Charlize Challen

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n11239905

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Psychological detachment for home working professionals

RESEARCH REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates how homeworking professionals can psychologically detach from work. When the commute home from work is removed, it blurs physical, temporal and digital boundaries. This can have detrimental health and wellbeing effects. Although the challenges of the Work from Home (WfH) model have been explored, there is limited investigation into issues.

A triangulation method was applied, combining surveys and interviews with secondary research. Primary research consisted of: 20 survey participants, representative of the end user, a total of 5 interviews including 2 industry experts and 3 home working participants. The mixed-method approach revealed market gaps, user needs and design opportunities, and proved the value of a design solution.

Three key themes emerged from the dataset: Transition & State Change, Psychological Carryover & Awareness and Digital Technology & Revovery.
Findings demonstrated the importance of signaling a transition before beginning afterwork routine. This enables a feeling of mindfulness and presence in afterwork activities, becoming an indicator of psychological detachment from work.
Opportunities for design include signals into transitions, supporting release of work-related thoughts and recovery awareness.

A solution that helps manage psychological detachment from work can assist in the broader goal of promoting long-term wellbeing for remote-working professionals..

Authenticity statement

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this report is my own work. This report has not been submitted for any subject or for other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this report is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this report and sources have been acknowledged.

Your name: Charlize Challen
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01

INTRODUCTION

AIM
BACKGROUND
BENCHMARKING

Charlize Challen **n11239905**

INTRODUCTION

Project overview

Australian Government and businesses are advocating for Work-from-Home (WfH) models due to the primary benefits of increased flexibility and autonomy for knowledge workers. While WfH has transformed how professionals work, its implications for recovery are often overlooked. WfH can leave workers feeling isolated, unmotivated and stressed, potentially contributing to burnout (Peninsula Group Limited, 2025). This is partly due to the erosion of physical, temporal and digital boundaries between work and personal life (Karakitsiou et al., 2025). Consequently, when not properly managed, WfH can have damaging effects on workers' physical health, mental health and sustainability of their career.

In occupational psychology, 'psychological detachment' is defined as "an individual's sense of being away from the work situation" (Pensar & Mäkelä, 2023). Difficulties with psychological detachment can impair recovery and increase the risk of burnout. Therefore, this study investigates how knowledge workers psychologically detach from work, with particular focus on their after-work routines, to identify opportunities for a design solution.

Project significance

There is currently no physical product designed specifically to facilitate psychological detachment from work; however, benchmarked products prove credibility in solving the problem. This emphasises the value of a design intervention that solves for psychological detachment more holistically.

Aim

This project investigates how home-working professionals psychologically detach at the end of the workday by exploring physical, temporal and digital work-life boundaries. The project aims to address the identified gap by developing a product that supports psychological detachment, with the broader goal of promoting long-term wellbeing for remote-working professionals.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

SECTION 1

Secondary Research

Benchmarking

SECTION 2

Primary Research

Analysis & Findings

SECTION 3

Synthesis

Opportunities

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BACKGROUND

Project overview

This section summarises the initial research surrounding the research problem and identifies knowledge gaps requiring further investigation.

Context

Since COVID-19, Work from Home (WfH) has become more prominent (Liang, 2023). Workplaces are continuing to expand their WfH capabilities, with approximately half of existing jobs now involving a hybrid approach that combines WfH and on-site work (Liang, 2023).
In 2025, 46% of all Australians worked from home fully or at least some of the time, while 52% of Brisbane CBD employees worked from home (Roy Morgan, 2025). Solo workers or self-employed workers recorded the highest WfH rate (55%), emphasising autonomy and adaptability associated with independent work (Roy Morgan, 2025).

Summary

The acceleration of WfH over the past five years has increased the importance of understanding how workers transition out of their work roles. While WfH provides greater flexibility and autonomy, the removal of physical, temporal and digital boundaries can make recovery more difficult. This establishes the importance of the research question:

‘How do professionals who work from home experience psychological detachment within increasingly blurred physical, temporal and digital work-life boundaries?’

