



#humanizing
digital work

HDW playbook 2025

**A Month of Positive Digital Routines:
The Human–Tech Habit Lab**

Small shifts, **big impact**

Four weeks to make
your digital work
more human,
focused, and
fulfilling.



Amadeja Lamovšek,
Jure Andolšek,
Matej Černe,
Maša Košak

Content

Why This Playbook Exists

- 04 Why This Playbook Exists
- 05 The Science Behind the Lab
- 06 How to Use This Playbook
- 07 What You'll Discover
- 08 Before You Begin

Week 1: Focus & Flow

- 09 Weekly mission
- 10 01 Science Spotlight: The Attention Paradox
- 11 02 The HDW Habit Experiment:
The 2-Hour Deep Work Window
- 12 Monday: Audit Your Attention
- 13 Tuesday: Create Your Focus Zone
- 14 Wednesday: Silence the Noise
- 15 Thursday: Monotask Mastery
- 16 Friday: Flow Journal
- 17 Weekend: Recover & Reset
- 18 03 Tips to Humanize Your Focus
- 19 04 Mini Nudge
- 20 05 Why It Matters
- 21 06 Key Takeaway
- 22 07 References

Week 2: Connection Week

- 23 Weekly mission
- 24 01 Science Spotlight: The Digital Empathy Gap
- 25 02 The HDW Habit Experiment:
The One-Warm-Message a Day Challenge
- 26 Monday: Empathy Ping
- 27 Tuesday: Camera-On Presence
- 28 Wednesday: The Gratitude Thread
- 29 Thursday: Ask Before You Tell
- 30 Friday: The Digital COmpliment
- 31 Saturday to Sunday: Connection Retro
- 32 03 Tips to Humanize Your Focus
- 33 04 Mini Nudge
- 34 05 Why It Matters
- 35 06 Key Takeaway
- 36 07 References

Week 3: Movement Week

- 37 Weekly mission
- 38 01 Science Spotlight: The Cognitive Body
- 39 02 The HDW Habit Experiment:
The 'Micro-Move Every Hour' Challenge
- 40 Monday: Desk Awakening
- 41 Tuesday: Walk & Think
- 42 Wednesday: Posture Check
- 43 Thursday: Micro-Stretch Thread
- 44 Friday: Embodied Flow
- 45 Saturday to Sunday: Nature Minute + Reset Plan
- 46 03 Tips to Humanize Your Focus
- 47 04 Mini Nudge
- 48 05 Why It Matters
- 49 06 Key Takeaway
- 50 07 References

Week 4: Recovery Week

- 51 Weekly mission
- 52 01 Science Spotlight: The Neuroscience of Rest
- 53 02 The HDW Habit Experiment:
The Digital Sunset Challenge
- 54 Monday: Track Your Energy
- 55 Tuesday: Digital Sunset
- 56 Wednesday: Micro-Recovery Moments
- 57 Thursday: Boundary Ritual
- 58 Friday: Sleep Sanctuary
- 59 Weekend: Analog Morning + Reflect & Reset
- 60 03 Tips to Humanize Your Focus
- 61 04 Mini Nudge
- 62 05 Why It Matters
- 63 06 Key Takeaway
- 64 07 References

After the Lab

- 65 After the Lab
- 66 Self-Assessment: How Humanized Is Your Workday
- 67 Sustaining the HDW Mindset
- 68 Final Thought
- 69 References
- 70 Thank You

Why This Playbook Exists

Digital work has redefined what it means to be productive, creative, and connected.

Yet as technology accelerates, our human rhythms (e.g., focus, empathy, movement, rest) lag behind.

The result? Many of us operate in “always-on” mode: over-stimulated, under-rested, and disconnected from meaning.

The Human–Tech Habit Lab was created to bridge this gap.

It draws on contemporary research in work design, organizational psychology, and behavioral science to help individuals and teams re-humanize the digital experience, one small habit at a time.

Instead of grand life overhauls, this playbook focuses on micro-experiments: short, science-based actions that gently reshape how we work, connect, move, and recover.

Because transformation doesn’t happen through information alone, it happens through practice.

“Humanizing digital work isn’t about doing less work — it’s about doing it in a way that lets us stay human while we do it.”

The Science Behind the Lab

This playbook stands at the intersection of several research areas:

Work Design & Recovery Science

Sustainable productivity depends on task autonomy, detachment, and recovery cycles (*Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015*).

Affective and Social Neuroscience

Emotional connection and empathy activate reward circuits, buffering stress (*Decety & Jackson, 2004*).

Embodied Cognition Behavioral Design

Physical movement enhances cognitive performance and creativity (*Wilson, 2002; Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014*).

Habits are shaped not by motivation alone but by context cues and immediate feedback (*Duhigg, 2012; Gollwitzer, 1999*).

Each weekly theme translates these insights into accessible, real-world experiments that can fit into any schedule or workspace.

How to Use This Playbook

01

Choose your rhythm.

Follow the full four-week journey, or start with the theme that feels most urgent for you: Focus, Connection, Movement, or Recovery.

Commit to daily micro-experiments.

Each day introduces a 5-minute challenge supported by scientific evidence. These are not checklists, they're mini-labs for observing your behavior, energy, and mindset.

02

03

Reflect and record.

Use a notebook or app to note short reflections: What worked? What surprised me? Awareness converts routine into learning.

Share and inspire.

If you try a challenge you love, post it with tagging @HumanizingDigitalWork and posting #HumanizingDigitalWork #HDWHabitLab. Collective visibility normalizes humane digital habits.

04

05

Repeat and scale

Revisit your favorite week every quarter. Habits compound over time; the goal is long-term rhythm, not perfection.

