that on more myself. And I'd say right now, too. I'm pretty tired and burned out. So I would say I'm pushing back more now than I have before (Interview 22, director, private sector).

Some said they had learned through experience that it was also important to not make it appear to employees that there was an expectation of constant connection to advance their careers.

> And one of the things that people said a couple of years ago was, essentially that I was like, too responsive, and that it created an expectation for them, if they were not in a director role, that that's what you need to be if you want to be a director, right? You set, unconsciously set an expectation that if you want to be a director, then you have to be responsive at all times, and that's not the message I ever would want to send to somebody who's more junior and looking at growing their career in the public relations space. But de facto, I was doing that, or you know, responding when you're on vacation, or these things (Interview 4, director, private sector).

Much fewer seemed to indicate that they strategically used after-hours work to develop their employees to give them more visibility, gain certain efficiencies or operate at higher levels, although one manager identified their process.

> I've started to include them in those executive calls, so that they can hear firsthand what is happening…for example, what actions are being taken by operations, so they're hearing it firsthand, and then from there, they can back off and craft their messages quickly and do their, you know, communications work, that reduces stress for them. Because although they're on the call, maybe on a Friday night, they're hearing first-hand information that is useful for them, and then they can go away and, you know, craft their releases, or their messages or whatever, with first-hand knowledge of what's being said, and that reduces stress for everybody, because they know what they're talking about, you know, they're not writing something, you know, blindly. And it reduces my work, because I'm not having to relay what was said, they're hearing it first-hand. And what it also does is it raises their profile in the company, so that the senior management team, you know, sees what the communication staff are doing, and really appreciate it. (Interview 23, Senior executive, private sector).

However, the fact that so many of those interviewed identified that they would take on extra work after hours in order to protect their teams from having to do so was a significant finding that may be reflective of how managers in public relations choose to exercise leadership in such situations.

5.4.2.7 Open communications. Another very interesting line of response surrounded the whole idea of leveraging open communications with an employer and within teams to arrive at a clearer shared understanding of what was expected from them after hours, and whether everything needed to be done urgently. As in the survey responses, this also included arriving at a clearer understanding of what constituted a crisis that would require response from the communications team, or helping manage a client's expectations so they understood that not everything needed to be completed immediately.

> Right, so having those conversations as part of like, coming into an organization. How is a team like the comms team, how are we going to work? How are we going to kind of protect each other and support each other's like whatever your mental health thresholds are? And I think there's I mean, anything's possible. There's a way to work around it. (Interview 2, director, private sector).

> I think organizations, senior leadership need to have for communications professionals a better understanding of the pressures that we're faced with, set reasonable metrics and support people and provide them with the budgets and be realistic about what is possible, right. And so that you prevent burnout. I think that's why at some point, you do need some kind of disconnecting, right? (Interview 3, manager, public sector).

> There's a huge gap between what I think should the way the world should be and the way I know the world will be. And so, yeah, I think we should have the right to disconnect. I think there's a ton of examples where it's just not practical. I do think like, companies, in general can do more to just not bother people outside their assigned work hours, but there will always be an exception for like a genuine crisis. I think, where we need to kind of move the window is understanding what kinds of events arise to that level of genuine crisis, and which could be resolved from under when everyone gets back? Yeah, I don't think the paradigm is gonna change, but maybe how we apply it, and to what to watch. That's where we can make some improvements (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

> I think a lot of it comes down to leaders lose perspective, sometimes they get so immersed in the day-to-day of what they're working on that they forget that maybe their organization is not the be all and end all. And it could be something that actually could wait until Monday. But they get so completely immersed in it that they think no, we have to have this out at two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. When really sometimes I think we need to ask whether that's the truth and really have an honest conversation about putting things in perspective. We don't have to always have a 24/7 world. I think that's sometimes that's a bit of a myth that's the result of technology and digital communications (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

> Je le dis, moi, quand on veut faire un vidéo qui est plus léché, donnez-nous le temps. Un tweet, un post-it, ok, oui, on peut le faire. Tu sais bien. Faire un like, un retweet, ça, ça va. C'est des choses qu'on met sur notre liste de choses qu'on regarde tout le temps, mais que même s'il est pas fait dans la seconde, il faut que les gens acceptent que (ce n'a) pas été fait dans les deux secondes qu'il a été publié (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Several respondents also talked about how important it was to communicate within a team and set everyone up for success.

> Look, everyone, like, here's all of my work, like you're on call, not me, I'm not checking my phone for the next two hours, like, airplane mode, I'm doing my own thing. And I have to be very clear with my expectations. And I think that's an expectation, but also making sure that whoever I was giving my work to was like well-equipped to take on my work. And I think that was very important to do, just given like, I am not one to like, in

> order to take a break to like, leave all my responsibilities behind. Like, I need to make sure that it is well covered. Because I think just because I'm not working on it and someone else is, doesn't mean that the responsibility doesn't still fall on me (Interview 19, senior consultant, public sector).

However, sometimes organizations found a way to communicate surrounding availability.

> Sometimes our management group will be like, oh, I'm going to be offline. And we'll know like, we can't contact each other outside of those times. So that's, I guess, a strategy. If I needed to go offline for a specific purpose, or I'm traveling or something, I would make that known. And that's a strategy so that people aren't expecting to reach you. You know, there's, there's an answer that you can give. But we, it's a small team, right? So we're all pretty aware of where everyone is at any given time. (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

But crises were something that needed to be attended to no matter what else was going on, according to this practitioner.

> And then all of a sudden, boom, this happens at 8:30 at night. And so, you know, it's like, I'm sorry, I now must like, there's not really a discussion, it's just like this is there's an immediacy to it. So that means for the next two to three hours, I'm stuck in front of a Zoom, doing media interviews for television and radio […] The default is I'll be conscious of information, watching my phone to make certain nothing happens that demands an immediate reply (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

The isolated practitioner also used a strategy of what I would call presence to separate their day, where they hoped clients would get what they needed from them while the practitioner was physically present in the office.

> Like, one of the strategies of me coming into the office is sort of one of those strategies, because people see me, they'll get what they need from me, hopefully, within work hours when they know I'm here. It's just when you're offline all of the time, right and working at home. Some people be like, Well, I didn't see (X), you know, at four o'clock today (so) at 6:30, you might as well send him a message anyway. So I think one of my strategies is yes, being like physically present here. (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

Overall, practitioners identified a range of strategies and approaches they used to manage the demands that came from the workplace via information and communication technologies. These allowed them to control, if not moderate, what could often appear like or actually be constant connection. Some practitioners had more success than others in managing these intrusions. What was clear is that practitioners were aware that constant connection could be an issue, and that they did have some agency in managing their relationship to their devices for work purposes.

5.5 Technology and the practice of public relations

Research question 3 sought to better understand what research questions 1 and 2 elucidated about public relations practice and practitioners. What have ICTs meant for the practice and for practitioners in a hyperconnected society? As noted previously, the mean age of interviewees was about 52 years old with roughly 22 years of experience in PR. This meant that many were already working in public relations at the time of the introduction of smartphones. They had front row seats as technology became part of the practice itself. They would have been practicing public relations, for the most part, throughout the introduction and evolution of social media. They also lived through what it meant to work in public relations throughout the pandemic.

While some of these themes had echoes to others discussed earlier, it was useful to consider how PR practitioners viewed change in the wake of the rapid evolution of technology in their workplace that has included, among others, the introduction of the smartphone, the proliferation of social media and more recently discussions surrounding artificial intelligence. As they spoke of technology, some practitioners harkened back to how calm and predictable things once were – such as the days when reporters worked a regular day, or practitioners could just go home at the end of a regular work day and not worry that something might occur outside regular business hours, or even the days where e-mail wasn't considered official communication.

> When we first got email, like email was not considered official correspondence. Right, you still had to write letters and signatures, and it was just there, it was like for notes. And then we went to well, okay, you use it as an envelope to send an attachment, that is a letter or document, to stop (it) being posted on email straight. And now we're on Teams. And I'm getting Teams stuff all the time (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

> I think that changed and all the tools we have sped things up. So in the olden days, a reporter never would have called me back after business hours, unless it was a crisis or something. But if it wasn't a crisis, it was just business as usual […] And in fact, I also knew that it didn't matter if I stayed till seven o'clock, or 7:30. Because the reporter wasn't there, they're home (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting).

> I think when I started in communications, it was a much more nine-to-five kind of role because I didn't take a laptop home, you know, I left my work at the office when I was working for (x). And so at the time, it was very much, there was a structured beginning

> and an end point to my day. But in the last, you know, 20 years as technology and personal, personal Tech have become more intertwined with what we do, it feels like my work has spread out a lot more into my personal time, as well (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

They also talked about the explosion of tools and channels that has occurred over recent years, and how technology changed the breadth of skillsets practitioners were called upon to have and/or understand.

> I think it's just more you know, the challenge of staying current on all of the different technologies, I think is big, and it's a source of stress. Like even something as simple as everybody transitioning from overhead slides to PowerPoint was huge. Like, all of a sudden, you had to learn how to do PowerPoint and pull all this together. And then they kind of switched from PowerPoint to those horrible placemats (a one-page summary of a number of facts and information, usually shown in a graphic format). So we're gonna add one page in which to kind of connect all these dots, and you suddenly needed to have a graphic design skill set that you kind of had (but) never really kind of wanted or had interest in. And then kind of saying: okay, now I've got to go from like, I've got to figure out Twitter, or how does Twitter work? Right now? And who's actually on Reddit? And what do I have to read about Reddit? (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

Another practitioner, who went to university when there was no Internet, talked about how the ability to access media was defined then by the contact information printed in books of media contact information assembled by a publisher.

> That's what it was back then. There was I mean, we had email, but the Internet was so juvenile at that point that, you know, but there was no online news either. I look at that

> back in the 90s, to where we are now. And really the introduction of the smartphone was the game changer. Absolutely. For our industry, it absolutely was the game changer. And I can't imagine doing my job successfully without it (Interview 24, director, private sector).

The smartphone and related devices may have been a game changer, but as one participant in this research noted, they were not automatically adopted by organizations. Initially, smart devices were only provided to very senior executives. Much of this revolved around the fact, in one interviewee's view, that organizations wanted people to be in the office at all times. They said this only changed when the productivity advantages of working from home became clearer.

> They didn't want anyone to have any Blackberrys because they wanted you to be in the office, what they didn't realize that they came to realize is it actually makes us more efficient, we can do more work, right? (Interview 24, director, private sector).

The fact that practitioners had memories of how things were in the past highlighted how quickly everything changed and the key role that technology played in the evolution. As they pondered the implications, many practitioners did see a number of positives in how ICTs have enhanced the practice of public relations, as noted in the following section.

5.5.1 Technology is key to PR practice

Some might argue technology always did have a central role, whether one spoke of typewriters, fax machines, photocopiers or printing presses. What the interviewees in this research highlighted, however, was the speed of the changes and the pressure this brought, as well as a list of pluses that flowed from the ability to use technologies to conduct work and/or interact with audiences.

You know, I think there's a lot of positives about there being more ways to connect with and interact with your stakeholders and more kind of creative ways to do things digitally and online. But again, that, you know, a practitioner could become spread quite thin (Interview 2, director, private sector).

But in terms of the event and the technology, I can do everything from a single seat. Yep, I have to jump across a ton of different software platforms […]. But at least I don't have to physically move locations. So that's good. In the past, I would have had to have been in the office, which would have meant commute, but it would also probably minimize the likelihood that somebody would reach out at all. It's kind of a double-edged sword (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

And, you know, even analytics can be so interesting, like, when you click into analytics, and it tells you what, where your user is going on your site, and, you know, if they're bouncing around, and it makes absolutely no sense. You're like, oh, something's wrong there, because they're not finding what they want. But it just gives you this tremendous insight into that human experience. So I think tech can be really, really cool (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

I think one of the best things technology did is it really gave all of us, certainly gave me the opportunity to expand my network. So in 2004, when I started my agency, I found out I had a really good and big network turned out. I had an OK network of the clients I've worked with in the past, and a few other people, but my network was small. And because

> of social and digital media, I found I was able to connect with and build relationships with people all around the world, certainly more in the U.S. though, build some kind of professional friendships with people who I would see at conferences and events. And that sometimes even led to work projects, collaborating with them. And that was really great. And you're able to gain a different perspective, because you're hearing what people think who may not live in the same country as you or the same part of the country (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting).

That said technology, and in particular the ability of organizations to contact practitioners at all times in today's environment, was seen by practitioners as being potentially both good and bad, or as having two sides.

> It's a blessing if you can leave early and go to the beach, and maybe somebody needs to get a hold of you. But otherwise you can kind of have your afternoon. But it's a curse if you had a long day and then you get home and they can still get a hold of you (Interview 21, director, public sector).

Even the ability to work in a hybrid or remote fashion, some of which flowed from the pandemic, fuelled the expectation that practitioners would be "always on," according to one practitioner.

> But the pandemic changed things for a lot of companies, there was a lot of companies who believed in their core in their heart that everyone should be in the office every day. And let me tell you, there are a lot of empty business towers in Toronto right now, because they realized during the pandemic, we don't need that, we don't need to be in the office. So it allowed you flexibility, and mobility. But it also, you know, there's a

> downside to that, which means you're always available or expected to be always available (Interview 24, director, private sector).

Participants in this study made reference to positive elements such as the ability to conduct work in hybrid or remote modalities, the ability to reach people more quickly and easily, to expand networks, to communicate directly with and reach both old and new audiences and build relationships, the ability to foster greater engagement, the breadth of tools available to communicate or conduct work, and greater agility of response. Some also indicated in their responses that there were both advantages and disadvantages of technology in PR work.

5.5.2 Technology has two faces

While PR practitioners clearly communicated that the variety of communications tools helped them reach audiences more broadly and more effectively, a number of practitioners also talked about the expectations that were created by technologies that allowed for, and sometimes demanded 24/7 response, and the stress that could bring.

> Ya, it's an industry that's almost always on the verge of burnout. And that's not good (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

Some referred to the history of the development of technologies and the speed with which everything accelerated as technologies evolved and how that changed the ability of communicators to pause and reflect or have time to respond. One respondent linked this to how media relations once operated, while identifying that there was still stress in the process at that time.

> And you knew that the earliest you'd get a response would be a day or two later, when a journalist got it, wouldn't be anything instant, or you weren't seeking an instant response. So you could think about. Okay, how are you positioning this? Can you improve your

> positioning? Can you improve the way you pitch this? Can you improve your story, all of that felt like there was more time for reflection, that didn't mean that you never felt stressed (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting).

The same practitioner noted that in the past, even with crisis communication, there were certain advantages.

> The luxury of the news cycle, which we felt wasn't very long. But now that news cycle is almost instantaneous, something happens and boom, you've got a situation, an issue or crisis on your hand (that) blows up immediately. How do you react to that (when) you still need time to think and reflect? (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting).

Other respondents also echoed that technology created a form of instantaneous expectation of response.

> So I find that technology has helped, you know, the flow of communication. But it's also meant that people have unrealistic expectations that they send you an email and they want something, you've got to turn it around quickly (Interview 3, manager, public sector).

> I think that's the inherent collision. It, we're continually getting new tools to make our jobs more effective. But it comes at a cost that they're very hard to turn off. And that they also allow your audiences to communicate with you much more effectively as well (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> But I think work-life balance suffers overall, by being connected so readily to your work. Just, if I leave on a Friday, you know, it used to be, I guess before phones and laptops, you just left and everything (would) be waiting for you Monday. But now there's a, I just

say expectation, certainly, not institutionally, but certainly among managers and directors to sort of be on top of things, even when you're not working (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

One respondent talked about how in the world of primary and secondary education, technology had really facilitated mass communications to parents and that this had been widely seen as making communications much easier and robust in the ability to reach various communities.

> We have many different communication streams we use, from the Board website, to social media platforms, to the platforms we have that communicate directly with families […] one of the biggest technological advances we've had in this position is that ability to create a message that goes out to all parents at one time, as opposed to six, seven years ago, we were still asking principals to print off letters and send them home in school backpacks and stuff like that (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

But this could also mean that public relations practitioners were contacted at all hours of the day and night because over the years, organizations learned to value communications advice. One practitioner described a situation where they were woken up in the middle of the night but the situation wasn’t an emergency, and they stressed the importance of boundaries in such cases.

> Réveillez moi pas à 3 heures du matin pour ça. On avait mis en place de nouveaux protocoles, mais souvent les gens s'appuient beaucoup sur les communicateurs, des gens, surtout comme nous pour les guider. Donc qu'est ce qu'on fait? Qu'est ce qu'on dit? Donc c'est sûr que ces gens là s'attendent à ce qu'on soit disponibles presqu'en tout temps. Il faut être capable de délimiter (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Underlying many of the responses was also the sense that speed had become a significant factor in public relations work, and that this had been going on for some time. The speed and pressure or stress participants described is highly correlated with the existence of a hypermodern society, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 6.

> But the thinking time didn't go down. But the speed at which the communications were distributed first, with faxes, then with emails, you know, just increased by a huge margin (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting)

> I don't see any kind of less of stress on the, on the professional. In fact, I see more stress. Simply, again, the cycles are getting tighter and tighter, the way you think is getting, you know, people's attention spans are getting shorter and shorter, you've got to kind of condense that message now into 15 seconds. You know, accessible, click and have an impact, (and) you're going to have to respond to a lot more craziness out there, I think. (Interview 18, senior consultant, public sector).

Practitioners reflected in the interviews that technology had brought many advantages in that it does make the work more effective and helped broaden the number of audiences reached, but that it had created an expectation of immediate response and that it had sped everything up, was hard to turn off, and had created more stress for practitioners.

5.5.3 Social media has changed practice

A significant theme flowing from the question of how technology has changed practice revolved around the ability to better reach audiences, but particularly focused on the societal climate and what it meant when applied to social media. Practitioners described an environment where views were polarized and where the ability to reach anyone also meant anyone could comment. They understood that this was in part linked to the general lack of trust in institutions. Audiences are engaging like never before with the organizations that are communicating with them. However, the lack of civility, quantity and volume of negative comment in some of the engagement was extremely difficult for practitioners. For the most part, their comments reflected an online environment that was exhausting, and at times toxic if not occasionally outright dangerous to their wellbeing. Several identified that they had somewhat of a love/hate relationship with social media. A handful did not use social media at all in their personal lives. Others questioned, given how difficult the social media environment is, the value it brings to their organizations. Generally speaking, the ability to connect with audiences on social media could be positive, as noted by a practitioner, but could also result in messages being less targeted than they might have been previously, because anyone could respond.

> As a result of social media, anyone can chime in and check in on what you're doing and have an opinion. And they don't necessarily need to be someone with a direct line to your organization or in the community where you live, to all of a sudden be a stakeholder that requires your time and attention. So that's why like the stakeholder or audience group has just blown wide open. And it can be anyone with the platform, anyone anywhere in the world (Interview 2, director, private sector).

As practitioners noted, citizens use social media platforms to make their views known. This can also make it difficult for organizations at times, when they are trying to advance socially relevant files like equity or diversity, and a variety of views exist in the public sphere.

> I know when I put out a message about black history month, or about a particular equity initiative that we're proud of that we're going to get an element that is opposed to that, and there are going to be strongly worded emails, and then we're going to see social

> media posts. And so knowing that kind of takes the joy out of this work we're doing inherently to support the health and well-being of students and create equity where equitable spaces, where they were, we didn't have them before. Because we now have to engage in this divisive element, you know what I mean? Like it just is exhausting sometimes just to do this job (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Practitioners found it challenging to have to deal with divisive elements and negativity and this impacted on their overall view of social media. A practitioner who works in higher education and needs to sometimes follow right-wing channels as part of their job noted their thoughts on social media.

> I personally hate social media, I'm not an active user. If I didn't have this job, I wouldn't have accounts in social media. I just find it is mostly just an exercise in depression. And, and just sort of crazy-making. And it's an awful way to view the world and I just don't find very much value in the experience. And so because of my role, and that monitoring, and just being aware and plugged in and know what students are saying and all of these things, right, you just have to constantly be immersed in this terrible world. And I do have to go and follow like, extreme right-wing channels […] I just hate living in that world. I despise everything about it (Interview 13, executive, public sector).