Problem

The commute functions as an aspect of liminality between ‘Worker’ and ‘Home’ identities. This creates a “neutral zone” in which thoughts are not directed towards either work or home (McAlpine & Piszczek, 2022). Literature suggests that the transition from office to home can be understood as a three-step process (as seen in figure 1):

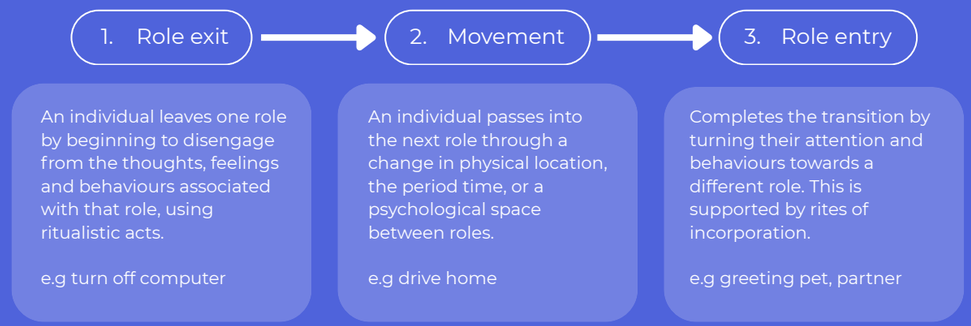


Figure 1. The role of the commute

For WfH workers, this process can become significantly less distinct because there is often no physical separation between the workplace and home (Seva et al., 2021). Environmental psychology acknowledges the relationship between physical environments and human behaviour (Kals et al., 2025). WfH can also create blurred temporal boundaries, as there is often no clear indication of when the workday has ended. Additionally, increased digital demands can contribute to stress, anxiety and fatigue among remote workers (Karakitsiou et al., 2025). Research indicates 69% of remote workers report increased burnout from constant availability and use of digital communication tools. Hence, unclear boundaries can contribute to mental fatigue (Peninsula Group Limited, 2025).

WfH enables a ‘24/7’ connected nature of work with benefits of flexibility and autonomy, yet the absence of clear spatial and temporal separation can make psychological detachment from work more difficult (McAlpine & Piszczek, 2022). Psychological detachment from work “is a process that restores employees' energetic and mental resources consumed by demands imposed by work and is an essential prerequisite of effective recovery” (Pensar & Mäkelä, 2023). Therefore, difficulties with psychological detachment can increase emotional exhaustion and negatively affect job performance (McAlpine & Piszczek, 2022).

BENCHMARKING

Project overview

Benchmarking determines effectiveness of existing solutions to the problem, with the purpose of identifying a gap in the market.

Gaps

The psychological detachment mechanism can be understood as a process extending from setting boundaries through to recovery awareness. Addressing each of these areas is important for successfully supporting psychological detachment from work (Figure 2).

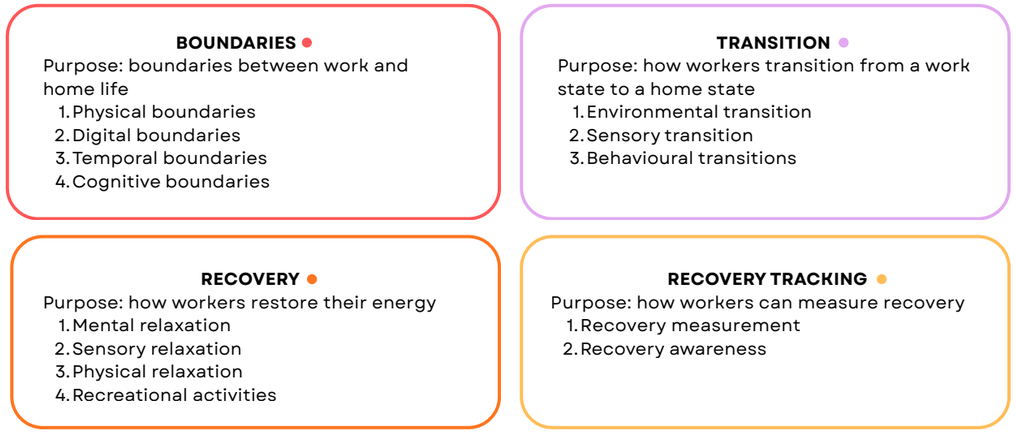


Figure 2. Psychological Detachment Mechanism

Benchmarking was segmented into four categories and included 56 products and 32 activities. The highest-performing products were assessed against the criteria (Table 1).