What You'll Discover

Week 1

Focus & Flow:

Design attention in a world of distraction.

Week 2

Connection Week:

Bring empathy and authenticity back to digital communication.

Week 3

Movement Week:

Reconnect the body and mind for clarity and creativity.

Week 4

Recovery Week:

Reclaim rest as the engine of sustainable performance.

Each theme is independent yet cumulative;
together, they form a holistic framework for Humanizing Digital Work.

Before You Begin

Take a deep breath.

Look at your workspace, your devices, your calendar,
and imagine what it would feel like if these tools
worked *for you, not against you*.

That is the intention of this month: to turn work back into a human practice.

Week 1

Focus & Flow

“Your brain is not a browser with infinite tabs, it’s a precision instrument that thrives on clarity.”

Weekly mission

In an intentional and creative way, protect two hours of deep work each day this week; no notifications, no switching.

Your goal: rediscover what real focus feels like.



01

Science Spotlight

The Attention Paradox

In today's digital work environments, attention has become both our most valuable and most fragmented resource. Research consistently shows that multitasking reduces productivity and cognitive accuracy, not because people are incapable, but because the human brain cannot process multiple streams of complex information simultaneously (*Rosen, Lim, Carrier & Cheever, 2011*).

Each time we switch between tasks or check notifications, we trigger what psychologists call *attention residue*; a lingering cognitive cost that impairs subsequent focus (*Leroy, 2009*). Field studies of information workers suggest it can take around 20–25 minutes to fully return to a task after an interruption (*Mark, Gudith & Klocke, 2008*).

However, focus is not merely the absence of distraction. When we engage fully in a cognitively demanding task that aligns with our skills, we can enter a state of flow; a deep immersion characterized by clarity, intrinsic motivation, and reduced self-consciousness (*Csikszentmihalyi, 1990*).

Flow contributes to both performance and well-being, acting as a natural buffer against burnout (*Bakker, Oerlemans, Demerouti, Slot & Ali, 2011*).

Digital tools, when used intentionally, can support this.

For instance, structuring asynchronous communication windows, turning off non-urgent notifications, or applying the Pomodoro technique has been shown to significantly improve attentional control (*Bailey & Konstan, 2006; Mark et al., 2016*).

“Focus is not a trait we have lost, it is a skill we must now deliberately design into our digital routines.”

02

The HDW Habit Experiment: The 2-Hour Deep Work Window

For seven days, create one two-hour block each workday for uninterrupted, focused work.

Rules of the experiment:

1. Silence all notifications, close communication apps, and set your status to “*Deep Work Mode*.”
2. Choose one cognitively demanding task aligned with your core goals.
3. Keep a short log: rate focus (1–5) and mood before and after each session.
4. After one week, reflect: What conditions helped or hindered your focus?

Optional twist: share your experience on social media using *#HumanizingDigitalWork #HDWHabitLab #FocusAndFlow* to normalize deep work in digital environments.

Monday

Audit Your Attention

Micro-Challenge:

Track every distraction for one focused hour:
messages, pings, self-interruptions.

At the end, count them.

Science bite:

Humans switch attention
about every 47 seconds
in digital contexts
(Mark, 2023).

Awareness is the first
step to change.

Reflect:

What triggers your interruptions most:
curiosity, anxiety, boredom?

Which ones could you design out tomorrow?

*"You can't manage
what you don't measure."*



Tuesday

Create Your Focus Zone

Micro-Challenge:

Choose one focus zone (physical or digital).
Tidy your space, close extra tabs, and add a cue
(e.g., plant, lamp, music, scent).



Science bite:

Environmental cues help
signal the brain it's time
for sustained attention
(Bailey & Konstan, 2006).

Tip:

Name your zone something fun:
e.g., "The Flow Cave" or
"Zen Desk."

"Design beats discipline."
Cal Newport

Wednesday

Silence the Noise

Micro-Challenge:

Turn off all push notifications for three hours.
Use “Do Not Disturb” or Focus Mode.

Pro-nudge:

Add an auto-reply:

*“In deep focus until 2 PM:
thanks for respecting my flow.”*

Science bite:

Frequent digital interruptions
increase errors, lower
performance, and are associated
with higher stress and frustration

*(Mark et al., 2008;
Rosen et al., 2011).*

Reflect:

How did the silence feel: freeing or anxious?



Thursday

Monotask Mastery

Micro-Challenge:

Work on one complex task until completion;
no switching.

Tip:

Use the “Pomodoro × 3”:
three 25-min sprints with 5-min pauses.



Science bite:

Task switching depletes working memory; and reduces accuracy by creating ‘attention residue’; part of your mind remains stuck on the previous task
single-tasking improves accuracy by 40 %
(Leroy, 2009).

“Depth is the new productivity.”

Friday

Flow Journal

Micro-Challenge:

Reflect on your best focus moment this week.

What conditions made it happen (time, place, emotion)?

Template:

"I entered flow when _____
because _____."

Science bite:

Flow emerges when
challenge meets skill and
feedback is immediate
(Csikszentmihalyi &
Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).



Optional share:

Post your reflection with
[#HumanizingDigitalWork](#)
[#HDWHabitLab](#).

Weekend

Recover & Reset

Saturday:

30-minute digital detox sprint, e.g., walk, breathe, or stare out a window (*Kaplan, 1995*).

Sunday:

Design your next week: schedule focus blocks first, then meetings around them.



*"Rest is not idleness;
it's preparation."*

Science bite:

Brief nature or offline breaks
restore directed attention
and reduce fatigue
(*Kaplan, 1995*).