What was also interesting to note is that even though practitioners may have gathered a lot of knowledge and skills in social media management, this did not necessarily translate into personal social media use. In fact, several practitioners were quite open about the fact they had a fairly scant presence on social media, if at all. Some also noted they had a waning interest in social media all around, even for work purposes, and that they dealt with this by hiring younger people with a greater understanding of it.

So I communicate for other companies, I don't do it for myself. But a lot of people do, a lot of PR practitioners do. And they have great social media, you know, I think of some of the folks that work in in lifestyle, for example, lifestyle, PR, you know, some of their social media, they're followed by tons of journalists, and that's fine. That's good for them. They keep it very professional. But I'm just not willing to go that far (Interview 24, director, private sector).

I think I'm aging out of social media. I think I'm starting to see that impact. I used to be much more into it. Twitter and Instagram, and but I hit TikTok and that was like not my thing. I think that started to be where I started to age out. So now I just hire people who are younger than I am who seem to understand it better (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

I don't participate in social media anymore. I'm done with it. Personally, I have no space, that's helped me a little bit, like just not dealing with social media, in my personal world. So I don't post anything to any of the channels, I will sometimes tune in to see what other people are doing. But I've set time limits on my phone for these different apps, so that it'll hit a wall and it will be like, sorry, you're locked out of Instagram for the rest of the day (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

So sometimes you're sort of trying to sell the features of yet another new tool, a new technology channel, a new technology platform, to the broader team, whether it's an internal tool or not. And you're like, I'm not on board. And that's when I knew I was

> getting old when I was like, Oh, my God, here we go. Yet another thing I have to learn, because it becomes mentality after a while, right? But it's like, Yes, this is yet another thing you have to learn how to do and use and be excited about for others, because others are looking to you as a model (Interview 4, director, private sector).

Some of the dislike of social media by several practitioners might also be explained by the exposure that practitioners said they had to certain audience comments on social media, comments that were not always healthy or safe. One practitioner noted that sometimes, they've had to send vulgar and sexual anonymous comments they received from their community to security for vetting.

> You know, it's gross, it makes you feel a little bit unsafe. So if it's really I say this, because it's related to technology, and how social media has changed things. So there's that aspect as well, that adds an additional strain or additional, I guess, toll on what you do. And you can - even if you are the type of person who dismisses those, it's still gross and not good (Interview 15, manager, public sector).

Others found that staff had difficulty with some of the comments they saw, and that there were emotional impacts for their employees. Viewing such comments were part of the technostress their employees felt at times.

> We're finding that social media and even news media is having an effect on the wellbeing of our team. Because when a news story is one-sided, or when, you know, they, they take part of the information that we provide, and present an article that maybe, you know, doesn't paint the city in the best light or doesn't paint the employer in the best light, I think they feel like they've failed, and they also feel attacked, and then, you know, they're really supportive and proud of their colleagues, they know their colleagues are doing

good work. And so they take on this emotional burden (Interview 20, executive, public sector).

Occasionally, an organization seemed to have found a way to triage or prioritize social media comments to reduce the stress factor, but this was the exception.

> And we find that we also, and there's also maturity on the team where they understand, you know, not everybody's negative comment is equal. By that, I mean, if we get, we get concerns raised by a city councillor, or an executive at a company, or, you know, a school teacher or a daycare that's in trouble, those are taken seriously, because we see that, you know, there's, there's a legitimate issue here with this, with this customer, or with this building, or whatever. And so they can, they can filter through this stuff, flag the ones that do require immediate attention, and then move them up and deal with them. (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

As can be noted, participants in the interviews reflected that the working environment created by social media has brought some challenges for practitioners. Exposure to critical or divisive views in particular has become a particular point of challenge for practitioners and their staffs. Some of those interviewed also expressed their difficulties with social media, with some indicating they did not use it at all for personal use and hired younger staff to manage social media in the workplace.

5.5.4 The nature of relationships has changed

Public relations has historically placed high-value on face-to-face communication. In-person press conferences, town halls with citizens, face-to-face team meetings, meetings with clients, engagement opportunities, employee gatherings and other in-person processes have all traditionally been part of the public relations mix not only as a regular part of business, but also a key element in what many practitioners recommended to their clients as part of public relations strategy. Although not a pervasive theme, a few reflected a concern that at times, the fact that technology facilitates electronic communications has meant that face-to-face connection is no longer a major theme. Some perceived this as not helping the profession nor relationship management and felt it may be fostering some uncivil behaviours. Some also felt practitioners were now lacking the opportunities to develop their face-to-face communication skills.

> And like you don't tell someone to pound sand when you're face to face. They feel quite willing to do it with technology. It's like they're hiding. They're hiding behind a screen. And I don't know if you've found that from anybody else you've spoken to. But the incivility is something that I think needs to be explored […] But how do you get people to reconnect as humans when you can't disconnect the technology? (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

> So this is I think, it's not just PR, but it's young professionals, or young working people who are missing the ability to interact face-to-face and the skill sets that come with that. You know, and I, we all know that if I meet with you face-to-face on an issue, more likely, we're going to come to an agreement and build a better relationship than if we talk on the phone or do it by email (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

Some reflected this was particularly noticeable in media relations, where technology had facilitated the transition from an environment in which public relations practitioners got to know reporters and build relationships of trust, to one where one never knew who was covering a particular story and much of the media relations work was done via e-mail. Some saw this as a good development, others were not so sure.

I mean, I remember, you know, even in the early (days), sending an email response to a journalist wasn't acceptable. And they would say that in the news story, well, they sent us this e-mail. Well, now it's commonplace, you know, you used to have to either put your statement out on the news, or you give it verbally, but now you can, you can email respond, which is a lot better for us, because we can control the message a lot better. You know, they, even the journalists are much more accessible, you can reach them on Twitter, you can reach them on Instagram, I mean, they're, they're so much more open, which, which is also to our advantage, because we can track them and understand what they're covering and what they're following. And, you know, where we might fit in with them. So I see it, you know, both good for us and for the media (Interview 24, director, private sector).

We're actually not doing things that actually matter. There are zero media relations going on. They can call themselves (what they want) they're not their media management. They get e-mail questions, and they craft e-mail answers […] And you wonder why the government doesn't control the message. While how many reporters do PA (public affairs) people meet in a week in Ottawa? I bet the answer is close to zero (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

Same with like news reporters or producers. I haven't met anyone in real life in the last at least three years. So a lot of the folks that I worked with before have either retired or they've moved beats. So right so now I'm like, oh, shoot, I don't even know who's covering that beat anymore (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> And maybe the one, the one area that is a risk, I think is this use of chat, and e-mails. I'm seeing more and more of that, in media relations, particularly emails, where practitioners are responding to reporters sending in their questions via e-mail. And it's great because the company can sit back and say: okay, well, let's think about this response. When I was coming up, it was on the phone, and I had to do it in real time. And so learning that, you know, diplomatic, you know, thought processes and how to frame words to a reporter is a skill that they're losing now, because they have a chance, they have time now to sit back, write the e-mail, get it approved by their boss, get a tweet by whoever, and then send it back to the reporter, and then the media tend to run with that statement. So there's that's one area that I can think of where, where there's a skill of media relations or interacting with publics, or reporters in real time, face-to-face is something that's being lost (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

The idea that there were some skills that some practitioners were losing, not learning, or no longer able to use as much as they once did seemed to come through in a number of the responses. New, young practitioners are entering the practice, often as digital natives who have great comfort with the technology and how to work with it, but potentially less experience managing interactions face-to-face. The data reflected that some more experienced practitioners were less interested in newer social media applications and other technologies and therefore tended to hire younger people or consultants for those areas. Others reflected that because of the speed and pressure inherent in a technologically enabled world, they no longer had the thinking time they did in the past to sit down and think about being strategic.

I just think it has changed the job quite a bit (in) that we spend, a lot of it makes it harder to, you're spending more time responding to ongoing, immediate needs, than having the time to sit and prepare strategically. Ideally, when you're dealing about strategic communications, you can talk about some of the best practices like the RACE formula (a planning formula used in public relations that stands for research, analyze, communicate, evaluation), research, audience, all the way down to evaluation, right? Like, you give me a problem. And I want to start with research and then I want to start with a purpose. And I want to identify my audience and I want to set up goals, I want to set up objectives, I want to say how are we going to execute that? What strategy are we going to use? And then most importantly, how are we going to evaluate that. But when you have two or three or four or five fires that seem immediate all day, you're kind of responding, responding and responding to those, it's very difficult to put any long term thinking or strategic strategy behind some of that communication (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Yeah, and when they do, you know, if they (younger practitioners) ever are cornered, or if they ever are in a situation where they need to think on their feet, and it doesn't have to be just with a reporter, it could be with an executive, it could be an angry customer, it could be an employee who confronts them, or you know, that ability to think on your feet verbally and be able to manage a face-to-face, you know, potentially adversarial discussion, a difficult discussion is lost, because it's now done through the safety of email or chat (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

What appeared to be an underlying theme in these comments was the possibility that the advancements in technology fostered a public relations practice in which not everyone had the same core skills. One might argue that this was always the case. Some people were better writers. Others better strategists. Others were perhaps gifted in media relations. Companies have a long history of not necessarily having their own graphic artists in-house and instead hiring contractors. Within larger organizations, this possibly meant that practitioners were streamed or streamed themselves towards certain functional areas of the practice if they were not generalists. But what also appears to be happening with the continued growth of technology, as reflected by the comments of interview participants, is that some employees may not be getting to learn some of the skills they need, even if they might want to. How do you learn face-to-face communications if your job is almost entirely online? How do younger practitioners learn how to manage crises if their working hours are limited by union regulations and right to disconnect legislation? How do more senior practitioners learn about emerging technologies if they perceive they've aged out, and hire millennials to handle that part of the job? These are all questions that the practice may consider as it continues to compose with explosive changes in practice, society, and the world.

5.5.5 Technology has made for a "never enough" practice

While not a pervasive theme, it was noticed that for some practitioners, there was a sense that they were not only constantly connected, but that the demands were so significant that it created a sense for them of never having done enough. Some practitioners described having this as a question that persisted internally for them. Others referred to this in reference to the fact that they felt their organizations ravenously expected more than anyone was capable of and that no matter what practitioners did, more was always expected. So one could argue that technology not only accelerated the pace of change, but also accelerated the pace and depth of expectation placed on practitioners. In addition, some noted the technology facilitated the ability to remind practitioners at all hours that there was more that was expected to be done.

> Now I would say in the past four years making it more of a priority to say, you know, I've got to get things done. And that's what I'm going to do. And I'm not going to feel guilty if I miss an hour of work, because I know I've been doing all these hours. That's just a me thing. Right? Like, that's Yeah. I think that you're right, we care about what we do. And, you know, I always feel it's I don't do enough. I mean, I do. But that's my own personal thing (Interview 3, manager, public sector).

> So we do have that disconnect from work policy in effect, and we communicated it throughout the business. But I find at the director level and up there is zero recognition that should be in play like last week, one morning, starting at five between 5:30 and 8:30, I got six e-mails from my boss about things that she wanted. Like she started at 5:30 in the morning, emailing me about things and it was all stuff like why didn't we do this? […] And like the programming we were doing. So like that example of like, it's never enough doesn't matter what you do. It's never enough (Interview 22, director, private sector).

> But most of the reading I'm doing for work or a lot of the reading I'm doing for work, for example, on what's happening, news, changes, trends, how it's affecting communications and our marketing, that pretty much happens digitally. And you know, there is some stress involved in that thinking that oh, did I read enough today? Have I done you know,

> when do I stop during a day and move on to something else? (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting)

> And, but no consideration for, you know, hey, this is going to be a lot of extra work, maybe we can relax your goals a little bit into consideration for that. So it's just, you know, more and more (Interview 6, director, public sector).

The question of what was enough is one that practitioners themselves sometimes seemed to grapple with, as noted in the comments above. What seemed also on their minds was the fact that the current environment communicated that it was ok to contact people at any time, something that was also dealt with extensively elsewhere in this research.

5.5.6 Avenues for change

In reflecting upon how technology had changed the practice of PR, practitioners also talked about what might help practitioners manage the demands that flow from the situation of constant availability created by today's technology. Many of the comments were not specifically about technology itself, but more about the positioning of PR in organizations and the ability of PR practitioners to fully exercise their skills and competencies within organizations. In going through the comments, the broad themes in which responses flowed included more respect for the PR role and for practitioners, better boundaries and expectations, defining crisis and media literacy and education.

5.5.6.1 More respect for the PR role and for practitioners. Several practitioners interviewed seemed to reflect that there was a continuing lack of understanding of the PR role within organizations and a general lack of respect for the expertise PR practitioners brought. Practitioners seemed to reflect that it was a problem that has persisted and that perhaps has been amplified with the advent of technology. They identified that some organizations continued to not integrate their PR teams at the outset of planning programs, announcements, or other projects. They also said some organizations seemed to persist in believing that management made decisions and that communicators simply communicated them. They said there was also a lack of understanding for how long it took to do PR work.

> The thing that we find more than anything is more of an attitude towards the role of PR. A lot of I'm sure you've heard this before, a lot of people find it very frivolous, not necessarily, not germane to their role. And if those people are the same people that you are relying on to get the information, it is not the technology that's failing you, it's peoples' kind of attitudes towards what you do for a living that is kind of holding up the timeline (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

> […] we were organizing a press conference. And we've done all the work. But like, no one cared so much about the event itself, everyone cared about the policy that we were announcing. So the event itself was moved several times. And they're just like, oh, they'll figure it out. But we had, for example, two days to like organize (an) entire press conference on the other side of the country, with many third-party vendors, with many stakeholders involved, and it was like, in the grand scheme of things (they) were like, oh, it's such a minor job. It's just a press conference. But because of the meat and bones of the policy. But like, if we were in the planning stages, from the very beginning, we could have worked in tandem, and then it would be a lot easier for us (Interview 19, senior consultant, public sector).

> Soit les gens ont de la misère à reconnaître l'expertise qu'on amène comme praticien en relations publiques parce que les gens (pensent que) c'est assez facile d'écrire un texte et c'est facile d'organiser une conférence de presse ou peu importe. C'est hilarant […] Et donc d'être capable d'avoir cette reconnaissance là, professionnelle qu'on apporte à des organisations (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Respondents also identified that the lack of understanding for the role also spilled over into the challenges PR practitioners said they faced in securing the resources they needed to do the job. One practitioner reflected not only about communications often being a "last thought," but on the constant questioning of PR budgets "when in reality, we are less than .1 per cent of the overall budget." They felt it was important to build redundancy into the communications function to support the wellbeing of practitioners and enable them to take vacation when they needed it, knowing that someone else would cover things in their absence. In the end, they reflected that the current situation and the pace at which practitioners worked did impact on output and quality.

> So technology and more ways of communicating and spreading that information is not the answer. You still need people to do that work. And to do it well and effectively, like they need time to plan time to, you know, think about audiences. And in the fast pace we're in right now, like we, we don't always have the time to do that, which means our efforts aren't paying off as well (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Practitioners also felt that one of the solutions to 24/7 demands was for organizations and communication teams to have systems in which practitioners could spell one another off so people could have breaks, some of the time. There was a clear sense that practitioners felt organizations and the practice needed to tackle the issue and arrive at some solutions.

> I think that we also have to, just with the shift with social media, with news moving in a 24-hour cycle, we have to somehow either embrace the 24-hour cycle, and somehow pay people to be on call 24 hours of the day, or have a 24-hour cycle of PR people so that we have, you know, four people working around the clock, if that's the expectation, in different shifts. Or we have to have the okay, from senior C-Suite people to say, we know it's a 24-hour cycle, we don't pay you for 24 hours, we really pay you for staffing, and we get a lot more […] So we're not going to work on the 24-hour cycle (Interview 6, director, public sector).

Or, as the same practitioner identified, on-call systems could be a solution but needed to be respected and could be difficult to implement in smaller organizations.

> But the system that we have where there are dedicated PR and comms people on call, really, truly should mean that the rest get rest. And I think that that, if implemented in the way in which it's supposed to be, I think that could really help. Because then, then it's not just the same person over and over again, getting burned out every weekend getting a message from I don't know, vice-president, this person saying: did you see that thing on social? How are we responding to that? You know, and we can distribute the work a little bit more, but not every organization is going to have that benefit of having more than one person to do that (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> So for example, this department, they do like a rotating on-call schedule. So now I'm on call, like one of, I think five or six weekends, which is nice. It's not too bad. And I was on call a week and-a-half ago, and I got three emails in a whole weekend. I can live with that. That was good (Interview 9, manager, public sector).

The isolated practitioner also reflected on how stressed leadership sometimes treated PR practitioners and other staff, reflecting a leadership culture of yelling and intimidation that one practitioner felt is becoming more commonplace.

> And because they're very stressed, they're not speaking very nicely to people. So I've been yelled at probably three times in the last two weeks. And again, that's not okay. You know, there's a way to express when you know, you want something differently, or you don't like what's going on, and yelling at people is not the way to do it. And that really didn't happen in the past, but has been much more prevalent, not only like with interactions I've had, but interactions that other people have had. And it's just unnecessary, and it makes it an unpleasant work environment (Interview 22, director, private sector).

Finally, practitioners also reflected on the importance of organizations investing in issues or risk management to become more proactive and less inclined to be subject to crisis and emergency situations. This would then enable practitioners to do proactive work to position their organizations before a crisis occurred.

> I'm most comfortable in my position, and most calm and feeling the best about myself when I've had time to prepare and plan. And then I'm not as anxious when I send out a communication because I've been working with material, I understand the data, I understand my audience, I understand what impact it's going to have. And I've put pieces in place to prepare for that. So if you give me enough time, I'm going to prepare for even a crisis or I'm going to play or prepare for a situation, and I'm going to have contingencies. But when you're responding to seemingly a new, immediate concern over and over again, a lot of that background stuff is, you're using your best judgment on that

> situation, but you haven't done a deep dive to really explore that. So you're putting out communications without really understanding and putting enough thought into what their impact will be and how you're going to respond to that impact. (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

5.5.6.2 Better boundaries and expectations. The theme of better boundaries and expectations was one that was reflected by a number of practitioners and spoke to not only what practitioners needed to do for themselves, but also what organizations needed to consider surrounding the availability of technology. Generally, what flowed from the responses was a need for better clarity surrounding what was expected of the public relations team, and/or of individuals. There was also the sense that public relations practitioners needed to become better advocates for their needs. Several reflected upon the difficulties public relations practitioners experienced at times with leaders who may have difficulty gaining a sense of perspective in identifying what was urgent and what could wait, when technology was always available.

> I think a lot of it comes down to leaders lose perspective, sometimes they get so immersed in the day-to-day of what they're working on that they forget that maybe their organization is not the be-all and end-all. And it could be something that actually could wait until Monday. But they get so completely immersed in it that they think no, we have to have this out at two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. When really sometimes I think we need to ask whether that's the truth and really have an honest conversation about putting things in perspective. We don't have to always have a 24/7 world. I think that's sometimes a bit of a myth that's the result of technology and digital communications (Interview 8, executive, public sector).

> I think the expectation setting by leaders, and then the consistency and the application of those standards, is really important (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

> So I really think that's where a lot of this, you know, in terms of technostress comes involved, I mean, we have all the ingredients for increasing technostress. And I don't think the compensations and the solutions are found in different kinds of technologies or advancements in technologies, or the foolish belief that we can just disconnect from our clients. But I think it places a greater emphasis, and it's more challenging to be a leader. And so the leaders have to determine, well, if everybody's not in the office, then what are my mechanisms for accountability? And what are my mechanisms that are established in terms of expectations around availability versus non-availability, and do I set those clearly with not just my employees but also with my clients? And then do I enforce them and am I standard on them, and when I deviate from them is it clear why I've deviated from them and that people can nod their head and say, agree or disagree, I understood the rationale? And so I think that's where most of the answers are going to be found. It isn't that somebody is going to build a better mousetrap that makes it easier to be a PR practitioner, and you don't have to be available all the time (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

As seen elsewhere in this study, communicators recognized there was a need for better communications within their organizations and with their clients to clarify boundaries and expectations, and also resource and pay adequately.