	SUNSAMA digital planner
Work Boundary	5
Psychological Detachment	5
Transition	4
Recovery	3
Emotional Regulation	3
Signal	4
Temporal	5
Ease-of-use	5
Life Integration	5
Price/ Accessibility	1
Visual Style	4

	AURIC Aromasphere
Work Boundary	2
Psychological Detachment	2
Transition	5
Recovery	3
Emotional Regulation	4
Signal	5
Temporal	N/A
Ease-of-use	4
Life Integration	4
Price/ Accessibility	2
Visual Style	5

	RENPHO Eyeris 3 Eye Massager
Work Boundary	5
Psychological Detachment	5
Transition	5
Recovery	5
Emotional Regulation	5
Signal	3
Temporal	4
Ease-of-use	4
Life Integration	4
Price/ Accessibility	5
Visual Style	4

	MUSE Headband
Work Boundary	1
Psychological Detachment	5
Transition	5
Recovery	5
Emotional Regulation	5
Signal	4
Temporal	5
Ease-of-use	4
Life Integration	4
Price/ Accessibility	2
Visual Style	4

Table 1. Benchmarking matrix

Boundaries

Figure 3 illustrates existing products that address physical boundaries through physical blocking, physical concealment, digital blocking, digital separation, automated shutdown, time management, digital planners, to-do lists, cognitive offloading and mental clearing.
The Sunsama Digital Planner performance highest for physical boundaries seen through Work Boundary, Psychological Detachment, Temporal, Ease-of-use and Life Integration in Table 1. However, the digital planner does not directly promote recovery or recovery tracking. Accessibility is also limited, as there is no free option, so customers are charged from $400 per year (Sunsama, 2025).

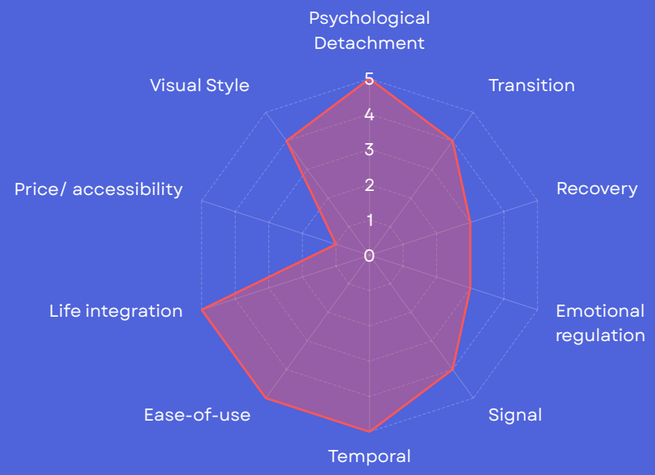


Figure 3. Physical Blocking Products Radar Chart

Transition

Figure 4 highlights the Auric Aromasphere as the top performer for environmental and sensory transiitons.
The sensory transition product provides an effective signal that work has finished, while its mood-affecting scent can support a transition into a different state. Its visual appeal also supports its integration into the home environment. However, the product does not directly address the other areas of the psychological detachment mechanism: Boundaries, Recovery and Recovery Awareness. In particular, it does not establish a physical work boundary or directly facilitate psychological detachment.
The Aromasphere may contribute to recovery through emotional regulation and mood-promoting scent, but recovery is not its primary outcome. Similarly, it does not provide recovery measurement or recovery awareness. This indicates an opportunity to extend the sensory transition function beyond simply signalling the end of work.

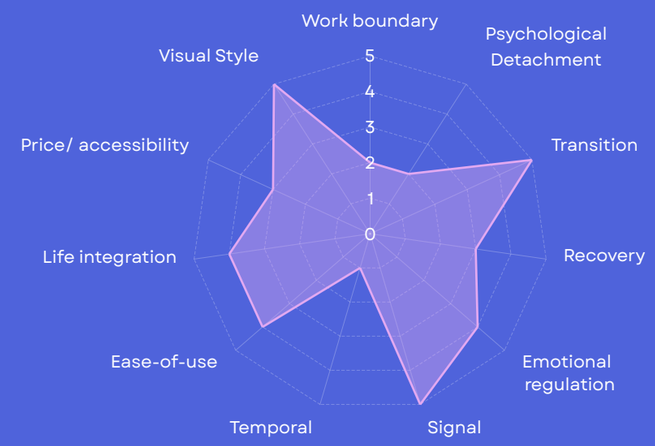


Figure 4. Transition Products Radar Chart

Recovery

Figure 5 presents the highest-performing recovery device for mental, sensory and physical relaxation: the Rephno Eyeris 3 Eye Massager.
The device achieved highly against Work Boundary, Psychological Detachment, Visual Style and Price/Accessibility. Although it also performed well across several other criteria, opportunities for improvement remain. The mask does not measure or track recovery, despite being designed to assist with eye recovery. It is also not directly designed for emotional regulation, although its therapeutic experience can provide comfort.
The mask does not explicitly signal or cue a transition. Nevertheless, it could be incorporated into an existing after-work routine.