Weekly reflection:

- Design Which habit gave you the biggest clarity boost?
- What one ritual will you keep next week?

03

Tips to Humanize Your Focus



- Start small:
Begin with one 90-minute focus block per day. Use a visible cue (e.g., “Deep Work” sticky note on your desk).
- Reclaim micro-pauses:
Instead of checking your phone between tasks, take three slow breaths or stretch your hands.
- Batch your communications:
Check email or chat twice daily, not constantly.
- Redesign your workspace:
Keep only the tools you need for one task in view.
- Celebrate “Flow Moments”:
After each session, jot down one sentence about what felt easiest or most absorbing.

04

Mini Nudge

“

Set your **Deep Work**
status on Teams or Slack;
Use your calendar not
just to track meetings,
but **to defend meaning.**

”

05

Why it matters

Studies show that digital interruptions can fragment our attention, reduce working memory capacity, and trigger stress responses (*Mark et al., 2008*). Yet focused, meaningful work is linked to higher motivation, performance, and psychological well-being (*Bakker et al., 2011; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990*).

When we design technology around human rhythms, rather than the other way around, we don't just get more done.

We feel more human while doing it.

06

Key Takeaway

**Design focus,
don't demand it.**

Your brain is not a browser with infinite tabs; it's a high-precision instrument that thrives on clarity, rhythm, and meaningful engagement. Reclaiming focus in digital work is not about rejecting technology, but about humanizing its tempo to match how attention actually works.

07

References

- Bailey, B. P. & Konstan, J. A. (2006). On the need for attention-aware systems: Measuring effects of interruption on task performance, error rate, and affective state. *Computers in human behavior*, 22(4), 685-708.
- Bakker, A. B., Oerlemans, W., Demerouti, E., Slot, B. B. & Ali, D. K. (2011). Flow and performance: A study among talented Dutch soccer players. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 12(4), 442-450.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). Flow: The psychology of optimal experience (Vol. 1990, p. 1). New York: Harper & Row.
- Decety, J. & Jackson, P. L. (2004). The functional architecture of human empathy. *Behavioral and cognitive neuroscience reviews*, 3(2), 71-100.
- Duhigg, C. (2012). *The power of habit: Why we do what we do in life and business* (Vol. 34, No. 10). Random House.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: strong effects of simple plans. *American psychologist*, 54(7), 493.
- Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of environmental psychology*, 15(3), 169-182.
- Leroy, S. (2009). Why is it so hard to do my work? The challenge of attention residue when switching between work tasks. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 109(2), 168-181.
- Mark, G. (2023). Attention span: A groundbreaking way to restore balance, happiness and productivity. Harlequin.
- Mark, G., Gudith, D. & Klocke, U. (2008, April). The cost of interrupted work: more speed and stress. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 107-110).
- Mark, G., Iqbal, S. T., Czerwinski, M., Johns, P. & Sano, A. (2016, May). Neurotics can't focus: An in situ study of online multitasking in the workplace. In *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 1739-1744).
- Oppezzo, M. & Schwartz, D. L. (2014). Give your ideas some legs: the positive effect of walking on creative thinking. *Journal of experimental psychology: learning, memory, and cognition*, 40(4), 1142.
- Rosen, L. D., Lim, A. F., Carrier, L. M. & Cheever, N. A. (2011). An empirical examination of the educational impact of text message-induced task switching in the classroom: Educational implications and strategies to enhance learning. *Psicología Educativa. Revista de los Psicólogos de la Educación*, 17(2), 163-177.
- Sonnentag, S. & Fritz, C. (2015). Recovery from job stress: The stressor-detachment model as an integrative framework. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 36(S1), S72-S103.
- Wilson, M. (2002). Six views of embodied cognition. *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 9(4), 625-636.

Week 2

Connection Week

Humanizing digital interaction.

*"We don't build connections through Wi-Fi;
we build it through attention."*

Weekly mission

Every day this week, perform one intentional act that strengthens human connection in your digital world, e.g., a message, gesture, or micro-moment that reminds someone there's a person behind the screen.

Your goal: experience how empathy fuels collaboration and well-being.



01

Science Spotlight

The Digital Empathy Gap

Digital work makes connection both easier and harder. While technology enables constant contact, it also reduces non-verbal and contextual cues, such as tone of voice, facial expression, synchronous feedback, that are important for empathy and trust (*Derks et al., 2008; Kock, 2005*).

In organizations, psychological safety and high-quality relationships are robust predictors of learning, knowledge sharing, and engagement (*Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009*).

When messages are purely text-based, people often misinterpret tone because senders overestimate how clearly their intent is conveyed (*Kruger et al., 2005*). To avoid over-precision, we state this as “often,” consistent with the evidence.

Intentional digital empathy, such as naming emotions (“That sounds frustrating”), using richer cues (e.g., video for sensitive topics), and brief gratitude notes, improves warmth and collaboration in CMC (computer-mediated communication) contexts (*Derks et al., 2008; Kock, 2005*).

02

The HDW Habit Experiment: The One-Warm-Message a Day Challenge

For seven days, send one genuine, personal message to a colleague, classmate, or collaborator.

Acknowledge effort, express appreciation, or simply check in with curiosity. Observe how the tone of your interactions and your mood shift across the week.

Optional: share your reflections with *#HDWHabitLab* *#ConnectionWeek*.