> I think probably just honest conversations with their supervisors and with their managers about what that looks like and setting boundaries. Right, and just making it really clear

> about when they are available, and when they're not. And I think it's incumbent on managers to also compensate people right, and to be very clear about what you're expecting off-hours. And if you are making somebody work off-hours, then there's a cost to that, not just emotionally, but they need to be compensated for working those hours, even if it just is being on call. I think that acknowledgement is important. So that people don't feel like they're being taken advantage of, because I think that's where it gets really messy. And where people get resentful, is that feeling that they're doing extra work for free, when they should be having their time off (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

Some practitioners also reflected that sometimes, practitioners needed to learn to say no, but that it was unfortunate and awkward to be placed in the position of being the one to always set the boundaries.

> I don't know. I think the onus is on us a lot of the times. I think that a lot of the PR and comms people that I've met over the years are really keen. They're pleasers, they want to solve problems, and they want to do it, and see the need that they sometimes have to do it quickly. So I think that personality type lends to being workaholics and overworking and just continuing to take on more and more and more (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> C'est pas facile parce qu'on a tendance à dire oui à tout. Donc comme praticiens d'être capable d'avoir ces mesures là, de gérer, de planifier, de mesurer et d'être capable de dire non (Interview 17, director, public sector).

The voices of practitioners reflected that there needed to be better boundaries and that this sometimes included practitioners being able to say no at times. They noted that practitioners should not always be the ones to set the boundaries. They also reflected a need for good communications all around that created more of a shared understanding around questions like what work after hours looked like.

5.5.6.3 Defining crisis. As seen elsewhere in this study, practitioners also felt that there needed to be much more shared understanding between practitioners and their organizations or clients of what constituted a crisis that required immediate response. To a certain extent, communicators saw this issue as being tied to respect and trust in the communications team, who perceived they had a good grasp of what was or not a crisis situation but were faced with leadership that responded to all things as if they were critical. One practitioner in particular reflected that it would be important for organizations to better understand misinformation, which may also help them be less inclined to respond to everything and place pressure on the communications team.

> I hope that as there's more attention paid to misinformation as well. I think that will help also, because there won't be the random, you know, did you see this on social? Did you see that rumor? Right? You're like, oh, I did. That's not a credible news source at all. You know, there wouldn't be that quite that same need to have to educate and re-educate and, and share that information, I hope (Interview 6, director, public sector).

Another noted that they had a good manager, but that it just seemed like many more things constituted crises post-pandemic.

> I gotta say, my boss has been really fantastic. She really respects personal time. She, when she calls me on a holiday or after hours, I know that it's a serious issue. And, you know, that's part of my job. I'm paid at a manager's rate, there is a sense of your own call. It just seems that the amount of what constitutes an emergency in the public sector,

particularly education is just, has significantly increased post pandemic. So the amount of times where an emergency pops up or a crisis that has to have action on it immediately has increased significantly (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

Overall, a better shared understanding within organizations of what might constitute a crisis requiring immediate communications support was clearly reflected in several areas that were part of this study.

5.5.6.4 Media literacy and education. Respondents reflected that there was a role in preparing undergraduate students for the profession, particularly for how to handle the demands that flowed from the technology.

And I think it ties in with media literacy, just figuring out how and when to respond, what the priorities are, how you can establish your own boundaries, how you can have conversations with your employers to make sure that everyone's on the same page, about when you respond, when you don't respond, when you're taking time off and what's expected of you. Because I think some stress comes from misplaced expectations. And it's because we don't know like technology was just added into our life. In a lot of ways, I don't think of the phone as a piece of technology, but really it was it just it was always something that was there (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting)

I think that it also goes back to the education though, of PR professionals. I don't know what the education for PR is like anymore. But I was a PR major. I was in a journalism program. PR was my major. And I did PR internships all through university. And it did not prepare me for this […] I don't know how it could have because social media was not a thing. In fairness, you know, not possible. But I just I think that there's, you know, it

> seems that fewer people are going into the field, with eyes wide open with what the field is like (Interview 6, director, public sector).

The same practitioner identified a concern that those who did set boundaries or have them set for them around their time may be limited in their advancement opportunities.

> But there are a lot of comms folks in the unionized jobs, who have wonderful boundaries on their time as they should and we should learn from them. Absolutely. But I fear that they will never advance or they will never be able to advance. (Interview 6, director, public sector).

Others identified that public relations could benefit from better communications about what it does and educate people on “how the sausage is made and the considerations that go into it. I’m not under the illusion that everyone would respond to that in the same way, a lot of people would say: well, who cares?” (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

> Donc c'est ça comme praticiens, c'est d'éduquer, d'éduquer nos patrons, nos organisations que tout ne vaut pas un post média, tout ne vaut pas une conférence de presse, on fera pas la première page du Globe and Mail. Pour chaque petite affaire qu'on fait, il faut être capable de mesurer maintenant la segmentation. On est capable de dire on va cibler certaines tranches de gens qui vont avoir un engagement avec ce qu'on veut leur prouver, parce que ces gens-là sont intéressés par ce qu'on leur offre plutôt que d'essayer d'être partout et tout à la fois (Interview 17, director, public sector).

Finally, practitioners also sounded the alarm surrounding how important it would be for people to take a balanced and critical look at what ChatGPT and other AI tools could or could not do, since these are having and will have an impact on the profession.

> Like, I'm really looking at Chat GPT right now as a potential career killer. And I look at the copy that it generates and say, it's not very good. It reads like an eighth grader's essay, but I've got to outplay that […] But do I trust leadership to see (it) the same way? Is it possible that they can look at something that ChatGPT generates and think that's good enough, I don't need a conscious person anymore? (Interview 7, manager, private sector).

> We haven't really used a lot of chat GPT, we've played around with it a little bit just to kind of say what's possible and what's in there. But trying to kind of create some parameters on when and how we might use that. (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

There were several lines of thought that were brought out by practitioners in this area. For one, they felt that the practice and academia could be doing a better job preparing practitioners for how to use technology, and what to expect once they entered the profession. Others also noted that it was important that the profession educate the organizations that employ them and their clients on what effective public relations consists of, on the assumption that organizational expectations might shift if there were a better understanding of the role and functions of excellent PR support. Finally, the concern was raised surrounding ChatGPT and other similar tools, in that there may be a role in helping organizations better understand what these tools could and could not do for them in delivering their PR and organizational objectives.

The next section addresses what practitioners had to say about their experience during the pandemic in relation to their work. Given that the interviews occurred in early 2023 as organizations were continuing to adjust to a post-pandemic environment, it was not surprising that practitioners had a view on how the pandemic affected them and how technology impacted upon the practice of PR.

5.6 Special section on technology and the pandemic

While this research did not set out to study how public relations practitioners and the practice fared through the pandemic, it was a topic important to address given the timing of this research and the fact that the deployment of certain technologies facilitated remote work during this period. These technologies, as well the fact these were often used for within peoples' private spaces like their home or apartment, arguably made it more difficult to discern boundaries between public and private lives. Masking mandates, vaccine communications, crisis response and the requirement for ongoing internal communications with employees, among others, arguably put public relations practice and practitioners front and centre during the pandemic. At the time the survey and interviews were conducted for this research in the winter of 2023, organizations were still in recovery mode as well – working out how people would work and where, and with what technology, were very much part of the ongoing discussion and one might argue quite relevant to discussions about the use of technology for work in public relations. As identified elsewhere in this research by participants, the urgency of the pandemic and the importance of effective communications as a crucial element of the response also set the stage for organizational response post-pandemic, and how PR practitioners were working at the time of the interviews.

While there has been research about communications during the pandemic, as is so often the case in PR the research has focused on how communications functionally occurred during the pandemic. As has been identified earlier and commented upon by Bridgen & Verčič (2017), PR rarely turns the lens on its own practitioners to study their lived experience. For example, Park et al (2024) found in their systematic review that the topics most often covered by PR and other peer-reviewed journals about public relations research and the pandemic were relationship management, crisis/risk management and issue management. The authors identified 126 articles on public relations and COVID-19 in their review. It is notable that not one of these focused primarily on the impact of the pandemic on PR practitioners' work life or well-being. However, it was noted that within the articles there was an article on journalists' stress during this period by Hoak (2021). Those interviewed for this study often raised the issue of work during the pandemic but were also asked about how things changed for them and the role of technology during and after the pandemic in the course of the interviews.

Within the profession and on the Internet, there was some discussion that the pandemic allowed PR professionals to shine and demonstrate their skills in relationship management, crisis management and internal communications, among others. This was also echoed by practitioners interviewed for this study.

> I agree that I think a lot of units that didn't understand the potential and the value and the importance of communication learned it really quickly. Because they really saw the positive outcome that came from people understanding what was going on, feeling like they had a sense, feeling like they got the answers that they needed, that they knew what was going on, feeling engaged and connected, feeling like leadership cares, you know (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

Another practitioner, who was new in their job at the time the world shut down in March 2020, said leading communications during the pandemic "allowed me to shine, because I was able to provide leadership and be responsive and provide, you know, excellent communication support" (Interview 3, Manager, public sector).

Some practitioners also mentioned that the need for crisis communications and issues management that were at the heart of pandemic communications played to the strengths of PR practitioners.

> I think it's always been the case that part of why communicators are known so well for issues management and crisis management is that real tangible example of the value that we bring to an organization when you manage an issue effectively, and you prevent it from being coming or crisis, or you help resolve it or earn trust as a result of what you've done (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

The same practitioner elaborated on the point and on the opportunities that the pandemic brought for practitioners to help the organizations and the publics they serve.

> One good thing that we did in COVID, because we realized our communications had to be very centralized, coordinated, tightly scripted, it allowed us, and people turned to us to sort of centralize what was going on. So there was that consistency of messaging that was really good. I'd say, we're pretty good about managing big projects or issues by setting out a set of guiding principles and for the institution at the beginning, that really becomes a filter on how, you know, sort of ethics and integrity (Interview 14, chief communications officer, public sector).

But at the same time that communicators were performing a leadership role in communicating about the pandemic, there were also signs that the pandemic was having an impact on professionals and their wellbeing. Research conducted online with 400 practitioners globally during the pandemic found that 65% were feeling more stressed and 51% more burnt out (Panico, 2023). Interviewees for this study also echoed that practitioners indeed worked very hard throughout the pandemic period. They reflected the view that organizations did not necessarily understand the strength of their contributions. One noted one of their colleagues had sadly passed away during the pandemic as a result of the stress. They painted a picture of long – at times what felt like endless – work that had not necessarily abated at the time the interviews were conducted and that was facilitated by some of the technology that was deployed during the pandemic.

> And it was very, horribly stressful on communicators. And I'm not sure that people ever really appreciated and understood how tough it was on us and how hard we worked. And in a way, I'm a bit resentful about that. […] I still think it's an undervalued sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes undervalued function, you know. People still look at public relations as, oh, you're the spin doctors or you organize events, or you tell all the nice stories and stuff and not sort of as a strategic partner and that we're helping to protect the university's brand and reputation. Like some of these initiatives that we undertook during the pandemic, around, you know, vaccines and masks and moving people out of residence, you know, and then dealing with outbreaks and stuff like that. That was really tough work. Really tough work (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

> So I, there were times when, you know, easily on a daily basis, I worked 12-hour days, 12 to 15 hours, easily just trying to coordinate the communications and pull the pieces together, and get it from people (Interview 6, director, public sector).

> It was crazy, nonstop 12-hour days, like making sure we had to get the website up, we had to make sure we had information, emails to people, signage throughout the campus, like when we shut down making sure people knew what was happening because we shut

down March 18.[…] So there was a lot during that first March, April, May, June, it was like, we're going to reopen in May, we're going to reopen in June, we're going to react like we never reopened till last year. So it was always, it was intense, because you're always, things are changing. And information was changing (Interview 3, manager, public sector).

I'm finding as I'm getting into some of those valleys, valleys in the workload and in the cycle, that I am completely toast, that I have nothing left in the tank, and that it's taking me longer to recover. And so I would say I've experienced true burnout several times in the last 18 months, which is not something I could have easily said, I think in the previous five or six years of my career (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

I could turn my computer on at six o'clock in the morning, struggling through emails that have come in overnight. And it, I could look up at 11 o'clock at night and go: wow, where did the day go? Like, I might get up and make coffee or eat or something, but it would just be like all day, all day long (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

It was really, it was a heavy, heavy time. And I don't feel like we've got we're out of it. Yes, we're out of that phase. But we've just moved into another phase, I find of this weird hybrid workplace that we have now, this connection to technology that we're expected to be on all the time. We have laptops, all of us have, pretty much everybody here has laptops now. So that we can check in everywhere, you know, but we're supposed to still

> disconnect and not be burnt out and fried. I don't know how to do it (Interview 6, director, public sector)."

Another practitioner, who worked from home during the pandemic, looked back upon that period and summed it up this way: "The workday just didn't end and went forever, until you just were exhausted and then fell asleep" (Interview 13, Executive, public sector).

Practitioners identified that the pandemic and the crisis environment it created did, however accelerate the acceptance and deployment of various technologies. They saw this as helpful to PR and management practice.

> I think the technology helped us learn, helped us realize that we could work differently, and accelerated the pace of digital technology acceptance in a way that wasn't there. Now everyone knows how to use a Zoom. Doesn't matter if you're like a 75-year-old retired person, you kind of know what that is. How to set up a video call. (Interview 1, independent practitioner, consulting)

> Well, I think that the only way we could be working remotely today and like it is through these technologies, because I mean, I can hear, we, you and I are having a perfectly productive conversation. And this is really how I'm interacting with my staff most of the time […] Now I talk to them individually, you know, daily or weekly, weekly at least, on business issues. But you know, by and large, they're working remotely and don't get together as a team, as a complete team, often (Interview 23, senior executive, private sector).

> I want to emphasize that pre-COVID if we did not have the technology we have now, we could not have maneuvered through COVID (Interview 16, manager, public sector).

Practitioners also identified that the ability to conduct work remotely which became much more prevalent during the pandemic had some productivity and agility advantages for practitioners.

> When in reality, and like I have spoken to my colleagues about this, we think that like at home, we're probably more productive because we are doing more things at the same time. We're not trying, we don't have time to transition from one place to another our colleagues aren't like chatting with each other at their offices anymore. And if they are it's like it's an instant message which they could read at a later time for example. So I wouldn't say I don't know if COVID made my specific job worse like in terms of my activities. I think if anything, it may have made it easier […] But I would say the culture of working overall may have negatively changed in terms of busyness due to COVID (Interview 11, executive, public sector).

> C'est autant un, autant on peut des fois être accroché et trouver que ça c'est trop envahissant. Autant maintenant, surtout depuis la pandémie avec Teams et tout ça, ça nous permet d'être beaucoup plus agiles dans la réaction. Il reste que ça ne remplace pas complètement. Et puis moi le premier, les rencontres en personne, les rencontres avec les collègues, avec les partenaires. Mais ça nous permet une plus grande agilité (Interview 17, director, public sector).

However, practitioners also identified that the technology deployed during COVID and now normalized within organizations increased multi-tasking, which could have both advantages and challenges. They identified that the new technology may have created new problems or challenges.

> But I would say in particular, like during COVID, people found it very acceptable to book back-to-back meetings all day, in addition to you working. And it's good and bad, because like now in a virtual sense, you can work, like you can work on something while you're in a meeting at the same time, which is something you couldn't do in real life, because you wouldn't have your computer with you. But also with that your schedule is a lot more packed, because you're not walking from meeting room to meeting room. Time is very finite. So it's like you're like you're clicking from one room to another. And at one point like I remember, we would be, I would be at like two meetings at the same time (Interview 19, senior consultant, public sector).

> So one, people pollute Zoom calls in the same way that there's the abundance and reliance upon them has become ridiculous. They're longer than they need to be, people feel they need to perform on a call (Interview 10, contractor, independent practitioner).

Practitioners also identified that remote working facilitated by the technology exacerbated issues with work-life balance and may have created cultures where it was always important to show one was available to do work.

> But let's start with what in its worst form, it means instead of coming home and compartmentalizing my day, I feel like I always have one foot in the office wherever I am. And I think COVID very much exacerbated this issue because we were working at home. And we all had that collision of work in life and lock down (Interview 12, manager, public sector).

> But what happened with COVID, again, is that, because we all had to be working remotely, we set up our teams for that, which means everybody got a laptop, everybody got a mobile phone. And so I think that increased that technostress aspect, right, it's like, because now you have these tools at home, you might be more inclined to check. Whereas before, like the communications officers had desktop computers and they did not have a work phone. So when they left at the end of the day, like work was there, like they couldn't check in, they couldn't do anything (Interview 20, director, public sector).

> Because I understand there was a lot of concern during COVID, especially with managers, not just in the public service, but everywhere that like were people working efficiently from their homes. And I think because of that perception of time change, like there was a lot of expectations from management, but also employees to be like you need to show up at everything and anything (so) you can to kind of prove that you're working and being efficient, and being productive workers (Interview 19, senior consultant, public sector).

While not a pervasive thought, the occasional practitioner also mentioned the impact that various changes in where and how audiences received information have changed practice.

> And the whole influencer world exploded during COVID. I mean, TikTok went through the roof. And so it's even more exciting now because we're not trying to win over journalists like we used to. It's, you know, it's more like partnerships with influencers and working in tandem with them to develop content that works for both of us. So it's a new world. (Interview 24, director, private sector).

Finally respondents identified that the pandemic created a sense of urgency to all communications that had not necessarily waned by the time the interviews were conducted. This sense of urgency, of faster pace, of things being constant and in hyperdrive are characteristics of hypermodernity as defined in Chapter 2.

> And I think it's gotten worse actually in my organization, because during COVID, I think there was at least the realization that there were certain things that were out of our control. And I think now, you know, everybody talks about it being like a new normal, but more normal than it was during COVID. It's like, okay, now we need to make up ground that was lost, which is crazy, because my company was more successful than ever, like, we had our best years ever, you know, during COVID (Interview 22, director, private sector).

> I think also, there's a little bit of an element where, because everything was urgent, or because everything was supplied, everything being messaging and being, you know, information, there was sort of, it was always very quick, and it was always kind of on demand. And I think in a weird way, there may be more of an expectation now that, you know, oh, you know, we're gonna send out a memo on Friday […] And so I think maybe it's created a bit of a sense of urgency and a bit of a kind of expectation for on-demand that I should find out right now. I'm not going to wait till the newsletter on Friday. I want to know right now. So I think. I think there is a little bit of that where it's, it is sort a little more fast-paced. (Interview 21, director, public sector).

The voices of PR practitioners, in summary, identified that the pandemic was a period in which practitioners worked extremely hard, sometimes to the detriment of their own health.

Practitioners found that the technology deployed was helpful to their efforts, but that remote work did have an impact on their work-life balance. There were opportunities for practitioners to shine and to support their organizations in being more strategic in their messaging. At the time of the interviews, however, the pace and speed of response required of practitioners post-pandemic had not changed by much based on their own reflections.

6.0 Summary and discussion

This research focused on the experience of technostress of public relations practitioners who use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to respond to work demands both during the regular work day and after regular hours. It was viewed through the lens of a hypermodern society in relation to the use of ICTs by PR practitioners. The research sought to better understand what the experience of technostress is for PR practitioners (RQ1), how practitioners resist of otherwise emancipate themselves from the demands that flow to them through ICTs (RQ2) and what this means for practitioners and the practice of public relations (RQ3). Along the way, data was gathered in a variety of areas relevant to discussions surrounding ICTs and technostress, including areas such as job satisfaction, stress, work-life balance and the right to disconnect.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

6.1.1 The experience of technostress (RQ1)

Many of the PR practitioners in this sample reported work hours that went beyond the regular work day, not only on work days but also on weekends and at times while on vacation. This was not surprising since the criteria for this sample was structured to solicit practitioners who worked additional hours. What was instructive was finding out to what extent additional hours were part of this sample's work. Some worked few additional hours per week, but others reported working many additional hours per week, and a significant portion reported working several hours per day on weekends. Practitioners however appreciated the flexibility that came with the use of technology in managing their day, and in some cases, this helped mitigate for them the requirement for additional hours, although not all practitioners felt the same way. Several practitioners talked about how remote and hybrid work models have allowed them to mold their work day around both work and life commitments, and that this worked for them. That said, some felt they had few options when it came to handling evening or weekend demands.