Monday

Empathy Ping

Micro-Challenge:

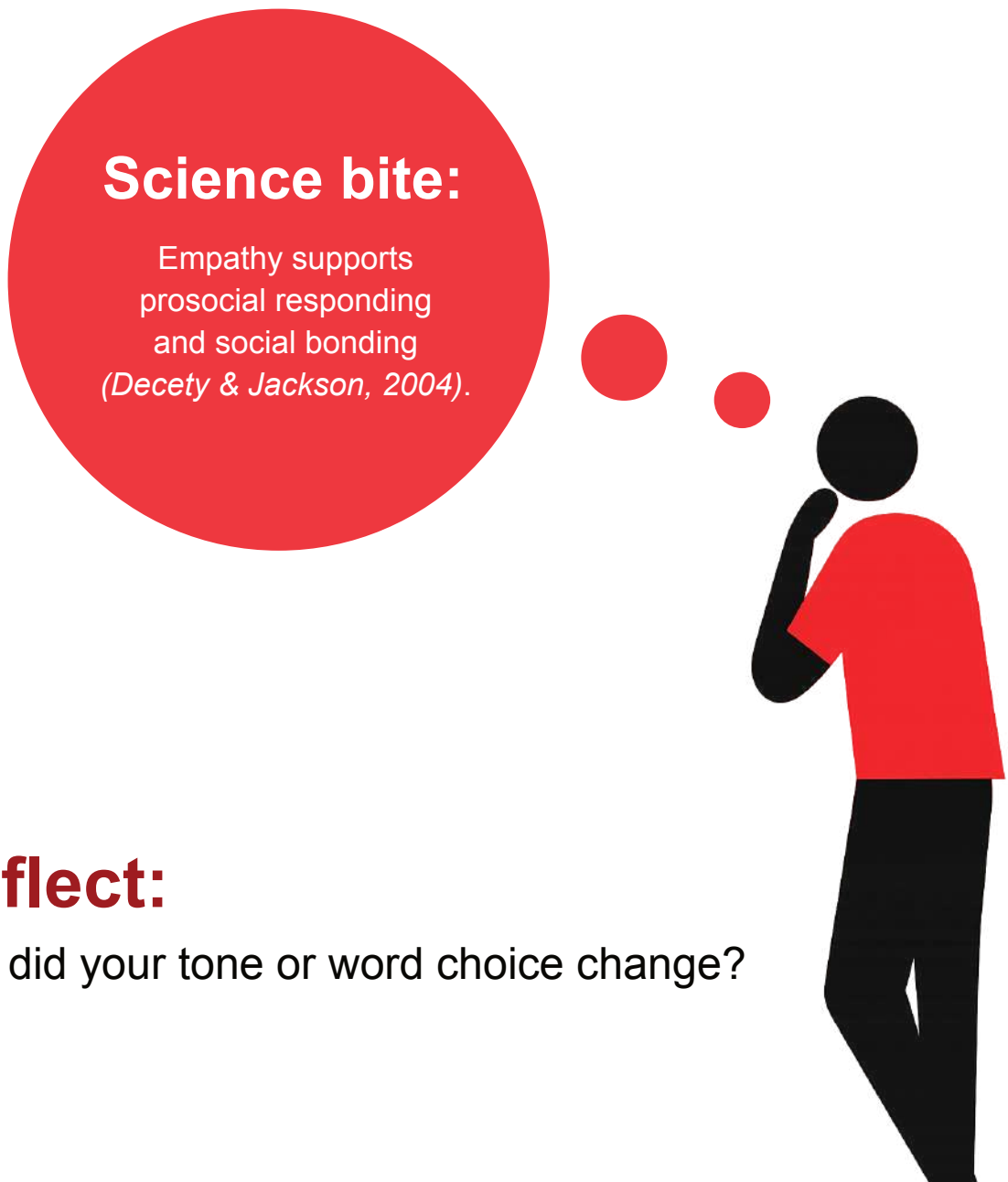
Before replying to any email or chat, pause 3 seconds and imagine the other person's perspective.

Science bite:

Empathy supports
prosocial responding
and social bonding
(Decety & Jackson, 2004).

Reflect:

How did your tone or word choice change?



Tuesday

Camera-On Presence

Micro-Challenge:

Turn your camera on in at least one meeting where you'd normally stay off.

Science bite:

Richer, more “natural” media add visual cues that aid understanding and cooperation
(Kock, 2005).

Tip:

Keep posture open; nod or smile once per speaker.

“Presence is not about being seen — it’s about being attentive.”



Wednesday

The Gratitude Thread

Micro-Challenge:

Publicly thank someone in a group chat or Slack channel.



Science bite:

Gratitude strengthens relationships by helping people **find, remind, and bind** valued partners (*Algoe, 2012*).

Reflect:

How did others respond?

Thursday

Ask Before You Tell

Micro-Challenge:

Start every feedback conversation with a question:
“Can I share a thought that might help?”

Pro-nudge:

Replace “You should...”
with “What if we tried...?”

Science bite:

Behaviors that
lower interpersonal
risk and invite
input are central to
psychological safety
(Edmondson &
Lei, 2014).



Friday

The Digital Compliment

Micro-Challenge:

Give one specific compliment via chat or email;
highlight effort, not personality
(*"I appreciated how you structured that summary"*).

Science bite:

Positive social cues/
recognition engage appetitive
motivational systems
(approach/reward),
reinforcing engagement
(Lang & Bradley, 2010).



Saturday to Sunday

Connection Retro

Micro-Challenge:

Review your week's messages.

Which ones felt most human?

What pattern will you
keep next week?

*"Kindness is
bandwidth-independent."*



03

Tips to Humanize Your Digital Communication



- Replace “OK” with short affirmations (“Got it, thanks for clarifying!”).
- Use names; personalization boosts engagement.
- Add warmth cues; emojis or line breaks to signal tone.
- Give feedback live, not by long email threads.
- Celebrate small wins collectively on Fridays.