The technological devices that most practitioners reported they most used for work were laptops and smartphones, which were generally provided by the employer or client. However, nearly a third of respondents purchased the smartphone they used for work themselves. Desktop computers were not widely used by practitioners at the time of this research with 6 out of 10 respondents indicating they did not use one for work. There was also no standard within the practice about who paid for what technological device(s). Sometimes the employer paid or provided the work device, at other times the practitioner covered the cost. A number of practitioners had both a work smartphone and personal smartphone, although some identified that they used only one phone.

Job satisfaction was generally found to be high among practitioners, based on both survey and interview responses. The survey identified that practitioners overwhelmingly liked the things they did in their work and felt a sense of pride in doing their job. In the interviews, about a third used the word love to characterize their work. There was no single factor that emerged to identify what drove satisfaction for practitioners. However, in the interviews some practitioners identified certain aspects of their work that they found compelling, such as the work itself and the people they worked with.

The question of stress was examined several ways. Using the Stanton et al. (1985) scale, it was found that PR practitioners were most likely to characterize their work as demanding and that all things were stressful, closely followed by characterizations of their work as being stressed or pushed. More than three-quarters of respondents identified that their work was either often demanding or demanding all the time. Almost half of respondents in the survey noted their work was never or rarely calm. At the same time, characterizations on a threat sub-scale of the same scale suggested that practitioners were most likely to characterize their work as under control, comfortable and smooth running. This suggested that while practitioners indicated that they worked in a demanding, stressful and often hectic environment, they also seemed to experience some semblance of order and control within that environment. This question was also examined using questions from the Swedish Occupational Survey of Health (Magnusson Hanson et al., 2018). It found that practitioners were most stressed by demands to give immediate answers to emails and phone calls that required a lot of work to write. They were also most stressed by constantly being interrupted by the phone and e-mail, closely followed by demands to be available on work-related issues during leisure time. Practitioners reported being the least stressed by computers and other equipment that failed to work properly. When asked in the interviews what factors stressed them most, comments analysed indicated, in no particular order, that three factors or themes primarily drove stress for respondents: the job itself; the technology; and the fear of missing information in the course of their work.

With respect to work-life balance, a measurement of work-life balance using Hayman (2005) suggested that public relations practitioners felt that work interfered more with their personal life, but also enhanced their personal life more than personal life interfered with work. That said, almost two-thirds of respondents (62.7%) said they sometimes or always struggled to juggle work and non-work. When asked for a global rating of their satisfaction with their work-life balance on a scale of 0-10, a majority of respondents identified their satisfaction as being in the mid-range, with roughly a quarter less satisfied and a quarter more satisfied. Factors that seemed to positively impact on the perception of a positive work-life balance included things such as remote or hybrid work; a supportive work environment and culture; being self-employed and the setting of healthy boundaries. Factors seen as impacting negatively on work-life balance were elements such as too much work, poor setting of boundaries, and lack of resources, human or financial. Work-life balance was also measured in the survey using technostress questions, as noted below.

As part of the research on technostress, this study probed practitioners on what they did with their technology while on vacation. While some of these results could also be considered as part of the responses to RQ2, they have been organized within RQ1 since they relate also to hours of work and issues of work-life balance. This research found that practitioners did take vacation time. Practitioners also indicated that it was difficult to disconnect from work during vacation times because of the expectations of the job, indicating that vacation might not entirely be personal time. The extent to which work demands via technology were a factor during vacation varied based on the responses. Some organizations were respectful of vacation time. Others less so. Some practitioners exercised at least some agency over their devices and made decisions about whether work could access them during vacation, or not. In the extreme, some practitioners took vacation in harder to reach (other countries, other continents) or off-the-grid places and chose to be unreachable. Some turned off their work technological devices when they were on vacation, although more commonly they may have provided limited access to one or two people, who knew how to reach them. Some took vacation during slower work periods based on the rhythm of their employers, when it was less likely they would be contacted. Some made use of some of the technological features identified in the interviews in RQ2, like turning off notifications, to be less accessible and have some agency over what reached them. This type of action could shift the power balance to the practitioner, who could then decide whether and when to look at their messages. Some chose not to respond during vacation to role model good practice to more junior staff. Many practitioners tended to take some work technology with them and a number continued to respond in order to alleviate the load on others and to support their organizations.

This research used the technostress scale to identify some of the working conditions public relations practitioners operated under. Almost three-quarters of practitioners identified that they experienced role overload in such areas as having more work than they could handle, that they were required to do difficult tasks, were required to multi-task, were required to work beyond actual or official working hours, and never had enough time to do their work. Overload from the technology was also an issue that was examined by the techno-overload section of the technostress scale. Results to a series of statements presented indicated that practitioners did not see the technology as a major factor that drove having more work that they could handle, although when presented with a statement around whether they were forced to change work habits to adapt to new technologies, just more than half either totally agreed or moderately agreed with this statement. Similar responses were found to a statement surrounding whether practitioners perceived increased technology complexity drove a higher workload. The third technostress sub-scale questions spoke specifically to technology interference with personal life. Results indicated that things may be nuanced overall in this area for practitioners. While many responded they had to be in touch with work during vacation, a strong minority either totally agreed or somewhat disagreed with such a statement. Practitioners also generally indicated they did not spend vacation and weekend times learning about new technology. There were feelings at both ends of the scale on the question of whether practitioners felt their personal life was being invaded by technology, with about 4 in 10 either totally disagreeing or totally agreeing with this statement, and the rest distributed across choices that agreed a bit, agreed moderately or somewhat disagreed with this statement. Finally, most practitioners did not indicate that they felt they spent less time with their family due to the technology, with about half either totally disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing with this statement. Finally the fourth sub-scale focused on the extent to which technology could be a positive factor in work. Results indicated that practitioners substantially felt that technology helped improve the quality of their work, that it helped improve their productivity, helped them accomplish more work than would otherwise be possible, and helped them to perform their job better. All of these statements resulted in very small percentages of practitioners who totally disagreed with these statements, indicating that practitioners generally viewed technology as a very positive factor in their work. That said, practitioners were also asked in the survey whether they found themselves viewing and answering texts, tweets and emails related to work at all hours of the day and night – even it meant interrupting other things they were doing, more than half identified that this was always, often true or true roughly half of the time. Similarly, when asked specifically: “when my smartphone rings, beeps or buzzes for work, I feel the urge to immediately check for tweets, emails, updates, etc.,” roughly 80 per cent of respondents indicated this was true always, often, or half the time.

6.1.2 Strategies (RQ2)

A key focus of this research was to examine the strategies PR practitioners used to resist or somehow emancipate themselves from the demands that came to them through the technological devices they use. In a first instance, practitioners were asked in the survey whether they used strategies to regulate or limit the use of technology for their work. Only 19% identified that they did so often or all the time. Almost a quarter acknowledged that they never did so.

Roughly another quarter said they did so half the time, with the largest group, around 41% conceding that they did so occasionally. This indicated that strategies used by practitioners to limit their exposure to technological devices, when used for work purposes, were not the routine for most PR practitioners. When specifically presented with certain strategies, such as not looking at work messages after work, turning off notifications, blocking out times in a day where they didn't look at e-mail or messages, turning over the phone, etc., what was noticeable is that in almost all cases, approximately half of PR practitioners responded they didn't use the particular strategy at all. Among the strategies practitioners identified they used all the time, the practice of not looking at technology during in-person meetings was the one most applied all the time, but only by 16% of respondents. Responses in the survey showed a moderate at best use of any of the strategies mentioned, suggesting that in many cases, most practitioners were not using strategies much, if at all, to limit or moderate the flow that came to them. Respondents were also asked, in an open-ended question as well as in the interviews, what other strategies they or their employees used.

The question of strategies utilized by practitioners was an area that was probed much more deeply in the interviews, where it was found that some practitioners interviewed did in fact make use of a variety of strategies, including some from among the ones asked about in the survey. That said, as shown in the survey responses, some practitioners who were interviewed did not feel they could turn off and had no strategies to deal with their work situation. Some found that work conventions and policies could be helpful, although they reported such policies were only effective if everyone followed them, including senior management. Strategies that moderated the flow such as blocking times in the calendar and turning off notifications were also used by some practitioners. Others set boundaries on their work time by instituting such rules as no phones at the dinner table when they were with their families. Some organizations also established on-call rosters to allow some practitioners to be off, some of the time. However, it was also noted that some practitioners chose to continue to be available after hours because they perceived there were certain risks in not being responsive. Specifically, the interview responses suggested that practitioners feared losing their position at the decision-making table if they were not available at all times. One finding of note also identified that practitioners in management positions took on additional work and chose to be available after hours, in order to protect their staff from having to do so. Strategies that were also mentioned in the interviews included making choices about whether to have technology present, utilizing one's judgment about when/whether to respond to demands that flowed through the technology, on call-rosters, life management strategies, delayed sending of e-mails, and other approaches.

One area that was also probed both in the surveys and interviews was the right to disconnect. Overall, practitioners felt that it should be possible for practitioners in Canada to disconnect at least some of the time, but that this was logistically difficult for some practitioners, and particularly for practitioners in manager/director roles. Some practitioners felt the right to disconnect would not be extended to practitioners and particularly also those who worked in areas such as media relations, crisis communications, issues management or social media. A few went as far as to suggest it may not be advisable to disconnect. It was felt there would be little tolerance for practitioners not responding in cases of crisis or other emergencies, and that if there were a right to disconnect for practitioners, it should include caveats such as the expectation of response in emergency situations. They felt the right to disconnect was somewhat dependent on what the operational requirements are at the time. In their responses, practitioners indicated that their views on the right to disconnect did not differ materially from what they felt their organizations' views would be. A number of factors were identified that made it either easier or more difficult for practitioners to disconnect more regularly, and this included factors such as lack of resources, union vs. non-union status, organizational leadership and culture, and the risk of appearing to be less committed to the job. At the same time, it was felt that some roles and organizations may have an easier time of disconnecting outside of regular working hours than others.

6.1.3 What does this mean for PR practice and practitioners?(RQ3)

This question was focused to elicit responses around the impact of technological devices on PR practice and the practitioners themselves. Results indicated that practitioners felt technology has been crucial to PR practice in the 21st century and that it has strengthened the practice through its ability to better reach audiences, the flexibility to conduct work from a single seat, the ability to better measure interactions, and the ability to expand networks. However, practitioners also indicated that technology had also brought in elements of the job that were more difficult – such as a pace and volume of work that seemed to be "never enough," the stress and risk of burnout, the speed of communications and expectation of response, the need to stay current on new technologies and social media evolutions, and the extension of the work day much more clearly into personal or leisure time. Practitioners also felt that social media had changed the practice because of its ability to be accessed by anyone, anywhere, meaning that – as one interviewee said, "the stakeholder or audience group has been blown wide open" (Interview 2, director, private sector). This reality also means that practitioners were exposed to a variety of views in communicating with audiences, and that the responses from those audiences were not always congenial. Some practitioners struggled with the divisive or more extreme views they encountered when disseminating communications. Some chose to limit their exposure to managing social media accounts – leaving this to more junior staff – and chose not to have their own personal social media accounts.

Practitioners also identified that with technology-enabled communications the nature of relationships had changed, with less reliance on face-to-face communications. Practitioners were concerned on a number of fronts about this: some decried the fact that communications with journalists was now mostly done through carefully curated e-mails, which could at times work well but also meant practitioners were not building relationships with journalists as they did in the past. Others felt that newer practitioners had less exposure to allow them to grow their careers and were not learning the key face-to-face skills needed. For more experienced practitioners, there appeared to be less enthusiasm for social media, and some as noted above were happy to leave the management of these channels to younger staff. Several more experienced practitioners identified that they were not active on social media at all. The research highlighted that practitioners felt there were key skills and competencies that younger practitioners were no longer able to cultivate, and other skills that more experienced practitioners were not necessarily that interested in.

Practitioners felt that for things to change, there needed to be more respect and understanding on the part of organizations for the PR role and towards practitioners. Practitioners identified this as a persistent issue that has been exacerbated by technology. They reported it affects PR practitioners' positioning when decisions are made, their access to resources (such as the ability to have enough staff to establish on-call systems), and even the incivility that can sometimes be levelled at practitioners by leaders. Practitioners suggested that better boundaries and expectations – including the ability to say no to extra work – not only on the part of organizations but also on the part of practitioners could help. Practitioners also wanted more support from leadership in the setting of boundaries. One particular item practitioners stressed could be better defined in support of better balancing the work demands that flowed through technology was the ability to have a shared definition of what constituted a crisis. Currently, practitioners communicated that many things that were not crises were treated as such by clients and employers, particularly since the pandemic, and that this at times significantly drove after-hours and weekend asks. Some practitioners chose to resist non-urgent requests by delaying response to e-mails, or not responding at all.

Finally, practitioners identified that it would be important to prepare future practitioners for what they would encounter in the practice. They felt that both the practice and academia had a role to play in preparing new practitioners in how to use technology and what to expect when they entered the profession. They communicated that organizations needed a better understanding of what public relations is, and that this was partly the responsibility of practitioners to communicate. Some were also concerned that ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence might lead organizations to believe they needed fewer resources because the work could be fulfilled using such resources. Practitioners said communication about this and the creation of parameters around the use of generative artificial intelligence would be helpful.

In the course of this research, there was also opportunity to hear the views of practitioners about how the pandemic impacted on public relations practice and practitioners. Practitioners reflected that the pandemic presented opportunities for practitioners to “shine” by demonstrating and leveraging their skills in crisis communications, relationship management and internal communications. It was also positive in that it allowed for a very rapid deployment of technology that facilitated remote work and agility of response on the part of practitioners and organizations. Participants reflected that these advances in technology also increased multi-tasking, brought a sense of urgency to work, and increased the use of multiple platforms simultaneously, which contributed to stress. As in many other parts of this research, practitioners communicated that the pandemic brought advantages in terms of the ability to work remotely, but that it also exacerbated issues with work-life balance because work was being conducted at home, making it more difficult to delimit between the work and personal spheres. Participants also noted that this period was very stressful for practitioners. They felt that organizations did not necessarily understand this nor the strength of the contribution practitioners brought to the table. Some practitioners described an exhausting rhythm of non-stop work from early morning to late evening at times. Others identified that at the time of this research, the sense of urgency around all things had not necessarily been replaced with a more reasoned understanding by organizations of what was urgent, and what was not, as identified above.

6.2. Interpretation of Results

Taken as a whole, these results suggested a public relations practice in Canada that exhibited moderate to high satisfaction levels. It was also a practice characterized by speed, pressure and almost constant demands delivered via a variety of platforms that led to significant multi-tasking. Practitioners who were part of this research indicated they had too much work, an ever-increasing number of tools of work, that they struggled to juggle work and non-work, and did not have enough resources. Many noted that organizations and clients saw crisis everywhere. Practitioners identified they contended with leaders who did not role-model work-life balance well and sometimes expected others to work as they did, which included being contacted at all hours. Results indicated that practitioners substantially felt, however, that technology helped improve the quality of their work, that it helped improve their productivity, helped them accomplish more work than would otherwise be possible, and helped them to perform their job better. Practitioners felt they were often required to change their processes as technologies changed, but that they received limited to no training on the technologies themselves. The assumption on the part of organizations seemed to be that by virtue of their role, PR practitioners were experts in the technology. Practitioners in management and director roles seemed to be caring managers who were protective of their staff's lives after hours. However, this meant that some intermediate and senior practitioners took on additional work in order to give their staff a break, meaning these practitioners did not get a break themselves. This suggested that the burden of stress and overwork – whether self-directed or as a result of pressures from senior leadership – usually came to rest on many of those who participated in this research. Occasionally practitioners took on additional costs at their expense to equip themselves with the technology they needed for their jobs, as there did not appear to be a uniform standard – even with respect to smartphones – as to what technological devices organizations would pay for.

Practitioners indicated that technology had facilitated greater two-way communication with audiences. Some practitioners felt this brought out more negative aspects of two-way communications, such as exposure to extreme and/or negative views. They indicated this had placed stressors on practitioners. Practitioners generally felt that organizations did not understand the types of pressures PR practitioners faced and that at times, there was a lack of respect for the practitioner role. Some felt there was work to do in creating better shared understanding around what practitioners did, and defining what constituted a crisis requiring response. Additionally, senior leadership was not perceived generally to be helping PR practitioners manage work and life. Practitioners said leaders sometimes created rules or conventions to foster balance that these leaders didn't follow themselves which placed their staffs in difficult situations, and that this made for challenging work situations at times.

A key nexus seemed to turn around the amount of control, or agency, practitioners felt they had in balancing their work and lives. Most practitioners seemed to want times where they could for the most part focus on their personal lives. How and whether practitioners found that time when they were so committed to work – and potentially constantly technologically tethered – was one of the key areas of focus in this research. The data indicated that the sense of agency or control practitioners felt they had over demands flowing through the technology was limited for many, although some had found a way. Practitioners generally enjoyed their jobs and wanted to be of support to their organizations/client. They seemed on some level to have acknowledged that additional hours were what they signed up for. They enjoyed the flexibility that remote and hybrid work have brought. They felt it would be risky to set harder boundaries between work and life, so as to not lose their privileged position of having their views and work valued by senior leaders at all hours of the day.

The survey responses on the strategies practitioners used, or not, to resist or emancipate themselves from work were very instructive and reflected a practice that for many, did not use basic technology features of the devices to temper the flow of demands. The interviews probed more deeply on this point and reflected that there was nevertheless a full spectrum of strategies utilized by practitioners in resisting or emancipating themselves from the demands of work. These ranged anywhere from utilizing no strategies at all to physically removing oneself from the ability to be contacted altogether – sometimes going as far as leaving the country to do so. Somewhat in opposition to what was found in the survey, where roughly half of practitioners identified they did not use certain strategies, a number of practitioners when probed did utilize a number of features in the technology itself to moderate the flow that came to them through the technology. Of all the approaches, the one practitioners embraced and seemed to appreciate the most in relation to job satisfaction was the opportunity for flexibility to mold their days around both their public and private lives. This type of approach was seen as positive for practitioners as it challenged notions of strict hours of work separate from personal pursuits. Many practitioners also embraced remote or hybrid models of work. Some found a way to organize their lives within the work day with days that were not exclusively work and private time but moved from one sphere to the other throughout the course of the day.

Many practitioners commented upon the fact that they liked the flexibility they had in working in this way – in that they could work a few hours, go to an appointment, pick up a child from school or do the laundry for example, and then get back to working and finish their day. Some talked about moving in and out of various spheres to compose with life – such as responding to a few e-mails while watching a child play sports. Not all organizations extended this type of flexibility but for those who did, it seemed a key point of job satisfaction for some practitioners (and particularly also for self-employed practitioners, who commented on this several times). They felt that this provided a certain measure of control in composing with the requirements of their day whether these were work requirements or life needs. Where there was less control, it would seem, was in the volume of work and the hours at which it arrived.

As some said, at times this could feel for practitioners like "drinking from a firehouse." Some did not feel it was possible to disconnect or moderate, and generally did not. This may be in part the people who identified they had no strategies to disconnect, and indeed large numbers of those responding to the survey seemed to have very limited strategies in this regard. These practitioners were arguably at the mercy of their devices and of the demands that flowed through them at all times. A second group seemed to utilize a variety of strategies in the management of their time and work, often facilitated by technological features they chose to turn on or off on their technological devices, making judgment calls about whether to respond and when, and at times removing technological devices from view. This did not necessarily lead to organizations respecting these choices. It was encouraging to hear that practitioners, when asked in the interviews, did have a variety of strategies they used as detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, not only for work days but also when they took vacation. These included such strategies as limiting the number of people who could contact them, turning off notifications, and marking themselves as unavailable, among others. As a researcher, it was somewhat shocking to hear that for some practitioners, the only way they felt they could disconnect was to go out into the bush, take a vacation thousands of miles away or go on a cruise in order to make the case that they could not be reached. This strategy was repeated often enough that it was clear it was the working conditions that drove these practitioners to make such decisions, and at times one could hear the frustration in practitioners' voices. Even when practitioners used several strategies to seek to somewhat "untether" themselves from work, some seemed to experience a lot of internal conflict about making these choices. Some were comfortable, but others were also concerned about the price they may pay for not being available at the beck and call of their organizations or clients. Another issue seemed to be that lack of resourcing had made it difficult for practitioners to hand off their work to others, or to establish work rotations that might give people a break, some of the time. As a result, one got the sense that practitioners felt a bit caught between wanting to have better work-life balance and the realities of working in PR, which often meant being responsive in order to get ahead and to support the reputations of their organizations. As previously identified through this research, two-thirds said they struggled to juggle work and non-work.

While many practitioners felt there should be a right to disconnect for PR practitioners, they saw it as logistically difficult and risky. Few indicated the right to disconnect should be absolute in PR. Most felt it should be possible, although in practice they suggested it's more possible for unionized and/or non-management employees, and organizations with enough resources to fund on-call teams. Practitioners generally believed there should always be someone available to respond to crises, emergencies, media calls and social media. Some did not feel it was possible at all to disconnect in PR. While it is possible that newer entrants to the practice may have a different view on this point, responses seemed fairly consistent within this sample.

Is this situation unique to PR practitioners, or is it just the way the world is now? I would argue that it is part of what some public relations practitioners compose with routinely. While one can argue that senior managers and others may work at all hours on their devices and do, PR practitioners are also responsible and. in some cases. accountable for many key processes inside and about organizations functioning in a hypermodern world that extend beyond working hours. These include social media, crisis communications, and issues management, among others. Not all occupations include this type of tether to the workplace outside of normal working hours. Practitioners who participated in this research also felt a burden of responsibility that was well described in some in the interviews as a result of practitioners managing processes in a 24-hour world, processes very closely tied to organizational trust and reputation.

6.3 Links to Literature and theories

In his seminal work on excellence in public relations and communications management that is still quoted today (Grunig, 1992, p. 5) identified that public relations should be practiced strategically and that this included that practitioners should strive to become part of the "dominant coalition" where major organizational decisions are made. "Public relations managers should be involved in decision making by the group of senior managers who control an organization, which we call the dominant coalition" (p. 5). Later, in an article on paradigms of public relations in an age of digitalization, Grunig (2009) reconfirmed that his views had not changed in this regard and that most certainly key principles of excellence included that "the chief communication officer is part of or has access to the dominant coalition or other coalitions of senior managers who make decisions in the organisation" (p. 2). While it was outside the scope of this research to study the positioning of practitioners within organizational structures and whether their work identified them as members of the dominant coalition, it was clear from the data that some practitioners were often engaged in responding to work demands at all times of the day, suggesting that technology may have facilitated the ability of practitioners to be engaged in helping make important organizational decisions, at least some of the time, but at a cost that was described in this research. Technology accelerated the ability and opportunities for practitioners to be present in providing advice and in securing their position, in a variety of situations. It was also clear from the responses received that practitioners in part had difficulty disengaging from the demands of work that flowed through ICTs because they did not want to risk the privileged position they felt they had earned in being consulted/engaged on important issues. However, being at the decision-making table may not always be consistent with efforts to balance work and life. It might lead to additional stress for practitioners as they themselves identified eloquently in this research. In addition, some of those interviewed indicated that public relations continued to be seen by some leaders as less of a strategic function and one that simply executed the wishes of leadership – with some of those wishes meaning some practitioners were expected to respond and work at all hours of the day and night.

The society public relations practitioners identified in this research in terms of how they worked was also indicative of a modern risk society, as identified in Chapter 2. It is a society based on the pursuit of profit and productivity, one in which not all risks are knowable, traditional knowledge of time and space no longer apply, and the future is uncertain (Giddens, 1999). This was echoed by those interviewed who talked about an uncertain environment, never knowing what response they would receive to their communications with stakeholders, and the stress this created. Public relations as described by practitioners also identified a state where crisis communications was an important part of their work. Expectations were that practitioners would be responsive to crises. They also said they worked in an environment that had become highly globalized. This was typified by the response from a practitioner who spoke of an event or crisis occurring in one part of the world – and how that led to them theorizing about how their employer would need to be positioned to handle a similar threat – or respond to the media in case they were asked about it. Several practitioners spoke of having to work with different time zones and countries. Practitioners were able to very clearly see a time earlier in their careers where routines were more predictable. It was possible to work from 9 to 5 and then go home, reporters did not necessarily need to be responded to immediately, and responses were not expected to be instantaneous. It was also clear from the responses that PR is a practice of modernity by virtue of its link to and heavy use of technology. Technologies are what facilitate communication with audiences. By virtue of their role in communicating with audiences, PR practitioners are significantly tied to technology in many areas including routine messaging, social media, crisis communications, internal communications, among others. PR practitioners in this research talked about the extent they used technology in the performance of their work. The conclusion that PR is functioning within a modern society was also consistent with views that were expressed by Fredriksson (2009), who identified that public relations is tied to capitalism and mass consumption and is tied to modernity, in part because of its support in supporting the goals and legitimacy of organizations. Public relations practitioners in this research further described a workplace where crisis seemed to be perceived to be everywhere by organizations and clients, to the point where there was a sense organizational leaders had difficulty perceiving what constituted a real crisis.

The practice respondents described was also highly consistent with a hypermodern society, one in which everything is socially accelerated (Rosa, 2015). The constant need for speed, constant change, the dislocation of time and space, the pressure to respond immediately, the urgency, the volume of demands, and the increasingly critical views of audiences that respondents identified support the argument that public relations as practiced today constitutes many of the elements identified by scholars as being hallmarks of hypermodernity, and that practitioners are working within a hypermodern society (Lipovetsky, 2005; Aubert, 2008). With respect to the constant need for speed, practitioners described an environment in which there was a management expectation, for the most part, of immediate response – an environment where managers put pressure on employees – real or perceived – to be available at all times. Further, the survey research identified that practitioners also put pressure on themselves to be responsive in the context of their work.

For example, the survey research identified practitioners had difficulty resisting the call to be available. When asked “When my smartphone rings, beeps or buzzes for work, I feel the urge to immediately check for tweets, e-mails, updates, etc.,” more than two-thirds identified this was the case for them often or all the time. The fact that so many did not use many of the strategies they could use with their technology was further evidence of this. In the interviews, practitioners also talked about the extent to which practitioners were expected to be responsive to crises, to the point where they were also expected to respond if an occurrence turned out not to be a crisis, because senior management saw crisis everywhere. Practitioners also described a state of constant change, not only within the environment but also with the technologies they used to do their work. Particularly with respect to social media, several practitioners identified constant change, with new applications coming on board all the time that required those working in PR be up to speed in order to manage the reputations of their organizations and advise leaders. Practitioners identified that such constant changes in technology did have an impact of them, some were tired of the changes, others personally had no personal bandwith for them, and several also identified that PR practitioners received little if any training on how to use technologies.

The dislocation of time and space was addressed in detail in this research. Practitioners described that their work often had no time or space boundaries, although practitioners also identified that there were certain aspects of this that they found beneficial, such as the ability to move in and out of both personal and professional responsibilities as they moved through a day.

The urgency with which practitioners worked, the volume of demands and the speed with which the practice operated were also addressed by the comments of participants, and are consistent with the hypermodern society. As shown in Chapter 4, about three quarters of practitioners who responded to the survey characterized their work as most often demanding or pressing. According to Verhoeven et al (2018), research conducted also identified that European PR practitioners perceived a cultural transformation towards hypermodernity and hyperconsumption, among other factors, and that this influenced the communication between an organization and its stakeholders. However, Verhoeven et al. focused more on how hypermodernity affected the more functional aspects of public relations, and less on the background of the practice.

As identified in Chapter 2, technostress in relation to ICTs has rarely been studied in relation to PR practice. What studies exist are almost a decade old as identified in Chapter 2. This research found consistency with Ninaus et al (2015), which found that "constant availability, connectivity pressure, an inner obligation for availability and an increased workload emerged as major stressors of work-related ICT use" (p. 7). It also found that, as this research did, that practitioners perceived advantages to having flexibility in relation to where and how one worked. However, this research did not follow the approach of Bucher et al. (2013), who looked at the stress potential of social media and found that being literate in social media meant being able to cope with overload, invasion and uncertainty (p. 1652). Research on resilience in PR (Guo & Anderson, 2018; Moreno et al, 2019; Erskine, & Shoenmaker, 2018; Ziegele & Zerfass, 2021) suggested that higher levels of resilience constituted a competency that may be useful in PR work and protective against adverse mental health outcomes and burnout. Resilience may indeed be a valuable concept to study. But if suggestions are that it is solely within the hands of practitioners to learn to be more resilient, this is a view inconsistent with a more critical approach. Society and organizations are responsible to provide environments that facilitate resilience and are safer for practitioners. This research found that for the most part, although there were some exceptions and senior managers who clearly supported their employees' work-life balance, the burden of managing work and life in the context of ICT use rested largely on the practitioners themselves. While this sample was largely be composed of practitioners at the management level, they well described a situation where they were more and more caught in a world where senior leaders had no work boundaries and expected others to function as they did. According to those interviewed, many of these senior managers did not necessarily understand what constituted a crisis requiring the engagement of a PR practitioner after hours.

In addition, for many of those interviewed, the right to disconnect was limited at best for them, and they largely protected more junior staff from having to work the same way.

While the ability to work anywhere anytime was much valued by practitioners in this research, organizations did not seem for the most part to be stepping up to the challenge of facilitating greater balance or wellness for staff. Organizations have a number of tools at their disposal that they could leverage to support employees, as interviewees noted – among them – more resources, policies that support all employees and are respected, better boundaries when dealing with employees/contractors and training on how to best use the technology to foster balance.

Organizations do have power to make such changes. However as this research found, for the most part it's the practitioners themselves that seek to arrive at solutions in their lives. Research has shown that the wellness practices organizations enact, such as counselling, exercise, online chatbots and other programs have not necessarily had the intended effect, focus on the individual to act, and generally fail to address the more systemic reasons why employees may be experiencing wellness concerns. Researchers who recently completed a systematic review of the literature in this area identified that

> the lack of impact of well-being programs is explained in part by a focus on the individual employee rather than the systems that affect them. (Croft et al., 2024, online).

A crucial area upon which this research turned was the positioning of this research in more of a critical inquiry into public relations work. In particular this research recognized that the power dynamic between organizations and workers is socially constructed, and that through inquiry and hearing the voices of workers there can be opportunities to create change (Deetz, 2005; May & Mumby, 2004). By focusing on the experience of PR practitioners, this research was able to identify some avenues as identified by the practitioners themselves that might be helpful to adjusting the power dynamic. In particular the investigation of strategies practitioners used to restore balance – in relation to concepts such as resistance and emancipation, both concepts from the critical literature (Foucault, 1978; Vallas, 2016) were highly instructive. Research question 2 investigated some of the ways in which practitioners utilized strategies that allowed them to restore the power dynamic in their favour, through such strategies as time and work management, use of technology features on technological devices, choices that were made about whether to respond or not and when, and whether to have technology present, among others. Viewing public relations critically in this fashion moved this study away from psychological and human resources theory and more into a communicational and/or sociological framework that dealt more with issues of power and control. It showed that some practitioners employed strategies to resist or at times emancipate themselves from the constraints of technology when used for work purposes. An example of resistance might be turning notifications off so as to not be disturbed but still be able to look at messages based on the practitioners' timeline. An example of emancipation uncovered by this research would be leaving a device behind so as to not be disturbed or taking a vacation overseas where there was no cell phone or Wifi reception available.

That said, some of the findings of this research were consistent with what had been previously noted in public relations research, particularly regarding the two-edged nature of ICTs. For example, it was found that practitioners saw the technology as both enabling and facilitating (Aldoory et al., 2008). It was also identified that ICTs blurred the line between working and non-working hours (Shen & Fussell Sisco, 2015). Other research that studied technology in public relations practice identified that practitioners experienced stress from ICTs, but also saw several benefits such as advances in productivity and efficiency (Johnson, 2009), a conclusion that was found in this research as well. Research conducted in Europe (Zerfass et al, 2018) found similar results to those in this study that suggested one of the main sources of stress included, among others, the need to be available outside work to access workload. The research conducted as part of this study in a sense validated some of those previous findings but applied to public relations practice in Canada, indicating a certain stability to the views and experiences of practitioners over time and across geographical boundaries. It also combined both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry, something very few studies in public relations have done. But its timing in the wake of the pandemic also highlighted that there were ways of working that could be beneficial to workers. Hybrid models of work, where practitioners are in the office several days a week and work from home on other days, seem to have become far more prevalent in general in PR in the wake of COVID. This was recently identified by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (2024) in the United Kingdom, which found that 66 per cent of respondents to their survey reported working in a hybrid or remote fashion, with the remaining closely split between either fully remote or fully on-site. Similar findings were found in the latest release of the North American Communicator monitor (Meng et al., 2024), which identified that in North America, 45.3% of PR practitioners surveyed said that on a regular work day they worked remotely instead of going into the office.

Research into what competencies public relations practitioners ought to have was surprisingly for the most part silent on the types of leadership competencies that might allow practitioners to make better use of technology as part of their work. The Global Capability Framework (Gregory, 2019), which covered work done in nine countries – including Canada – by the Global Alliance for public relations and communications management, arrived at 11 capabilities grouped in such three areas: communication, organizational and professional capabilities. Only one touched on the subject of this research, focusing on training and development “to develop self and others, including continuing learning” (p. 8). The fact that these capabilities emerged with some consistency from broad research questions that were then discussed by the host countries may suggest that practitioners themselves may not be inclined to look at their own needs as much as they consider those of the organizations they serve. Other research, however, suggested that the ability to be literate in the use of ICTs was important. In particular, the emergence of CommTech has suggested that PR practitioners will need to become far more literate in a variety of technologies that they now use to manage the function. CommTech has been defined as:

> digital technologies provided or used by communications functions or departments to manage and perform primary activities, particularly stakeholder communications and internal advising, or functional support activities such as managing internal workflows for monitoring, content planning, or evaluation” (Brockhaus et al., 2022)

Recent studies such as Meng et al. (2024) suggested that practitioners saw this as important for the practice, although the most recent North American Communications Monitor they authored found that when asked to rate from a set list, practitioners identified their three most important issues facing the profession as trust, diversity, equity and inclusion and decision-making. Such items as dealing with the speed and volume of information flow, establishing flexible and remote work in communications, digitalizing communication processes with internal and external stakeholders, and using big data and/or algorithms for communication were at the bottom of the list of top issues. This was true whether inquiring of United States or Canadian respondents. This would suggest that generally, the practice continues to focus on broader issues for the practice rather than on how the practice itself is constituted, or on the practitioners themselves.

7.0 Conclusion

This study viewed the experience of technostress of PR practitioners through the eyes of the practitioners themselves. These findings have application to practitioners, to the practice of public relations and to organizations that have public relations support. They identify the types of challenges practitioners face in their efforts to manage the work that flows to them through ICTs. as well as some of the potential routes to mitigate some of these challenges.

As someone who spent many years working in public relations and who often worked after hours, studying the practice and practitioners brought certain challenges of reflexivity that I touch upon in Chapter 2. I had the opportunity to spend time thinking about and presenting on this challenge fairly early in my journey as a PhD student. This time spent reflecting was extremely useful to me, as it helped me position myself as a researcher in general and within the context of this work. Overall, I believe that my knowledge of the field and of the work were very useful to my research, may have supported my access to respondents, and particularly helped fuel my ongoing passion for this project. I believe the time I spent reflecting on my role in this study also helped me approach it with a posture of reflexivity at every step. In the end, having considered my own positioning as a researcher, I still felt it would be important, as part of these reflections, to make some suggestions about how this research could be used to enhance the profession itself, and make working conditions and the practice better for PR practitioners at any level.

7.1 Observations for PR practice and practitioners

This research followed a critical approach in looking at the impact of technostress on public relations practitioners. It focused on the voices of practitioners to research the problem and issues. It identified what the current environment looked like in areas such as stress, hours of work, work-life balance, job satisfaction, technostress, the right to disconnect and other areas, based on a survey and semi-structured interviews. It also probed on what strategies practitioners used with their technology to restore a sense of balance, with results summarized in chapters 4 and 5. It also sought to identify what the research unveiled about the practice and practitioners.

Based on this research, there is clearly a role for practitioners in thinking through what their personal boundaries are. How they wish to work, what work they want to do, what requests they say yes or no to, how they utilize their ICTs and moderate the demands that flow through them are all questions worthy of further reflection by practitioners. This is not a one-time exercise, but needs to be constantly rethought in the light of daily priorities and work because work can easily flow through ICTs at all hours, as we have shown through the practitioners' own responses in Chapters 4 and 5. This may involve training for practitioners and could also be part of undergraduate and graduate curriculum, as well as discussed more openly in professional conferences and training events. This might allow practitioners to make decisions throughout their career path with full knowledge of what the practice is like in various settings. Training in how to use the technology itself to manage intrusions and the constant call of work should also be part of any training in order to better balance the power dynamic between organizations, practitioners, and the publics they serve.

Conversely, there is also much work to be done by organizations which have created conditions of work that have allowed them to utilize technology to reach into what used to be considered private space. As the respondents identified themselves, this is not necessarily all bad. However, in the absence of better defining what the "work day" means in terms of a hypermodern, hyperconnected society, and what defines a crisis that would warrant engaging communications support at all hours of the day, the risk is that boundaries, if any, can at times evaporate and create psychological risk for employees.

There also appears to be a need for greater understanding of the public relations role on the part of organizations, because the lack of understanding seems to be fuelling some of the pressure on practitioners. This seems to be a fairly pressing concern, given how important the role of organizational communications has become and how quickly this has evolved with social media. Practitioners identify this as an important concern for them that impacts on their work, their identity and positioning within organizations as well as their work day and life.

Better standardization of the tools and technological devices required for public relations work and who pays for those devices would support practitioners. Practitioners who are employed by organizations should not have to pay themselves for their work devices nor supply any work equipment at their own expense.

Practitioners are being increasingly exposed, with the advent of social media and the many crises in organizations and around the world, to situations that can be very extremely stressful and toxic. Practitioners identified in this research some of the situations they have encountered with audiences, including divisive or extreme elements. I would suggest that this also means practitioners are potentially exposed to forms of trauma or vicarious trauma. In a modern world that is prone to crisis, communications practitioners can be effectively considered as first responders at times, in my view. Organizations should be aware of this and provide support to practitioners impacted in such situations. This may go beyond routine psychological services sometimes provided by companies and require specialized trauma support that can be extended to workers. Organizations need to be much more aware that PR practitioners, by virtue of their role, can be exposed to situations that are potentially harmful, protect the safety of practitioners and ensure that interventions are available to support practitioners.

Practitioners have the opportunity to become more skilled in the use of their technological devices, and in particular in mobilizing many strategies with the technology to help balance their work and life. Practitioners do not seem to entirely see the role they can play in emancipating themselves from their devices by use of one or more of these strategies. To be clear, I do not see this as a weakness rather than as an opportunity for practitioners to restore greater balance at times. Professional associations could also consider helping practitioners be more literate in how to utilize the various tools that can assist them in freeing themselves from their devices, some of the time, and universities/colleges could focus on the importance of such skills. Practitioners could also more clearly consider it a core skill for them to get to know the workings of their technological devices, so they could configure them best to meet their needs.

Practitioners highly value the flexibility hybrid and remote ways of working seem to have brought. However, this also highlights, as mentioned in the interviews, the particular challenges that can occur when work takes place at home, or somewhere other than in an employer or client space. It is important for practitioners and their organizations to find ways that practitioners can compose with their lives in an environment where additional work hours are often the norm. Much more serious thought needs to be given to adequate resourcing in PR, to organizational policies that support practitioner wellness, and to re-organizing the work itself to make it less taxing on practitioners.

This research also highlighted that there may be an emerging skills gap across the generations of PR practitioners – with more experienced practitioners having greater skills in face-to-face communications and newer practitioners better schooled in technology and social media. It will be important for the practice to consider this to identify how it can deal with the challenges this brings, and whether/how to close the gaps.