04

Mini Nudge

“

Before hitting Send, ask:
“Does this message
sound like me, a person,
or like a system?”

”

05

Why it matters

Empathy transforms information exchange into relationship building.

In distributed work, this human layer keeps teams resilient, creative, and psychologically safe.

Digital connection isn't about constant contact, it's about quality of presence.

Digital connection isn't about constant contact, it's about quality of presence.

06

Key Takeaway

**Connection
is a practice,
not a platform.**

Every click, message, or emoji can either distance or humanize, so choose intentionally.

07

References

Algoe, S. B. (2012). Find, remind, and bind: The functions of gratitude in everyday relationships. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(6), 455–469.

Carmeli, A. & Gittell, J. H. (2009). High-quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning from failures in work organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30(6), 709–729.

Decety, J. & Jackson, P. L. (2004). The functional architecture of human empathy. *Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews*, 3(2), 71–100.

Derks, D., Fischer, A. H. & Bos, A. E. R. (2008). The role of emotion in computer-mediated communication: A review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(3), 766–785.

Edmondson, A. C. & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 23–43.

Kock, N. (2005). Media richness or media naturalness? The evolution of our biological communication apparatus and its influence on new communication media. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 48(2), 117–130.

Kruger, J., Epley, N., Parker, J. & Ng, Z. W. (2005). Egocentrism over e-mail: Can we communicate as well as we think? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89(6), 925–936.

Kuznekoff, J. H. & Titsworth, S. (2013). The impact of mobile phone usage on student learning. *Communication Education*, 62(3), 233–252.

Lang, P. J. & Bradley, M. M. (2010). Emotion and the motivational brain. *Biological psychology*, 84(3), 437–450.

Week 3

Movement Week

Humanizing your digital body.

*“You don’t think your way into better working —
you move your way there.”*

Weekly mission

This week, integrate small, intentional movements into your digital routines. Every day, perform one embodied micro-ritual to reconnect mind, body, and screen.

Your goal: experience how motion restores energy and focus.



01

Science Spotlight

The Cognitive Body

Modern work design often forgets that cognition is embodied; thought is rooted in physical experience (*Wilson, 2002*).

Research indicates that prolonged sitting is associated with reduced cerebral blood and oxygen flow, impaired mood, and diminished executive performance (*Chandrasekaran, Pesola, Rao & Arumugam, 2021*).

Conversely, even short bouts of movement, like stretching, walking, or posture changes, can boost working memory and divergent thinking (*Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014*).

The embodied-cognition framework proposes that the body actively shapes mental processes: upright posture increases confidence and positive affect (*Carney, Cuddy & Yap, 2010*); open gestures improve communication and recall (*Goldin-Meadow & Beilock, 2010*).

Alternating between sitting and standing can help maintain arousal levels during computer work (*Ebara et al., 2008*), and more recent sit–stand desk interventions show improvements in subjective health, vitality, and sometimes reduced discomfort.

02

The HDW Habit Experiment: The “Micro-Move Every Hour” Challenge

Set a recurring reminder to move for one minute every hour of screen time. Stretch, walk, roll shoulders, breathe deeply; anything that changes posture and resets your focus.

Rules:

1. Silence Use a visual or auditory cue (timer, app, or sticky note).
2. Log your energy and mood after each mini-move.
3. Observe patterns: when does movement help most?

Optional: share a short clip of your favorite move on social media with *#HDWHabitLab* *#MoveAndThink*.

Monday

Desk Awakening

Micro-Challenge:

Every 60 minutes,
stand up and stretch
arms above your head
for 10 seconds.

Reflect:

How does your concentration
change after three rounds?

Science bite:

Short movement breaks
enhance alertness and
vigilance, likely by
improving cerebral blood
flow and oxygen delivery
(González-Fernández
et al., 2021).



Tuesday

Walk & Think

Micro-Challenge:

Take one 10-minute walking meeting or record a voice note instead of typing.

Science bite:

Walking increases creative output by $\approx 60\%$ compared with sitting
(Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014).

"Ideas like to move."



Wednesday

Posture Check

Micro-Challenge:

Each time you open a new browser tab,
roll your shoulders back and align your spine.

Pro-nudge:

Pair posture reset with a breath cue;
inhale focus, exhale tension.

Science bite:

Upright posture
enhances positive
affect and
perceived control
(Carney et al., 2010).



Thursday

Micro-Stretch Thread

Micro-Challenge:

Share one movement tip with your team chat (photo, emoji, or GIF).

Science bite:

Social accountability and shared responsibility within groups enhance motivation and adherence to physical-activity routines (Hellison, Wright, Martinek, & Walsh, 2015).



Reflect:

Did others join in?

Friday

Embodied Flow

Micro-Challenge:

Before a deep-work session,
do a 2-minute movement ritual —
slow neck rolls, hand shake, deep exhale.

Template:

“When I moved _____
I felt _____.”

Science bite:

Physical rituals
anchor attention and
improve task engagement
(Hefferon, 2013).



Saturday to Sunday

Nature Minute + Reset Plan

Micro-Challenge:

1. Step outside or look at natural scenery for 60 seconds.
2. Schedule your next week's movement cues directly into your calendar.



Science bite:

Even brief exposure
to nature restores
directed attention
(Kaplan, 1995).

*"Motion is emotion
in action."*

03

Tips to Humanize Your Focus



- Keep water within reach
Hydration supports focus.
- Alternate between sitting and standing every 45 minutes
- Use phone calls as “walk triggers.”
- Add physical cues
plant, light, scent — to remind you to breathe
- Treat stretching as micro-gratitude
for your body’s work.

04

Mini Nudge

“

Rename your calendar reminders from “Break” to “Recharge Loop” — it reframes movement **as fuel, not failure.**

”

05

Why it matters

The future of work is not only digital — it's biological.

Designing motion into work design protects cognitive performance and well-being, preventing burnout before it starts.

When we move, we don't
escape work — we embody it.

06

Key Takeaway

Move to think.

Humanizing digital work starts with remembering that creativity and clarity live in motion, not in stillness.

07

References

- Carney, D. R., Cuddy, A. J. & Yap, A. J. (2010). Power posing: Brief nonverbal displays affect neuroendocrine levels and risk tolerance. *Psychological Science*, 21(10), 1363–1368.
- Chandrasekaran, B., Pesola, A. J., Rao, C. R. & Arumugam, A. (2021). Does breaking up prolonged sitting improve cognitive functions in sedentary adults? A mapping review and hypothesis formulation on the potential physiological mechanisms. *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, 22(1), 510. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12891-021-04444-9>
- Ebara, T., Kawasaki, M., Shimaoka, M., Mitsuhashi, T., Mizoue, T. & Yoshimura, Y. (2008). Effects of adjustable sit–stand desks on workers' sedentary time. *Ergonomics*, 51(7), 877–895.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54(7), 493–503.
- Goldin-Meadow, S. & Beilock, S. L. (2010). Action's influence on thought: The case of gesture. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(6), 664–674.
- González-Fernández, F. T., González-Villora, S., Baena-Morales, S., Pastor-Vicedo, J. C., Clemente, F. M., Badicu, G. & Murawska-Ciałowicz, E. (2021). Effect of physical exercise program based on active breaks on physical fitness and vigilance performance. *Biology*, 10(11), 1151. <https://doi.org/10.3390/biology10111151>
- Hefferon, K. (2013). *Positive psychology and the body: The somatopsychic side to flourishing*. Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Hellison, D., Wright, P. M., Martinek, T. J. & Walsh, D. S. (2015). *Teaching personal and social responsibility through physical activity* (3rd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 15(3), 169–182.
- Oppezzo, M. & Schwartz, D. L. (2014). Give your ideas some legs: The positive effect of walking on creative thinking. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 40(4), 1142–1152.
- Wilson, M. (2002). Six views of embodied cognition. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 9(4), 625–636.

Week 4

Recovery Week

Recharge to create.

*“Rest is not the opposite of work —
it’s the hidden half of it.”*

Weekly mission

This week, try practicing intentional recovery — taking short, mindful breaks to recharge. Each day, set aside a few digital-free moments to rest your body, clear your mind, and spark your creativity.

Your goal: experience how strategic rest sharpens performance and deepens well-being.



01

Science Spotlight

The Neuroscience of Rest

In a world of constant notifications, our brains rarely enter true recovery.

Chronic cognitive load and disrupted sleep reduce attention, working-memory capacity, and other higher-order cognitive functions (*Lim & Dinges, 2010*), which can indirectly undermine emotion regulation and creativity.

Although there are many theories on recovery after work, taken together they mainly suggest that the non-work part of life is crucial for after work recovery of individuals, and that the recovery from work does not only require a worker to “stop working”, but is rather an active process (*Kinnunen & Mäkikangas, 2023; Sonnentag, 2018*).

So, recovery is an active biological process.

During rest and moments of mind-wandering, the brain’s default mode network consolidates memories, integrates ideas, and fuels creative thinking (*Christoff et al., 2016*). Consistent sleep patterns, and “psychological detachment” after work predict lower burnout and higher life satisfaction (*Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015*).

02

The HDW Habit Experiment: The Digital Sunset Challenge

For seven days, power down all screens 30 minutes before sleep. Replace late-night scrolling with a ritual that signals rest: journaling, gentle stretch, or slow breathing.

Rules:

1. No phone, tablet, or laptop in bed.
2. Dim the lights.
3. Write down one thing you're grateful for.
4. Observe sleep quality and focus on the next day.

Optional: share your favorite offline evening ritual with *#HDWHabitLab* *#RechargeToCreate*.

Monday

Track Your Energy

Micro-Challenge

Note your energy level (1–5) every three hours.

Science bite:

Awareness of fatigue (noticing your fatigue) is the first step in self-regulation (*Lane, Micklewright & Meijen, 2025*).

Reflect:

When do you crash — and what triggers it?



Tuesday

Digital Sunset

Micro-Challenge

One hour before bed, set devices aside
and lower light exposure.

*“Darkness is data for your brain —
it tells you it’s time to rest.”*

Science bite:

Evening screen light prolongs the time it takes
you to fall asleep, delays the circadian clock,
suppresses levels of the sleep-promoting hormone
melatonin, reduces the amount and delays
the timing of REM sleep, and reduces alertness the
following morning

(Chang, A.-M., Aeschbach, D., Duffy, J. F. & Czeisler, C. A. (2014))

Wednesday

Micro-Recovery Moments

Micro-Challenge

Between meetings, close eyes for one minute and breathe slowly.

Tip:

Pair it with deep shoulder release.



Science bite:

Short mindfulness improves working memory and executive functioning (Zeidan et al., 2010).

Thursday

Boundary Ritual

Micro-Challenge

Create a “shutdown sentence” to end your workday:
“I’ve done enough for today. Tomorrow begins here.”

Note, that you’ve done the work for the day.

Science bite:

We find it harder to switch off and stop thinking about our work when we feel like our tasks are unfinished
(Smit, 2015).