7.2 Limitations

There were several limitations to this research that reflected such elements as sample size, methodology and timing. The survey sample consisted of 123 PR practitioners from across Canada. The sample included a majority of participants from Ontario and did not include any participants from several provinces nor from any of the territories: Nunavut, Yukon or the Northwest territories. There were few participants from Quebec, which has a large public relations community. In addition, both the survey sample and interviews primarily represented management-level practitioners, with mean ages for both the survey and interviews above 45 years of age. The limitation in particular of the age and role factors meant that this study was largely unable to access the voices of younger practitioners at more junior or intermediate levels, who may have a different experience or strategies for managing the use of their technologies for work.

While 25 interviews did provide a solid sampling flowing from the surveys, the research could have benefited from larger numbers of respondents, particularly in the surveys. The lack of a single professional or governing body for PR practitioners in Canada made it more difficult to access practitioners, even if the research was marketed broadly through lists and social media. I would like to particularly recognize the support of the Canadian Public Relations Society and others identified in Chapter 3 who shared information about this research.

This research was constructed to elicit the views of practitioners themselves about various factors of their work life and technology. While mixed methods allowed for a richer view of these issues, future research could consider other methods, such as ethnography, the use of focus groups, or other methodologies.

These limitations identify that it is important to view the results within their context. They provide a snapshot of the field and of practitioner voices at the time the research was conducted.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Research

This research was largely conducted towards the end of the pandemic period and as organizations were starting to recover from it. I recognize that the pandemic created certain particular conditions for practitioners in the move for many from office-based work to hybrid or remote models. Further research might elucidate whether conditions have changed several years on from when this study was conducted.

The research was also conducted only with practitioners in Canada. Future research might also include accessing the voices of practitioners in other countries to identify whether there are cultural or other differences that could be noted, and things to be learned from practices in other countries.

The research criteria as established sought to focus on those who used their technological devices to work additional hours outside of the regular work day. While this was the area of focus, as was found in the interviews and mentioned by some participants, there may be new stresses cropping up for workers who are protected by union rules and policies or legislation, but still need to complete their work within a conventional work week. This could be the subject of future research that might examine whether the right to disconnect has created new pressures for certain categories of workers, such as unionized or other non-management workers. Such research might elucidate how these workers manage, what pressures organizations place on them and what strategies they use to manage work and life, and/or what challenges they may face in seeking to make the work day “fit” into set hours.

Future research could also focus on newer entrants to the practice from varying demographics, to better understand what their experience is with ICTs. These practitioners may bring new ways of working, may have greater comfort with technology and may be less tolerant of work practices that extend into the personal domain. It would be interesting to hear what they have to say.

Research on trauma or vicarious trauma in public relations work is something that may be ripe to explore, given social media and the number of crises in the world and communities.

As well, similar research using different methodologies could also be pursued. For example, ethnographical research with practitioners might provide evidence of how practitioners manage their technologies and compose with work and life throughout the day, and week.

In conducting this research, I was struck in the literature review by how few studies focused on the work life of public relations practitioners, and by how few studies incorporated qualitative research that would allow the voices of practitioners to be heard. Any research – and particularly qualitative research – that focuses on the life experience of public relations practitioners could provide great insights into the field.

This research contributed to expanding the body of knowledge about how PR practitioners compose with ICTs in their work, highlighted the challenges they face and the strategies they use, and what this means for the practitioners and the practice of PR. This is an underdeveloped area of academic study within the practice. To my knowledge, it was also the first study to examine the right to disconnect in relation to PR work.

These findings contribute to the practice of public relations and to public relations scholarship by focusing on the voices of practitioners in the experiences they face with ICTs and their work. It also focuses squarely on the practice rather than its various functions – highlighting some critical issues practitioners face in their work lives. There are learnings for organizations and for practitioners if one listens to what practitioners have to say about fostering a healthier practice for practitioners.

That said, based on what I learned through the voices of the practitioners themselves, my sense is that many organizations have a very poor understanding of the pressures they place on those who work in public relations. As practitioners noted, some senior managers do not generally follow the work policies they create to foster balance, and seem to expect their immediate staff to behave as they do. Practitioners seem caught at times between wanting to be of service to maintain their position where important decisions are made, and the need for some semblance of balance in their lives. One of the ways PR managers deal with this is by protecting their staffs from the constant call of work, which means managers take on additional pressures in the face of never-ending demands. Based on this research, practitioners also seem limited to some extent in the range of strategies they utilize to free themselves from the pressures of ICTs. These pressures have been exacerbated with social media, which seems to present particular work and wellness challenges for those who manage social media presence of any kind on behalf of their organizations.

It is my sincere hope that this research will be useful to both organizations and practitioners and will make a positive contribution to the body of knowledge on public relations work.

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Appendices

Apendix A – Ethics Certificate

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE I CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	S-03-22-7322
Titre du projet / Project Title	How do public relations practitioners experience technostress? Comment les praticiens des relations publiques vivent-ils le technostress?
Type de projet / Project Type	These de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Renouvele / Renewed
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	07/03/2022
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	06/03/2025

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	**Affiliation**	**Role**
Diane RIDDELL	Département de communication / Department of Communication	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Luc BONNEVILLE	Département de communication / Department of Communication	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada

550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie I www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

Appendix B - Recruitment letters for e-mail and social media
B1 - English

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Invitation to participate in a survey on technostress in Public Relations

Title of Project: How do public relations practitioners experience technostress?

Are you:

- a full-time (30 hours or more per week) public relations practitioner working in Canada?
- have three (3) or more years' experience in public relations?
- respond to work demands outside of your regular work hours (such as on evenings and/or weekends and/or holidays?)

If you answered yes to the above questions, you are invited to participate in a survey being conducted by Diane Riddell, a PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa. This study is being conducted for academic purposes as part of a Doctoral Thesis under the supervision of Luc Bonneville, Full Professor, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa.

The study is about the experience of technostress of public relations practitioners in Canada. Technostress is a form of stress brought about by the interaction between people and information and communication technologies (ICTs) that people use to do their work. You will be asked in a survey about your experience of work, and also about your relationship with the technologies that help facilitate your work such as smartphones, computers, laptops and other technological devices.

The survey should take no more than 15-20 minutes or your time. At the end of the survey, you will be asked whether you would also like to participate in a confidential interview on this same topic that would take place at a later date via telephone or Zoom, or possibly in person. The information you share will remain strictly confidential and your identity will be protected.

Your participation in this research will help increase understanding of the experience of public relations practitioners in relation to technology and their work and how practitioners seek to balance work and life. Your participation may also help others understand these experiences and contribute to knowledge on this issue.

You can read a more detailed consent form about this research and start the survey here https://uottawapsy.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_87TWHE6AveDW21M

Thank you for your time and participation in this research. If you have any questions you may contact the principal investigator, Diane Riddell, or the researcher's supervisor, Luc Bonneville at. If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5 Tel.: (613) 562-5387 Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

Thank you,

Diane Riddell

B2 - French

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Invitation à participer à une enquête par questionnaire sur le technostress en relations publiques

Titre du projet: Comment les praticiens des relations publiques vivent-ils le technostress?

Êtes-vous:

- praticien(ne) des relations publiques à temps plein (30 heures ou plus par semaine) travaillant au Canada?
- avez-vous trois (3) ans ou plus d'expérience en relations publiques ?
- répondez-vous aux demandes de travail en dehors de vos heures normales de travail (comme les soirs et/ou les fins de semaine et/ou les jours fériés) ?

Si vous avez répondu oui aux questions ci-dessus, vous êtes invite(e) à participer à une enquête menée par Diane Riddell, candidate au doctorat à l'Université d'Ottawa. Cette étude est menée à des fins académiques dans le cadre d'une thèse de doctorat sous la supervision de Luc Bonneville, professeur titulaire, Département de communication, Université d'Ottawa.

L'étude porte sur l'expérience du technostress chez les praticiens des relations publiques au Canada. Le technostress est une forme de stress provoquée par l'interaction entre les personnes et les technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) qu'elles utilisent pour faire leur travail. Dans le cadre d'un sondage, vous serez interrogé sur votre expérience du travail, ainsi que sur votre relation avec les technologies qui facilitent votre travail, comme les téléphones intelligents, les ordinateurs, les ordinateurs portables et autres appareils technologiques.

L'enquête ne devrait pas prendre plus de 15 à 20 minutes de votre temps. À la fin de l'enquête, il vous sera demandé si vous souhaitez également participer à un entretien confidentiel sur ce même sujet qui aura lieu à une date ultérieure, par telephone, par Zoom ou possiblement en personne. Les informations que vous partagerez resteront strictement confidentielles et votre identité sera protégée.

Votre participation à cette recherche permettra de mieux comprendre l'expérience des praticiens des relations publiques en ce qui concerne la technologie et leur travail, ainsi que la manière dont ils cherchent à concilier vie professionnelle et vie privée. Votre participation peut également aider d'autres personnes à comprendre ces expériences et à contribuer aux connaissances sur cette question.

Vous pouvez lire un formulaire de consentement plus détaillé sur cette recherche et lancer l'enquête par questionnaire ici
https://uottawapsy.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_87TWHE6AveDW21M

Nous vous remercions de votre temps et de votre participation à cette recherche. Si vous avez des questions, vous pouvez contacter la chercheuse principale, Diane Riddell ou le superviseur du chercheur, Luc Bonneville. Si vous avez des questions concernant la conduite éthique de cette étude, vous pouvez contacter le responsable du protocole pour l'éthique de la recherche, Université d'Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 rue Cumberland, pièce 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5 Tél : (613) 562-5387 Courriel : ethics@uottawa.ca

Merci,

Diane Riddell

Appendix C – Consent Forms – Questionnaire
C1 - English

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Consent form - Questionnaire

Title of the study: How do public relations practitioners experience technostress?

Principal Investigator: Diane Riddell Faculty of Arts, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa	**Supervisor:** Luc Bonneville Faculty of Arts, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa

This study is being conducted for academic purposes as part of a Doctoral Thesis under the supervision of Luc Bonneville, Full Professor, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa.

Invitation to participate: I am invited to participate in the research named above which is conducted by Diane Riddell. We are currently soliciting the participation of public relations practitioners who are employed or self-employed thirty (30) or more hours per week in public relations/communications; respond to work demands both during the regular work day and after hours (evenings and/or weekends and/or holidays); and have three (3) or more years of experience in public relations

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to understand, from the point of view of public relations practitioners, how they work with information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones, laptops, computers, tablets and other devices. Among other elements, this study examines the demands practitioners experience both during regular working hours and outside of these (such as on evenings, weekends and holidays) and how practitioners seek to balance their life and work.

Participation: I understand my participation consists of completing an online questionnaire, which should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. At the end of the questionnaire, I will be invited to participate in a one-on one interview at a later date. I will be asked to provide contact information at which I can be reached for the purpose of scheduling an interview if I am selected for this second phase of the research study. I am aware that not all those who indicate their interest in an interview may be contacted.

Risks: There is the possibility that some of the questions particularly as they relate to stress and technostress experienced by public relations practitioners might create some stress or psychological discomfort for me as I think about or reflect on my experiences.

Benefits: This research will allow me to have my voice heard on a topic that has received limited study in public relations practice. This research will provide me with the opportunity to think about my lived experience of technostress as a public relations practitioner and give meaning to it. I may also derive some positive psychological benefit, on a personal level, in having contributed and shared my experiences. This research may also benefit the public relations community, which will hear from its own practitioners about how technostress impacts them

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have the researcher's assurance that the information I share with them will be confidential and anonymous in any possible scientific contribution, such as reports, conference submissions, posters and other documents. In the analysis and in any reports or publications, respondents will be identified by a numerical code or by generic occupational information that could not identify interviewees.

To minimize the risk to my security and to ensure confidentiality I understand it is recommended that I use standard security measures, such as ending the session, closing my Internet browser and locking my screen or device when I am no longer using it/have completed the questionnaire.

I am also aware that whenever one works with e-mail or the internet, there is always the risk of compromising confidentiality and/or anonymity. My confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. I understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

Conservation of data: The data collected, both hard copy and electronic data, including audio/video recordings, transcripts, survey datasets, researchers' notes, consent forms, and any other project files will be kept in a secure manner in the principal investigator's personal office and personal computer and/or hard drive for a period of 7 years. Only the principal investigator and their supervisor will have access to this data.

Voluntary Participation: My participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, and/or refuse to answer certain questions without any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw from the study, any personal data collected from interviews will be deleted immediately. Data collected from this survey will not be able to be removed from the dataset but will at no time be used in such a way that would identify the individual respondent.

Acceptance: By proceeding with completion of this survey, I agree to participate in the survey phase of the above research study conducted by Diane Riddell of the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Professor Luc Bonneville. If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the principal investigator, Diane Riddell or her supervisor, Luc Bonneville.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5 Tel.: (613) 562-5387 Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

If I feel I need any emotional or psychological support or some information, I may contact one of the following free services:

Crisis Services Canada: 1-833-456-4566 (24/7, bilingual) or text 45645 (between 4 p.m. and 12 a.m. ET, English only)

https://www.ementalhealth.ca/

https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA

C2 - French

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Formulaire de consentement - Questionnaire

Titre de l'étude: Comment les praticiens des relations publiques vivent-ils le technostress?

Chercheur principal: Diane Riddell Faculté des arts, Département de communication, Université d'Ottawa	**Superviseur:** Luc Bonneville Faculté des arts, Département de communication, Université d'Ottawa

Cette étude est menée à des fins académiques dans le cadre d'une thèse de doctorat sous la supervision de Luc Bonneville, professeur titulaire, Département de communication, Université d'Ottawa.

Invitation à participer: Je suis invité(e) à participer à la recherche susmentionnée qui est menée par Diane Riddell. Nous sollicitons actuellement la participation de praticiens des relations publiques qui sont employés ou indépendants trente (30) heures ou plus par semaine dans le domaine des relations publiques/communications; qui répondent aux demandes de travail pendant la journée de travail normale et en dehors des heures de travail (soirs et/ou weekends et/ou jours fériés); et qui ont trois (3) années ou plus d'expérience en relations publiques.

Objectif de l'étude: L'objectif de cette étude est de comprendre, du point de vue des praticiens des relations publiques, comment ils travaillent avec les technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) telles que les smartphones, les ordinateurs portables, les ordinateurs, les tablettes et autres appareils. Parmi d'autres éléments, cette étude examine les exigences auxquelles les praticiens font face à la fois pendant les heures de travail régulières et en dehors de celles-ci (comme les soirs, les weekends et les jours fériés) et la façon dont les praticiens cherchent à équilibrer leur vie et leur travail.

Participation: Je comprends que ma participation consiste à remplir un questionnaire en ligne, ce qui devrait prendre environ 15 à 20 minutes. À la fin du questionnaire, je serai invité(e) à participer à un entretien individuel à une date ultérieure. Il me sera demandé de fournir les coordonnées auxquelles je pourrai être joint(e) afin de planifier un entretien si je suis sélectionné(e) pour cette deuxième phase de l'étude de recherche. Je suis conscient(e) que toutes les personnes qui indiquent leur intérêt pour un entretien ne seront pas nécessairement contactées.

Risques: Il est possible que certaines des questions, en particulier celles qui ont trait au stress et au technostress vécus par les professionnels des relations publiques, me causent un certain stress ou un malaise psychologique lorsque je pense ou réfléchis à mes expériences.

Avantages: Cette recherche me permettra de faire entendre ma voix sur un sujet qui a été peu étudié dans la pratique des relations publiques. Cette recherche me donnera l'occasion de réfléchir à mon expérience du technostress en tant que relationniste et de lui donner un sens. Je pourrais également tirer un avantage psychologique positif, sur le plan personnel, d'avoir contribué et partagé mes expériences. Cette recherche peut également profiter à la communauté des relations publiques, qui pourra entendre ses propres praticiens parler de l'impact du technostress sur eux.

Confidentialité et anonymat: J'ai l'assurance du chercheur que les informations que je partage avec elle seront confidentielles et anonymes dans toute contribution scientifique éventuelle, comme les rapports, les présentations à des conférences, les affiches et autres documents. Dans l'analyse et dans tout rapport ou publication, les répondants seront identifiés par un code numérique ou par des informations professionnelles génériques ne permettant pas d'identifier les personnes interrogées.

Afin de minimiser le risque pour ma sécurité et de garantir la confidentialité, je comprends qu'il m'est recommandé d'utiliser des mesures de sécurité standard, telles que la fin de la session, la fermeture de mon navigateur Internet et le verrouillage de mon écran ou de mon appareil lorsque je ne l'utilise plus/que j'ai terminé le questionnaire.

Je suis également conscient(e) que chaque fois que l'on travaille avec le courrier électronique ou l'internet, il y a toujours un risque de compromettre la confidentialité et/ou l'anonymat. Ma confidentialité sera préservée dans la mesure où la technologie utilisée le permet. Je comprends qu'aucune garantie ne peut être donnée quant à l'interception par des tiers des données envoyées via l'internet.

Conservation des données: Les données collectées, qu'il s'agisse de données sur papier ou de données électroniques, y compris les enregistrements audio/vidéo, les transcriptions, les ensembles de données d'enquête, les notes des chercheurs, les formulaires de consentement et tout autre fichier du projet seront conservés de manière sécurisée dans le bureau personnel du chercheur principal et sur son ordinateur personnel et/ou sur son disque dur pendant une période de 7 ans. Seuls le chercheur principal et son superviseur auront accès à ces données.

Participation volontaire: Ma participation à cette recherche est volontaire et je suis libre de me retirer à tout moment, et/ou de refuser de répondre à certaines questions sans aucune conséquence négative. Si je choisis de me retirer de l'étude, toutes les données personnelles recueillies lors des entretiens seront immédiatement supprimées. Les données recueillies dans le cadre de ce questionnaire ne pourront pas être supprimées de l'ensemble des données, mais ne seront à aucun moment utilisées de manière à pouvoir identifier le répondant individuel.

Acceptation: En répondant à ce sondage, j'accepte de participer à la phase de sondage de l'étude de recherche susmentionnée menée par Diane Riddell du Département de communication de l'Université d'Ottawa, laquelle recherche est sous la supervision du professeur Luc Bonneville. Si j'ai des questions concernant l'étude, je peux contacter la chercheuse principale, Diane Riddell, ou son superviseur, Luc Bonneville.

Si j'estime avoir besoin d'un soutien émotionnel ou psychologique ou de renseignements, je peux contacter l'un des services suivants:

Services de crises du Canada: 1-833-456-4566 (24 heures sur 24, 7 jours sur 7, bilingue) ou texto 45645 (entre 16 heures et minuit, HNE, support texto anglais seulement). Pour les résidents du Quebec, composez 1-866-APPELLE (1-866-277-3553)

https://www.esantementale.ca/

https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/fr-CA

Appendix D – Survey questionnaire
D1 – English

<u>Questionnaire: How do Public Relations Practitioners experience Technostress?</u>

1. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements

	Do not agree	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much
I like doing the things I do at work						
I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.						
My job is enjoyable.						
I sometimes feel my job is meaningless. (reverse score)						
Overall, I like my job						

2. Please consider to what extent the following words describe your work in general.

	Never	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Often**	**All the time**
Demanding					
Hectic					
Calm					
Relaxed					
Many things (are) stressful					
Pushed					
Pressured					
Irritating					

Under control					
Nerve wracking					
Hassled					
Comfortable					
More stressful than I'd like					
Smooth-running					
Overwhelming					

3. Please tell us about your workload

	Completely agree	Agree very much	Moderately agree	Somewhat disagree	Do not agree at all
I often have to do more work than I can handle.					
I am often required to do difficult tasks.					
I often work beyond actual or official working hours.					
I often attend to many problems or assignments at the same time.					
I never seem to have enough time to do my actual work					

4. How many hours do you typically work on these days [participants will select from a drop down menu from 0-20]

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
In a light week							
In a typical work week							
In a heavy work week							

5. If you don't have cyclical work where you work more some weeks or days than others, how many hours would a standard work week be for you?