Friday

Sleep Sanctuary

Micro-Challenge

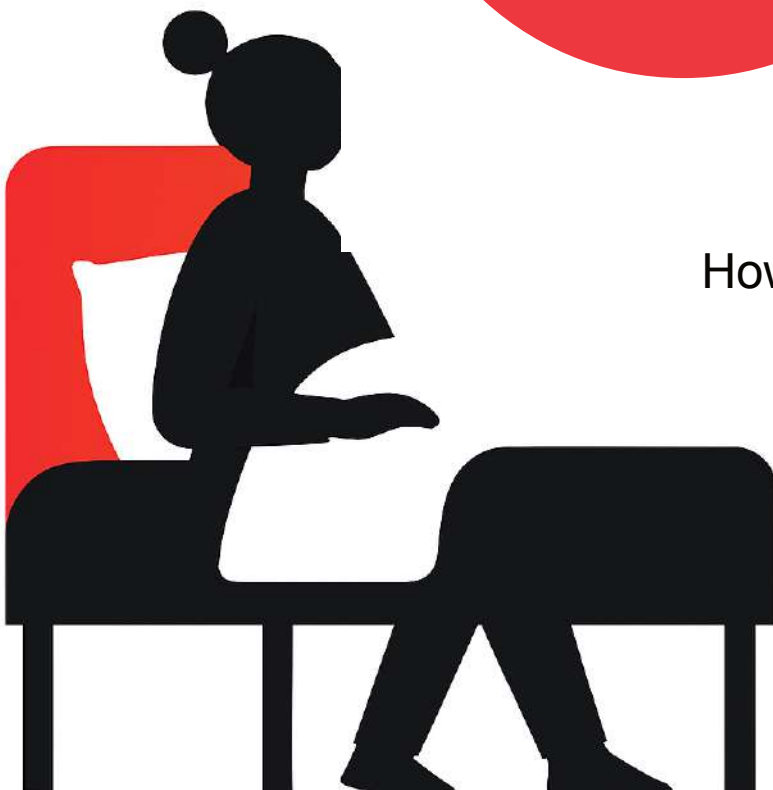
Optimize your sleep space —
cooler room, darker lights, no chargers near bed.

Science bite:

Environmental cues
shape sleep efficiency
(Caddick, Gregory,
Arsintescu &
Flynn-Evans, 2018).

Reflect:

How different did rest feel?



Weekend

Analog Morning + Reflect & Reset

Saturday:

Start your day without screens for 60 minutes.

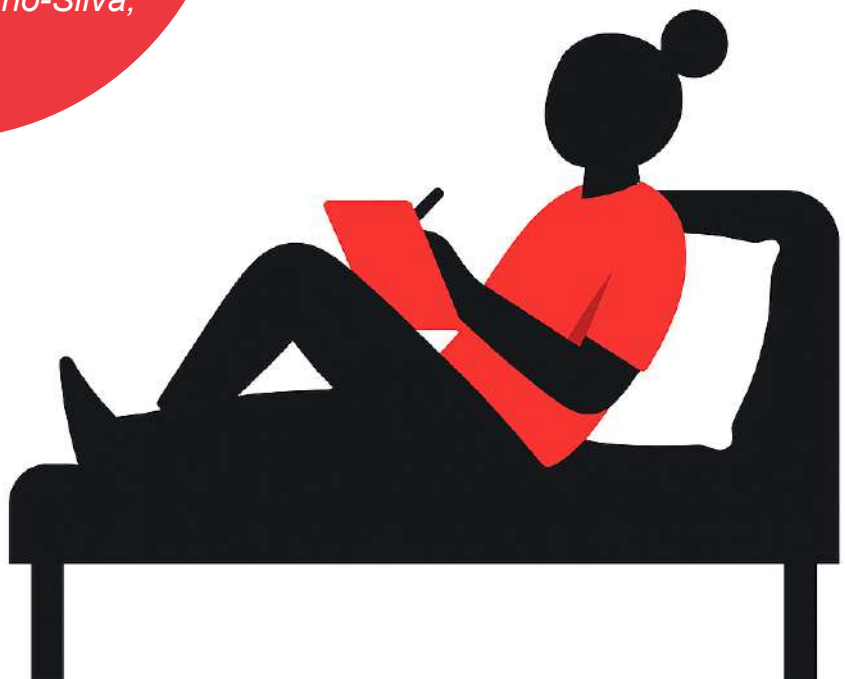
Sunday:

Journal one page about what “rest” meant to you this week.

Science bite:

Higher recreational screen time is associated with poorer mental health outcomes (Santos, Ventura, Nogueira, Mendes, de Paula, Miranda & Romano-Silva, 2024).

“Rest well, so your ideas have somewhere to land.”



03

Tips to Humanize Your Focus



- Protect micro-pauses — 5 minutes offline every hour.
- Schedule recovery as deliberately as meetings.
- Keep technology out of sight during meals.
- Create a “transition playlist” between work and life.
- Honor weekends as creative incubation time, not overflow work.

04

Mini Nudge

“

Rename
“Out of Office” to
“In **Recovery Mode** —
Recharging to Create.”

”

05

Why it matters

Rest is a radical act in a productivity-obsessed world.

Without structured recovery, digital work consumes the very capacities it relies on — attention, empathy, creativity.

Humanizing work starts with
honoring our biological need to pause.

06

Key Takeaway

Rest is design.

When you treat recovery as part of your workflow, you protect the rhythm that keeps work sustainable, humane, and inspired.

07

References

- Caddick, Z. A., Gregory, K., Arsintescu, L. & Flynn-Evans, E. E. (2018). A review of the environmental parameters necessary for an optimal sleep environment. *Building and Environment*, 132, 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2018.01.020>
- Chang, A.-M., Aeschbach, D., Duffy, J. F. & Czeisler, C. A. (2014). Evening use of light-emitting eReaders negatively affects sleep, circadian timing, and next-morning alertness. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(4), 1232–1237. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1418490112>
- Christoff, K., Irving, Z. C., Fox, K. C., Spreng, R. N. & Andrews-Hanna, J. R. (2016). Mind-wandering as spontaneous thought: A dynamic framework. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 17(11), 718–731.
- Kinnunen, U. & Mäkikangas, A. (2023). Longitudinal profiles of recovery-enhancing processes: Job-related antecedents and well-being outcomes. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(7).
- Lane, A. M., Micklewright, D. & Meijen, C. (2025). *Understanding fatigue: A psychological framework for health and performance*. *Sci*, 7(4), 162. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sci7040162>
- Lim, J. & Dinges, D. F. (2010). A meta-analysis of the impact of short-term sleep deprivation on cognitive variables. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(3), 375–389.
- Pennebaker, J. W. & Chung, C. K. (2011). *Expressive writing: Connections to physical and mental health*. In *Oxford Handbook of Health Psychology* (pp. 417–437).
- Santos, R. M. S., Ventura, S. de A., Nogueira, Y. J. de A., Mendes, C. G., de Paula, J. J., Miranda, D. M. & Romano-Silva, M. A. (2024). The associations between screen time and mental health in adults: A systematic review. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, 9(9), 825–845. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-024-00372-6>
- Smit, B. W. (2015). Successfully leaving work at work: The self-regulatory underpinnings of psychological detachment. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 88(4), 605–629. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12137>
- Sonnentag, S. (2018). The recovery paradox: Portraying the complex interplay between job stressors, lack of recovery, and poor well-being. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 38, 169–189.
- Sonnentag, S. & Fritz, C. (2015). Recovery from job stress: The stressor-detachment model as an integrative framework. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(S1), S72–S103.
- Zeidan, F., Johnson, S. K., Diamond, B. J., David, Z. & Goolkasian, P. (2010). *Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training*. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 19(2), 597–605.

After the Lab

Reflection, renewal, and what comes next.

*“Habits are not what we do once —
they are what we become through repetition.”*

Reflecting on Your Month in the Lab

Congratulations!

You’ve just completed a month of *Human–Tech Habit Lab experiments* —
small, deliberate steps to make digital work
more focused, connected, embodied, and restorative.

Pause for a moment and notice:

- When did you feel most human during digital work?
- Which micro-practices quietly changed your day-to-day energy?
- What surprised you — about your habits, or about yourself?

Even small wins —
one fewer notification,
one genuine message,
one deeper breath —
build momentum.

In other words, you’re not
just adjusting routines;
you’re redesigning the
conditions of your working life.

Self-Assessment:

How Humanized Is Your Workday?

Rate yourself (1 = rarely, 5 = consistently) for each statement below.
This isn't a test — it's a mirror.

Dimension	Statement	Score (1-5)
Focus	I protect blocks of time for uninterrupted deep work.	
Connection	I make intentional efforts to add warmth and empathy in digital communication.	
Movement	I regularly shift posture, stretch, or walk during work hours.	
Recovery	I create boundaries between work and rest, including screen-free moments.	
Meaning	My work routines align with my personal values and energy cycles.	

Interpretation:

- **20–25:** You're thriving — your digital habits are already human-centered.
- **15–19:** You're balanced — a few consistent rituals can amplify your well-being.
- **10–14:** You're functional but fatigued — pick one theme (Focus, Connection, Movement, or Recovery) and revisit its daily challenges.
- **Below 10:** You may be running on autopilot — this is your invitation to start small again.

Note on validation

This self-assessment scale is an internal reflective tool developed specifically for this playbook. It has not been psychometrically validated and should not be interpreted as a standardized or diagnostic instrument. Its purpose is self-reflection and awareness-building only, not formal measurement or comparison.

Sustaining the HDW Mindset

1. Cycle back, don't move on.

Each theme can be revisited quarterly — your body, brain, and calendar change with seasons.

2. Build collective rituals.

Embed habits in your team's workflow: focus hours, gratitude threads, or movement minutes before meetings.

3. Track energy, not hours.

Research shows that aligning work with natural energy peaks leads to higher output and lower strain (*Gaggero & Tommasi, 2023*).

4. Share your story.

Post your reflections or photos with *#HDWHabitLab* — each story helps normalize humanized work cultures.



Final Thought

Work is not just what we produce —
it's how we experience our days.

By redesigning digital habits around focus, empathy,
movement, and rest, we remind ourselves that technology
is most powerful when it disappears into our humanity.

So take a breath.

Stretch.

Send a kind message.

Close your laptop when the workday ends.

And remember:

**Humanizing digital work begins with how you treat
your own attention.**

References

Gaggero, A. & Tommasi, D. (2023). Time of day and high-stake cognitive assessments. *Economic Journal*, 133(652), 1407–1429.

Pennebaker, J. W. & Chung, C. K. (2011). Expressive writing: Connections to physical and mental health. *In Oxford Handbook of Health Psychology* (pp. 417–437).

Thank You!

Acknowledgements

This project was supported by the Slovenian Research Agency through the programme International Science Promotion/Dissemination, under the Public Call for (Co)Financing of Science Popularization Activities in 2025, based on the Agreement on the (Co-)Financing of Scientific Research Activities in 2025 (No. 1000-25-3527).