[Participants would select here from 0-100 from a drop down menu]

6. In the course of a year, how many days would you work overtime

(pick from 0-365 from a drop-down)

7. Out of the 52 weekends in a year how many of these would you work

(pick from selection 0-52 from a drop-down)

8. How many weeks out of 52 weeks in a year would you consider [Pick from a drop down]

Heavy	
Typical	
Light	

9. In a work week, how many hours on average would you say that you work beyond the regular work day (for example, after regular hours, evenings, weekends, holidays)

[Sliding scale from 0 to 10)

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday

10. On average, what percentage of these hours would you say take place outside of your regular work week (after working hours, on weekends or holidays)

(sliding scale – 0-100%)

11. What is your level of agreement with the following statements

	Totally true of me	Somewhat true of me	A bit true of me	Somewhat untrue of me	Totally untrue of me
My personal life suffers because of work					
My job makes my personal life difficult .					
I neglect personal needs because of work					
I put my personal life on hold for work					
I miss personal activities because of work					
I struggle to juggle work and non-work					
I am Happy with the amount of time I have for non-work activities (reversed scored)					
My personal life drains me of energy for work					
I am too tired to be effective at work					
My work suffers because of my personal life .					
It is hard to work because of personal matters					
My personal life gives me energy for my job					
My Job gives me energy to pursue personal activities					
I am in a better mood at work because of my personal life					
I am in a better mood because of my job					

12. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all satisfied and 10 is totally satisfied [sliding scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all balanced and 10 is totally balanced]

    a) how satisfied are you with your work-life balance?

    b) where would you like your work-life balance to be?

13. Please tell us more about your work satisfaction and any challenges you face with your work-life balance.

[written response, up to 10 lines]

This section is about the impact of information and community technology devices such as smartphones, computers, laptops, tablets etc on you and your work as a public relations practitioner. In the following series of questions, the term technology means the information and communication technology devices you use to do your work.

14.(a) What technology do you use in your daily job? Please pick and rank the ones that are most useful to you in your job

	Employer or client provided	Purchased by me
Smartphone		
Desktop computer		
Laptop computer		
Tablet		
Scanner		
Mouse		
Webcam		
Second screen		
Microphone		
Ring light		
Specialized software		

14.(b) Is anything missing from this list?

[will be given a few lines to fill in based on the chart above]

15. What percentage of your work is completed on a smartphone vs. a computer or laptop? [Enter percentages]

Smartphone
Desktop
Laptop

16. New technology and more flexible working conditions have changed working life for many people. Technology can be very helpful, but also contribute to new types of stress. Please estimate to what extent you are stressed by technology in the context of your work via:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
too many calls and emails					

claims on your time to be available on work-related issues during work hours					
claims on your time to be available work-related issues during leisure time					
claims on your time to give immediate answers to emails and telephone calls that require a lot of work					
constantly being interrupted by the telephone and email					
computers and other equipment that fail to work properly.					

17. (original) I put pressure on myself to respond quickly to work demands that I receive through various information and communication technology devices (smartphone, computer, laptop, tablet or other).

    Always
    Almost always
    Sometimes
    Rarely
    Never

18. Please indicate below your agreement with the following statements about the technology you use for your work:

Scale: Totally disagree; Somewhat disagree ;Agree a bit; Moderately agre; Totally agree; Does not apply/Don't know

I am forced by this technology						

to work much faster. I am forced by this technology to do more work than I can handle.						
I am forced by this technology to work with very tight time schedules.						
I am forced to change my work habits to adapt to new technologies.						
I have a higher workload because of increased technology complexity.						
This technology helps to improve the quality of my work.						
This technology helps to improve my productivity.						

This technology helps me to accomplish more work than would otherwise be possible.						
This technology helps me to perform my job better.						

19. I find myself viewing and answering texts, tweets and emails related to work at all hours of the day and night – even if it means interrupting other things I am doing

Do not agree
Agree a bit
Agree moderately
Agree a lot
Totally agree

20. When my smartphone rings, beeps or buzzes for work, I feel the urge to immediately check for tweets, emails, updates, etc.

Do not agree
Agree a bit
Agree moderately
Agree a lot
Totally agree

21. Do you make any efforts to regulate your use of technologies for work? [Participant to pick their answer from a drop-down]

Yes
No
Sometimes

22. There are a number of strategies below that are used to regulate the use of technology devices. Please indicate which of these strategies you personally use or not. [drop down will give a choice from Always/Sometimes/Rarely/Never]

I don't look at my work messages and e-mails after working hours

I block out times in a day where I don't look at or check my e-mails and messages

I don't look at my work technology during in-person meetings

I don't look at my work technology during on-line meetings

I turn off my work technology past a certain time to get a break from work demands

I turn off notifications to get a break from work

I put my phone out of reach during meals or when I'm not working

I turn over my work phone or tuck it away, so I won't be distracted by it during personal time

I don't look at my work messages on weekends

23. What other strategies do you use, if any (please specify)…8 lines

24. Please read the following statements and indicate whether your employer uses the following strategies:

1. Yes
2. No
3. This does not apply to me

When I'm done with my work day, my employer has extra staff or duty staff to handle work on evenings and weekends

My employer has implemented shift work to share and distribute the load

My employer has implemented policies that allow employees to turn off their phones/computers and not respond to work demands after a certain time

25. What other types of things do you and/or your employer do to help balance or otherwise mitigate the demands that may flow to you through the technology you use? How successful do you feel these strategies, if any, have been?
[Open ended, 8 a plines]

26. Were you aware, previous to this survey, that Ontario is the first province in Canada to have legislation that requires companies with 25 employees or more have a policy by June 2022 outlining the right of employees to disconnect from workplace technologies after hours?

Yes

No

27. To your knowledge, and whether you live in Ontario or not, does your employer or do any of your clients (if applicable) have a right to disconnect policy or plan to implement one within the next year?

	Have a policy	Plan to implement a policy
Yes		
No		
I'm not sure/don't know		

28. Do you believe that organizations would be supportive of public relations practitioners who wish to exercise a right to disconnect? Please comment.

[5 lines]

29. Regardless of how organizations view this question, what are your thoughts on whether public relations practitioners and managers should be able to disconnect from demands of the workplace (for example, by not responding to work requests via smartphones or computers or not checking social media after certain hours of the day) and whether this is possible in PR. Please comment:

(10 lines)

30. Please write any other comments you may have on any aspects of this survey here (open question – 10 lines)

Demographics

31. What is your birth year [Pick from a drop down]

32. What age group do you fall under [Pick from drop down]

18-24
25-34

35-44
45-54
55-64
65-74
75 or above
I prefer not to answer

33. How many years of experience do you have working in public relations/communications

(pick from Sliding scale)

34. What is the term that best describes your identity and/or expression of your gender at the present time [Pick what applies]

Man
Woman
If none of these apply to you, please enter how you define yourself at the present time _______
Prefer not to answer

35. What is the highest level of education you have completed? [Pick from selections]

High school
Some college/university
Public relations certificate
College diploma
Joint College diploma and Bachelor's degree
Bachelor's degree
Master's degree
PhD
Other ___
Prefer not to say

36. What province or territory do you primarily work in?

Alberta
British Columbia
Manitoba
New Brunswick
Newfoundland and Labrador
Northwest Territories
Nova Scotia
Nunavut
Ontario
Prince Edward Island
Quebec
Saskatchewan
Yukon

37. How would you best describe your current employment level, would you say you are a

Junior consultant
Intermediate consultant
Senior Consultant
Coordinator
Officer
Supervisor
Manager
Director
Executive
Senior executive
Student
CEO/COO/CCO
Contractor
Other (Please specify)

38. What type of organization would you say you work in?

I work in-house in the private sector
I work in-house in the public sector
I work in-house for a non-for-profit or NGO
I work in a consultancy/agency
I am an independent practitioner

39. In which area of public relations/communications do you primarily work

I am a Generalist
Media relations/media monitoring
Strategic Communications
Social media
Internal Communications
External communications
Marketing communications
Stakeholder engagement
Investor relations
Writing
Other: (please specify)

The next phase of this research will include interviews of approximately 60-75 minutes in length conducted via telephone or Zoom. Would you be willing to be interviewed to discuss your experience and views in relation to the topic of this survey?

Yes

No

If yes, could you please provide your name, e-mail and telephone number (optional), and the principal investigator will contact you. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Diane Riddell.

Name:____________________
e-mail: ___________________
Telephone number: _______________

Thank you very much for your participation.

D2 - French

Questionnaire: Comment les praticiens des relations publiques vivent-ils le technostress?

1. Veuillez indiquer dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes

	Pas du tout d'accord	Modérément en désaccord	Un peu en désaccord	Un peu D'accord	Modérément D'accord	tout à fait d'accord
J'aime faire ce que je fais au travail						
Je ressens un sentiment de fierté à faire mon travail.						
Mon travail est agréable.						
J'ai parfois l'impression que mon travail est vide de sens (score inversé)						
Globalement, j'aime mon travail						

2. Veuillez considérer dans quelle mesure les mots suivants décrivent votre travail en général.

	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Souvent	Toujours
Exigeant					
Accéléré					
Calme					
Détendu					

Beaucoup de choses (sont) stressantes					
Poussé					
Pressé					
Irritant					
Sous contrôle					
Perturbation nerveuse					
Tracassé					
Confortable					
Plus stressant que je ne le voudrais					
Sans problème					
Accablant					

3. Veuillez nous parler de votre charge de travail

	Tout à fait d'accord	Beaucoup d'accord	Modérément d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Pas du tout d'accord
Je dois souvent faire plus de travail que je ne peux en assumer					
On me demande souvent d'effectuer des tâches difficiles					
Je travaille souvent au-delà des heures de travail réelles ou officielles					
Je m'occupe souvent de plusieurs problèmes ou travaux en même temps					

Je n'ai jamais assez de temps pour faire mon travail réel					

4. Combien d'heures travaillez-vous habituellement les jours indiqués [les participants choisiront dans un menu déroulant de 0 à 20] ?

	Lundi	Mardi	Mercredi	Jeudi	Vendredi	Samedi	Dimanche
Dans une semaine légère							
Au cours d'une semaine de travail typique							
Au cours d'une semaine de travail intense							

5. Si vous n'avez pas de travail cyclique où vous travaillez davantage certaines semaines ou certains jours que d'autres, à combien d'heures correspondrait pour vous une semaine de travail standard ?

[Les participants doivent choisir ici entre 0 et 100 dans un menu déroulant].

6. Au cours d'une année, combien de jours feriez-vous des heures supplémentaires ?

(Choisir de 0 à 365 dans un menu déroulant)

7. Sur les 52 week-ends de l'année, combien de ces week-ends travailleriez-vous ?

(choisissez dans la liste déroulante 0-52).

8. Sur les 52 semaines que compte l'année, combien de semaines considéreriez-vous comme [Choisissez dans un menu déroulant] ?

Lourd	
Typique	
Léger	

9. Au cours d'une semaine de travail, combien d'heures en moyenne diriez-vous que vous travaillez en dehors de la journée de travail normale (par exemple, après les heures normales, le soir, les week-ends, les jours fériés) ?

(échelle mobile de 0 à 10)

Lundi
Mardi
Mercredi
Jeudi
Vendredi
Samedi
Dimanche

10. En moyenne, quel pourcentage de ces heures se déroulent en dehors de votre semaine de travail normale (après les heures de travail, les week-ends ou les jours fériés) ?

(échelle mobile - 0-100%)

11. Quel est votre degré d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes

	Totalement vrai pour moi	Plutôt vrai pour moi	Un peu vrai pour moi	Plutôt faux pour moi	Totalement faux pour moi
Ma vie personnelle souffre à cause du travail					
Mon travail rend ma vie personnelle difficile					
Je néglige mes besoins personnels à cause du travail					
Je mets ma vie personnelle en attente à cause du travail					

Je manque des activités personnelles à cause du travail					
J'ai du mal à concilier travail et vie privée.					
Je suis satisfait(e) du temps que je consacre aux activités non professionnelles (score inversé).					
Ma vie personnelle me prive d'énergie pour le travail					
Je suis trop fatigué(e) pour être efficace au travail					
Mon travail souffre de ma vie personnelle.					
Il est difficile de travailler à cause de questions personnelles					
Ma vie personnelle me donne de l'énergie pour mon travail					
Mon travail me donne de l'énergie pour mes activités personnelles					
Je suis de meilleure humeur au travail à cause de ma vie personnelle					
Je suis de meilleure humeur grâce à mon travail					

12. Sur une échelle de 1 à 10 où 1 n'est pas du tout satisfait et 10 est totalement satisfait [échelle glissante de 1 à 10 où 1 n'est pas du tout équilibré et 10 est totalement équilibré]

a) dans quelle mesure êtes-vous satisfait(e) de l'équilibre entre votre vie professionnelle et votre vie privée ?

b) où aimeriez-vous que votre équilibre travail-vie privée soit ?

13. Veuillez nous en dire plus sur votre satisfaction au travail et sur les difficultés que vous rencontrez en matière d'équilibre entre vie professionnelle et vie privée.

[réponse écrite, 10 lignes maximum].

Cette section concerne l'impact que les dispositifs de technologie de l'information et de la communication tels que les smartphones, les ordinateurs, les ordinateurs portables, les tablettes, etc. ont sur vous et votre travail en tant que praticien des relations publiques. Dans la série de questions qui suit, le terme technologie désigne les dispositifs de technologie de l'information et de la communication que vous utilisez pour faire votre travail.

14. a) Quelle technologie utilisez-vous dans votre travail quotidien ? Veuillez choisir et classer celles qui vous sont les plus utiles dans votre travail.

	Fourni par l'employeur ou le client	Acheté par moi
Smartphone		
Ordinateur de bureau		
Ordinateur portable		
Tablette		
Scanner		
Souris		
Webcam		
Second écran		
Microphone		
Anneau lumineux		
Logiciel spécialisé		

14. b) Y a-t-il quelque chose qui manque dans cette liste ?

(vous aurez quelques lignes à remplir en vous basant sur le tableau ci-dessus)

15. Quel pourcentage de votre travail est réalisé sur un smartphone par rapport à un ordinateur ou un portable ?

[Entrez les pourcentages]
Téléphone portable (smartphone)
Ordinateur de bureau
Ordinateur portable (Laptop)

16. Les nouvelles technologies et des conditions de travail plus flexibles ont changé la vie professionnelle de nombreuses personnes. La technologie peut être très utile, mais aussi contribuer à de nouveaux types de stress. Veuillez estimer dans quelle mesure vous êtes stressé par la technologie dans le contexte de votre travail via :

	Jamais	Rarement	Parfois	Presque toujours	Toujours
trop d'appels et de courriels					
des demandes de disponibilité sur des questions liées au travail pendant les heures de travail					
des demandes de disponibilité pour des questions liées au travail pendant les heures de loisir					
demande de disponibilité pour donner des réponses immédiates aux e-mails et aux appels téléphoniques qui demandent beaucoup de travail					
être constamment interrompu par le téléphone et					

les e-mail					
ordinateurs et autres équipements qui ne fonctionnent pas correctement.					

17. Je me mets de la pression pour répondre rapidement aux demandes de travail que je reçois par le biais de divers appareils de technologie de l'information et de la communication (smartphone, ordinateur, portable, tablette ou autre).

Toujours
Presque toujours
Parfois
Rarement
Jamais

18.Veuillez indiquer ci-dessous votre accord avec les affirmations suivantes concernant la technologie que vous utilisez pour votre travail :

	Pas du tout d'accord	Moyennement en désaccord	Un peu d'accord	Moyennement d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord	Ne s'applique pas/ne sais pas
Je suis obligé par cette technologie de travailler beaucoup plus vite.						
Je suis obligé par cette technologie de faire plus de travail						

que je ne peux en assumer						
Cette technologie contribue à améliorer la qualité de mon travail.						
Je suis obligé(e) par cette technologie de travailler dans des délais très courts.						
Cette technologie contribue à améliorer ma productivité						
Cette technologie m'aide à accomplir plus de travail qu'il ne serait possible autrement.						
Cette technologie m'aide à mieux accomplir mon travail.						
Je suis obligé de changer mes habitudes de travail pour						

m'adapter aux nouvelles technologies.						
J'ai une charge de travail plus importante en raison de la complexité accrue de la technologie						

19. Je me retrouve à regarder et à répondre à des textes, des tweets et des courriels liés au travail à toute heure du jour et de la nuit - même si cela signifie interrompre d'autres choses que je fais.

Pas du tout d'accord	Un peu d'accord	Moyennement d'accord	Beaucoup d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord

20. Lorsque mon smartphone sonne, bipe ou vibre pour le travail, j'ai envie de vérifier immédiatement s'il y a des tweets, des e-mails, des mises à jour, etc.

Pas du tout d'accord	Un peu d'accord	Moyennement d'accord	Beaucoup d'accord	Tout à fait d'accord

21. Faites-vous des efforts pour réguler votre utilisation des technologies dans le cadre de votre travail ? [Le participant doit choisir sa réponse dans une liste déroulante].

Oui
Non
Parfois

22. Vous trouverez ci-dessous un certain nombre de stratégies utilisées pour réglementer l'utilisation des appareils technologiques. Veuillez indiquer lesquelles de ces stratégies vous utilisez personnellement ou non. [le menu déroulant permet de choisir entre Toujours/Parfois/Rarement/ Jamais].

Je ne regarde pas mes messages et e-mails professionnels après les heures de travail.

Je me réserve des moments dans la journée où je ne regarde pas ou ne consulte pas mes e-mails et mes messages.

Je ne regarde pas ma technologie professionnelle pendant les réunions en personne.

Je ne regarde pas ma technologie professionnelle pendant les réunions en ligne.

J'éteins ma technologie professionnelle après une certaine heure pour faire une pause dans mon travail.

Je désactive les notifications pour faire une pause dans mon travail.

Je mets mon téléphone hors de portée pendant les repas ou lorsque je ne travaille pas.

Je tourne mon téléphone portable de bord ou je le range pour ne pas être distrait pendant mon temps libre.

Je ne regarde pas mes messages professionnels pendant les week-ends.

23. Quelles autres stratégies utilisez-vous, le cas échéant (veuillez préciser).8 lignes

24. Veuillez lire les affirmations suivantes et indiquer si votre employeur utilise les stratégies suivantes :

1. Oui
2. Non
3. Cela ne me concerne pas

Lorsque j'ai terminé ma journée de travail, mon employeur dispose de personnel supplémentaire ou de personnel de service pour gérer le travail le soir et le week-end.

Mon employeur a mis en place un système de travail en équipe pour partager et répartir la charge de travail.

Mon employeur a mis en place des politiques qui permettent aux employés d'éteindre leurs téléphones/ordinateurs et de ne pas répondre aux demandes de travail après une certaine heure.

25. Quels sont les autres types de mesures que vous et/ou votre employeur prenez pour équilibrer ou atténuer les demandes qui peuvent vous être adressées par le biais de la technologie que vous utilisez ? Dans quelle mesure pensez-vous que ces stratégies, le cas échéant, ont été efficaces ?

[Question ouverte, 8 lignes].

26. Saviez-vous, avant ce sondage, que l'Ontario est la première province du Canada à avoir une loi qui exige que les entreprises de 25 employés ou plus aient une politique d'ici juin 2022 décrivant le droit des employés à se déconnecter des technologies du lieu de travail après les heures de travail ?

Oui
Non

27. À votre connaissance, et que vous viviez ou non en Ontario, votre employeur ou est-ce que vos clients (le cas échéant) disposent d'une politique de droit à la déconnexion ou prévoient d'en mettre une en place au cours de la prochaine année ?

	Ont une politique	Ont l’intention d’en mettre un politique en place
Oui		
Non		
Je ne suis pas sûr/je ne sais pas		

28. Pensez-vous que les organisations soutiendraient les professionnels des relations publiques qui souhaitent exercer un droit à la déconnexion ? Veuillez commenter:

[5 lignes]

29. Indépendamment de la façon dont les organisations considèrent cette question, que pensez-vous que les praticiens et les gestionnaires des relations publiques devraient avoir le droit de se déconnecter des exigences du lieu de travail (par exemple, en ne répondant pas aux demandes de travail via des smartphones ou des ordinateurs ou en ne consultant pas les médias sociaux après certaines heures de la journée) et si cela est possible dans les relations publiques. Veuillez commenter :

(10 lignes)

30. Veuillez écrire ici tout autre commentaire que vous pourriez avoir sur tout aspect de cette enquête (question ouverte - 10 lignes)

Données démographiques

31. Quelle est votre année de naissance [Choisissez dans un menu déroulant].

32. Dans quelle tranche d'âge vous situez-vous ?

18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65-74
75 ou plus
Je préfère ne pas répondre

33. Combien d'années d'expérience avez-vous dans le domaine des relations publiques/communications ?

(choisissez dans l'échelle coulissante)

34. Quel est le terme qui décrit le mieux votre identité et/ou l'expression de votre genre à l'heure actuelle [choisissez ce qui s'applique] ?

Homme
Femme
Si aucun de ces termes ne s'applique à vous, veuillez indiquer comment vous vous définissez à l'heure actuelle _______
Préfère ne pas répondre

35. Quel est le niveau d'éducation le plus élevé que vous ayez atteint ? (Choisissez parmi les sélections)

Secondaire
Un peu d'université/CEGEP/collège
Certificat en relations publiques ou en communication
Diplôme universitaire
Diplôme d'études collégiales et baccalauréat
Baccalauréat
Maîtrise
Doctorat
Autre ___
Préfère ne pas dire

36. Dans quelle province ou quel territoire travaillez-vous principalement ?

Alberta
Colombie-Britannique
Manitoba
Nouveau Brunswick
Terre-Neuve et Labrador

Territoires du Nord-Ouest
Nouvelle-Écosse
Nunavut
Ontario
Île-du-Prince-Édouard
Québec
Saskatchewan
Yukon

37. Comment décririez-vous votre niveau d'emploi actuel, diriez-vous que vous êtes un

Consultant junior
Consultant intermédiaire
Consultant senior
Coordinateur
Agent
Superviseur
Gestionnaire
Directeur
Cadre
Cadre supérieur
Étudiant
PDG/COO/CCO
Entrepreneur
Autre (veuillez préciser)

38. Dans quel type d'organisation diriez-vous que vous travaillez ?

Je travaille à l'interne dans le secteur privé
Je travaille à l'interne dans le secteur public
Je travaille à l'interne pour une organisation à but non lucratif ou une ONG
Je travaille dans une agence/un cabinet de conseil
Je suis un praticien indépendant

39. Dans quel domaine des relations publiques/communications travaillez-vous principalement ?

Je suis généraliste
Relations avec les médias/suivi des médias
Communications stratégiques
Médias sociaux
Communications internes
Communications externes
Communications marketing
Engagement des parties prenantes

Relations avec les investisseurs
Rédaction
Autre : (veuillez préciser)

La prochaine phase de cette recherche comprendra des entretiens d'une durée approximative de 60 à 75 minutes réalisés par téléphone ou par Zoom. Accepteriez-vous d'être interviewé(e) pour discuter de votre expérience et de vos opinions sur le sujet de cette enquête ?

Oui
Non

Si oui, pouvez-vous indiquer votre nom, votre adresse électronique et votre numéro de téléphone (facultatif), et la chercheuse principale vous contactera. Vous pouvez également contacter la chercheuse principale, Diane Riddell.

Name:____________________
e-mail : ___________________
Numéro de téléphone : ________________

Merci beaucoup pour votre participation.

Appendix E – Recruitment letter for interview
E1 - English

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L'Université canadienne
Canada's university

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

INFORMATION LETTER / RECRUITMENT TEXT

Dear (name of interviewee)

Thank you for completing the survey that is part of my PhD research at the University of Ottawa titled "How do public relations practitioners experience technostress?". At the end of the questionnaire, you indicated you would be willing to participate in the second phase of this research, which consists of an interview.

I am inviting you to participate in this interview, which will be generally held by telephone or via Zoom and will last approximately 60-75 minutes. The interview will be recorded, which will help facilitate analysis of the interviews. The interview will take place in your language of choice (English or French), at a time that is convenient for you. During the interview, I will be seeking to better understand, from your point of view, your experience of your work in public relations/communications, particularly as it relates to your use of information and communication technologies such as smartphones, laptops, computers and tablets.

I will also send you a consent form before the interview that I will ask you to read and return to me with your signature, before the interview.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you,

Diane Riddell
PhD Candidate|Candidate au doctorat
Research Assistant|Assistante de recherche
University of Ottawa|Université d'Ottawa
Faculty of Arts|Faculté des Arts
Department of Communication | Département de Communication

E2 French

uOttawa

L'Université canadienne
Canada's university

PARTICIPATION À UNE RECHERCHE

LETTRE D'INFORMATION / TEXTE DE RECRUTEMENT

Cher (nom de la personne interrogée)

Je vous remercie d'avoir répondu au questionnaire qui fait partie de ma recherche doctorale à l'Université d'Ottawa «Comment les praticiens des relations publiques vivent-ils le technostress?». À la fin du questionnaire, vous avez indiqué que vous seriez prêt à participer à la deuxième phase de cette recherche, qui consiste d'une entrevue.

Je vous invite à participer à cet entretien, qui se déroulera principalement par téléphone ou via Zoom et durera de 60-75 minutes. L'entrevue sera enregistrée, ce qui facilitera l'analyse des entretiens. L'entretien aura lieu dans la langue de votre choix (anglais ou français), à un moment qui vous convient. Au cours de l'entretien, je chercherai à mieux comprendre, de votre point de vue, votre expérience de votre travail dans le domaine des relations publiques, en particulier en ce qui concerne votre utilisation des technologies de l'information et de la communication telles que les smartphones, les ordinateurs portables, les ordinateurs et les tablettes.

Je vous enverrai également un formulaire de consentement avant l'entretien que je vous demanderai de lire et de me retourner avec votre signature, avant l'entretien.

Merci et au plaisir,

Diane Riddell
PhD Candidate|Candidat au doctorat
Research Assistant|Assistante de recherche
University of Ottawa|Université d'Ottawa
Faculty of Arts|Faculté des Arts
Department of Communication | Département de Communication

Appendix F - Consent form – Interview
F1 English

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

Consent form - Interviews

Title of the study: How do public relations practitioners experience technostress?

Department of Communication
Faculty of Arts
Desmarais Building
Room 11101
arts.uOttawa.ca
55 Laurier Avenue East
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5
Canada

Principal Investigator: Diane Riddell Faculty of Arts, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa	**Supervisor:** Luc Bonneville Faculty of Arts, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa

This study is being conducted for academic purposes as part of a Doctoral Thesis under the supervision of Luc Bonneville, Full Professor, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa.

Invitation to participate: I am invited to participate in the research named above which is conducted by Diane Riddell. We are currently soliciting the participation of public relations practitioners who completed the survey associated with this research and self-identified as willing to participate in an interview.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to understand, from the point of view of public relations practitioners, how they work with information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as smartphones, laptops, computers, tablets and other devices. Among other elements, this study examines the demands practitioners experience both during regular working hours and outside of these (such as on evenings, weekends and holidays) and how practitioners seek to balance their life and work.

Participation: My participation will consist of participating in a 60–75-minute recorded interview with the researcher, in which I will respond to questions in order to share my experience of technostress as a public relations practitioner. I will be asked to respond to some introductory questions about my work, followed by some questions on technology and my work, and then I will be asked some questions about the strategies I use to manage life and work.

Risks: There is the possibility that some of the questions particularly as they relate to stress and technostress experienced by public relations practitioners might create some stress or psychological discomfort for me as I think about or reflect on my experiences.

Benefits: This research will allow me to have my voice heard on a topic that has received limited study in public relations practice. This research will provide me with the opportunity to think about my lived experience of technostress as a public relations practitioner and give meaning to it. I may also derive some positive psychological benefit, on a personal level, in having contributed and shared my experiences. This research may also benefit the public relations community, which will hear from its own practitioners about how technostress impacts them.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have the researcher's assurance that the information I share with them will be confidential and anonymous in any possible scientific contribution, such as reports, conference submissions, posters and other documents. In the analysis and in any reports or publications, respondents will be identified by a numerical code or by generic occupational information that could not identify interviewees.

Conservation of data: The data collected, both hard copy and electronic data, including audio/video recordings, transcripts, survey datasets, researchers' notes, consent forms, and any other project files will be kept in a secure manner in the principal investigator's personal office and personal computer and/or hard drive for a period of 7 years. Only the principal investigator and their supervisor will have access to this data.

Voluntary Participation: My participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, and / or refuse to answer certain questions without any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw from the study, data collected from the interviews will be deleted immediately. Data collected from the surveys will not be able to be removed from the dataset but will at no time be used in such a way that would identify the individual respondent.

Acceptance: By signing my name below, I agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's name: ________________________ Date: ___________________

Participant's signature: ________________________ Date: ___________________

Researcher's signature: ________________________ Date: ___________________

There are two copies of the signed consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Tel.: (613) 562-5387

Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

If I feel I need any emotional or psychological support or some information, I may contact one of the following free services:

Crisis Services Canada: 1-833-456-4566 (24/7, bilingual) or text 45645 (between 4 p.m. and 12 a.m. ET, English only)

https://www.ementalhealth.ca/

https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA

F2 French

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

Formulaire de consentement - Entrevues

Département de communication
Faculté des arts
Édifice Desmarais
Salle 11101
arts.uOttawa.ca
55 Laurier Avenue Est
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5
Canada

Titre de l'étude: Comment les praticiens des relations publiques vivent-ils le technostress?

Chercheur principal: Diane Riddell Faculté des arts, Département de communication, Université d'Ottawa	**Superviseur:** Luc Bonneville Faculté des arts, Département de communication, Université d'Ottawa

Cette étude est menée à des fins académiques dans le cadre d'une thèse de doctorat sous la supervision de Luc Bonneville, professeur titulaire, Département de communication, Université d'Ottawa.

Invitation à participer: Je suis invité(e) à participer à la recherche susmentionnée qui est menée par Diane Riddell. Nous sollicitons actuellement la participation des praticiens des relations publiques qui ont rempli le sondage associé à cette recherche et qui se sont déclarés prêts à participer à une entrevue.

Objectif de l'étude: L'objectif de cette étude est de comprendre, du point de vue des praticiens des relations publiques, comment ils travaillent avec les technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) telles que les smartphones, les ordinateurs portables, les ordinateurs, les tablettes et autres appareils. Parmi d'autres éléments, cette étude examine les exigences auxquelles les praticiens font face à la fois pendant les heures de travail régulières et en dehors de celles-ci (comme les soirs, les week-ends et les jours fériés) et la façon dont les praticiens cherchent à équilibrer leur vie et leur travail.

Participation: Ma participation consistera à prendre part à un entretien enregistré de 60 à 75 minutes avec le chercheur, au cours duquel je répondrai à des questions afin de partager mon expérience du technostress en tant que praticien des relations publiques. On me demandera de répondre à des questions d'introduction sur mon travail, puis à des questions sur la technologie et mon travail, et enfin à des questions sur les stratégies que j'utilise pour gérer ma vie et mon travail.

Risques: Il est possible que certaines des questions, en particulier celles qui ont trait au stress et au technostress vécus par les praticiens des relations publiques, me causent un certain stress ou un malaise psychologique lorsque je pense ou réfléchis à mes expériences.

uOttawa

Avantages: Cette recherche me permettra de faire entendre ma voix sur un sujet qui a été peu étudié dans la pratique des relations publiques. Cette recherche me donnera l'occasion de réfléchir à mon expérience du technostress en tant que relationniste et de lui donner un sens. Je pourrais également tirer un avantage psychologique positif, sur le plan personnel, d'avoir contribué et partagé mes expériences. Cette recherche peut également profiter à la communauté des relations publiques, qui pourra entendre ses propres praticiens parler de l'impact du technostress sur eux.

Confidentialité et anonymat: J'ai l'assurance du chercheur que les informations que je partage avec elle seront confidentielles et anonymes dans toute contribution scientifique éventuelle, comme les rapports, les présentations à des conférences, les affiches et autres documents. Dans l'analyse et dans tout rapport ou publication, les répondants seront identifiés par un code numérique ou par des informations professionnelles génériques ne permettant pas d'identifier les personnes interrogées.

Conservation des données: Les données collectées, qu'il s'agisse de données sur papier ou de données électroniques, y compris les enregistrements audio/vidéo, les transcriptions, les ensembles de données d'enquête, les notes de chercheur, les formulaires de consentement et tout autre dossier du projet seront conservés de manière sécurisée dans le bureau personnel du chercheur principal et sur son ordinateur personnel et/ou sur son disque dur pendant une période de 7 ans. Seuls le chercheur principal et son superviseur auront accès à ces données.

Participation volontaire: Ma participation à cette recherche est volontaire et je suis libre de me retirer à tout moment, et/ou de refuser de répondre à certaines questions sans aucune conséquence négative. Si je décide de me retirer de l'étude, les données recueillies lors des entretiens seront immédiatement supprimées. Les données recueillies dans le cadre de l'enquête par questionnaire ne pourront pas être supprimées de l'ensemble des données, mais ne seront à aucun moment utilisées de manière à identifier le répondant individuel.

Acceptation: En signant mon nom ci-dessous, j'accepte de participer à cette étude de recherche.

Nom du participant: ________________________ Date: ___________________

Signature du participant: ________________________ Date: ___________________

Signature du chercheur: ________________________ Date: ___________________

Il y a deux exemplaires du formulaire de consentement signé, dont l'un est à conserver.

Si j'ai des questions sur l'étude, je peux contacter le chercheur ou son superviseur.

Si j'ai des questions concernant la conduite éthique de cette étude, je peux contacter le responsable du protocole d'éthique de la recherche, Université d'Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 rue Cumberland, pièce 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5. Tél: (613) 562-5387. Courriel: ethics@uottawa.ca

Si j'estime avoir besoin d'un soutien émotionnel ou psychologique ou de renseignements, je peux contacter l'un des services suivants:

Services de crises du Canada: 1-833-456-4566 (24 heures sur 24, 7 jours sur 7, bilingue) ou texto 45645 (entre 16 heures et minuit, HNE, support texto anglais seulement). Pour les résidents du Quebec, composez 1-866-APPELLE (1-866-277-3553)

https://www.esantementale.ca/

https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/fr-CA

Appendix G – Interview Guide
G1 English

<u>Interview Guide – How do public relations practitioners experience technostress?</u>

Thank you for completing the survey questionnaire and for participating in the interviews that constitute the second phase of this research. I have a number of questions. Please take your time to answer them, as the purpose of the interviews is to better understand your experience as a public relations practitioner in relation to information and communication technologies such as smartphones, laptops, computers and tablets that you may use in your work. As noted on the consent form, this interview will be audio recorded. May I begin?

Introductory questions

1. Can you please share a bit about your work and what you do? Also your work schedule, generally what kind of hours you work and when? What does a typical day look like for you?

2. What role does technology such as smartphones, laptops, computers, tablets etc play in your work day? What is your experience of being connected to do your work?

3. What is your experience of working overtime and/or on evenings, weekends and holidays? Is this something that is part of your work?

Technology and work

In doing their work, it seems that part of what public relations practitioners do is receive information and complete work via various devices – smartphones, laptops, computers and tablets, among others.

4. How does work facilitated through these devices impact you and in particular, what would you say is the impact on your stress levels?

5. What is the impact of work facilitated by these devices on your time?

6. Would you say that these devices and the work demands you receive through them help or hinder your your work-life balance?

7. How have things changed in this area since you first started in public relations?

8. What has been the impact on you of these changes?

9. What do you think has been the impact of various technology devices such as smartphones, laptops, computers and tablets on how public relations is practiced and the profession?

Strategies

10. What kinds of things do you do to carve out some time for yourself and/or your family and get a break from the technology you use for work (for example, are there times you don't respond to your smartphone or take more time to respond, block out time, put away your device). Or do you respond to your devices at all times?

11. Is it your sense that your employer and /or clients understand? What do they do to help practitioners have better work-life balance and in particular to get a break from smartphones and other devices?

12. Are there things you and your colleagues do collectively as a team to carve out time for yourself or for your colleagues and/or employees?

13. What are your thoughts on whether public relations and communications practitioners should have a right to disconnect from demands of the workplace (for example, by not being required to address work requests after certain hours of the day).

14. How did the pandemic change things for you in relation to your work and working hours, and your use of technology such as smartphones, laptops, computers, and tablets? At first? And now?

In closing

15. In your view, what needs to be done to ensure that public relations and communications practitioners better able to balance their work and life?

16. Is there anything else I haven't asked about that you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation in this research.

G2 French

Guide d'entrevue - Comment les praticiens des relations publiques vivent-ils le technostress?

Merci d'avoir rempli le questionnaire d'enquête et de participer aux entretiens qui constituent la deuxième phase de cette recherche. J'ai un certain nombre de questions à vous poser. Veuillez prendre votre temps pour y répondre, car l'objectif des entretiens est de mieux comprendre votre expérience en tant que praticien des relations publiques par rapport aux technologies de l'information et de la communication telles que les smartphones, les ordinateurs portables, les ordinateurs et les tablettes que vous pouvez utiliser dans votre travail. Comme indiqué sur le formulaire de consentement, cet entretien fera l'objet d'un enregistrement audio. Puis-je commencer ?

Questions d'introduction

1. Pouvez-vous nous parler un peu de votre travail et de ce que vous faites ? Quel est votre horaire de travail ? En général, quelles sont vos heures de travail et quand ? À quoi ressemble une journée typique pour vous ?

2. Quel rôle jouent les technologies telles que les smartphones, les ordinateurs portables, les ordinateurs, les tablettes, etc. dans votre journée de travail ? Quelle est votre expérience en matière de connexion pour effectuer votre travail ?

3. Quelle est votre expérience du travail en heures supplémentaires et/ou le soir, le week-end et les jours fériés ? Est-ce quelque chose qui fait partie de votre travail ?

Technologie et travail

Dans le cadre de leur travail, il semble qu'une partie de ce que font les praticiens des relations publiques consiste à recevoir des informations et à effectuer des travaux via divers appareils - smartphones, ordinateurs portables, ordinateurs et tablettes, entre autres.

4. Quel est l'impact sur vous du travail facilité par ces appareils et, en particulier, quel est l'impact sur votre niveau de stress ?

5. Quel est l’impact du travail facilité par l'intermédiaire de ces appareils sur votre temps ?

6. Diriez-vous que ces appareils et les demandes de travail que vous recevez par leur intermédiaire aident ou nuisent à votre équilibre travail-vie privée ?

7. Comment les choses ont-elles changé dans ce domaine depuis vos débuts dans les relations publiques ?

8. Quel a été l'impact de ces changements sur vous ?

9. Selon vous, quel a été l'impact des différents dispositifs technologiques tels que les smartphones, les ordinateurs portables, les ordinateurs et les tablettes sur la façon dont les relations publiques sont pratiquées et sur la profession ?

Stratégies

10. Que faites-vous pour vous ménager du temps pour vous et/ou votre famille et faire une pause dans la technologie que vous utilisez pour travailler (par exemple, y a-t-il des moments où vous ne répondez pas à votre smartphone ou prenez plus de temps pour répondre, bloquez du temps, rangez votre appareil). Ou bien, est-ce que vous répondez à vos appareils en tous temps?

11. Avez-vous l'impression que votre employeur et/ou vos clients comprennent ? Que font-ils pour aider les praticiens à mieux équilibrer leur vie professionnelle et leur vie privée et, en particulier, avoir un “break” de leurs smartphones et autres appareils ?

12. Y a-t-il des choses que vous et vos collègues faites collectivement en équipe pour vous ménager du temps pour vous ou pour vos collègues et/ou employés ?

13. Que pensez-vous du fait que les praticiens des relations publiques et de la communication devraient avoir le droit de se déconnecter des exigences du lieu de travail (par exemple, en n'étant pas tenus de répondre aux demandes de travail après certaines heures de la journée).

14. Comment la pandémie a-t-elle changé les choses pour vous en ce qui concerne votre travail et vos horaires de travail, ainsi que votre utilisation des technologies telles que les smartphones, les ordinateurs portables, les ordinateurs et les tablettes ? Au début ? Et maintenant ?

En conclusion

15. Selon vous, que faut-il faire pour que les praticiens des relations publiques et de la communication soient mieux à même d'équilibrer leur travail et leur vie ?

16. Y a-t-il autre chose que je n'ai pas demandé et que vous aimeriez ajouter ?

Nous vous remercions de votre participation à cette recherche.