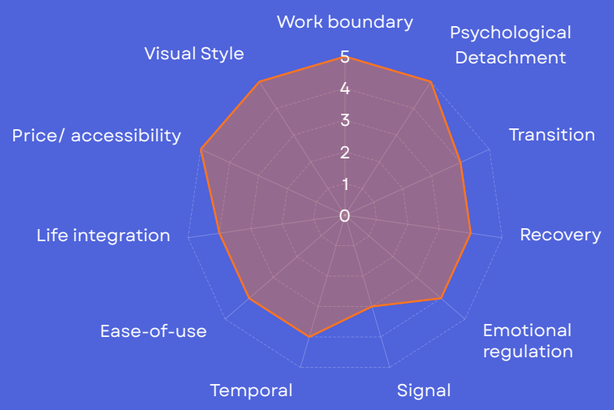


Figure 5. Recovery Products Radar Chart

Recovery Tracking

Figure 6 presents Muse as the top performing recovery tracking device. Recovery tracking is important for users as results can help inform better recovery decisions and performance. Against the established criteria, the Muse Headband outperformed Whoop, in regard to Psychological Detachment, Transition, Recovery, Emotional Regulation and Temporal performance.
Although, the Muse Headband is limited by its performance in Work Boundary and Price/Accessibility. It can help users clear work-related thoughts and physically discourages work, as it involves pracicing meditation. However, its effectiveness may be critiqued during periods of intense stress, when work-related thoughts can be more difficult to redirect.
The device costs around $750AUD (Muse, 2026), where substitute products such as meditation apps are free and readily available. Thus the perceived value of the product varies per customer.

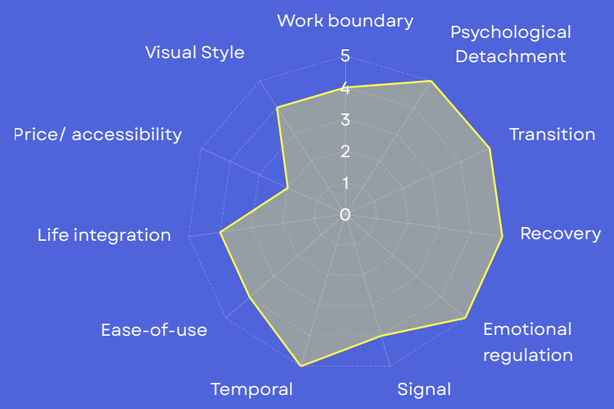


Figure 6. Recovery Awareness Products Radar Chart

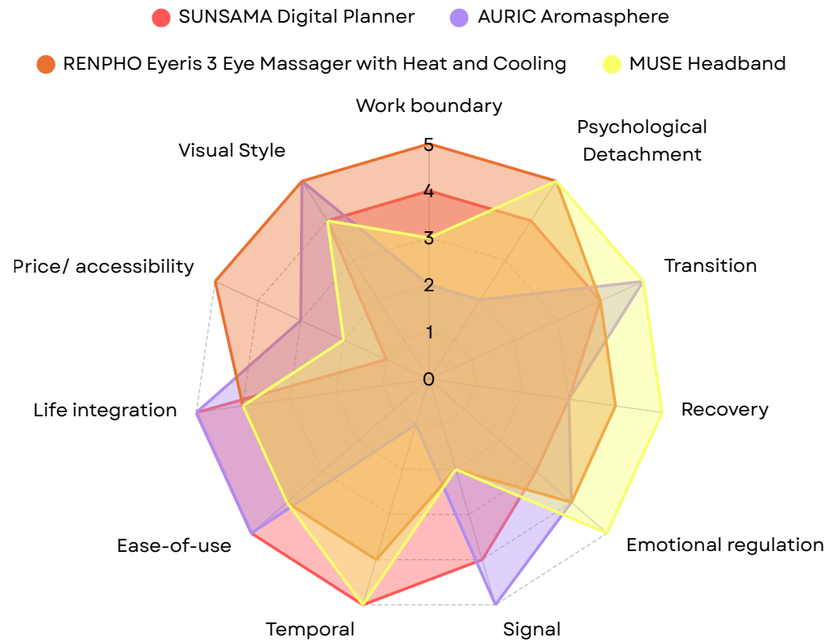


Figure 7. Existing Product Comparison Radar Chart

Summary

This section revealed key gaps among existing products that could be used to address the research problem. Figure 7 compares the top performing products from each category, and illustrates none of the benchmarked products address all stages of the psychological detachment process. The Rephno Eyeris performed the highest overall, demonstrating that a single product can address multiple aspects of psychological detachment. However, it was designed primarily for eye-related recovery and therefore does not successfully address all established criteria.
The Muse Headband closely follows the Rephno Eyeris, outperforming it in Recovery, Transition and Emotional Regulation. However, the Muse Headband was not specifically designed for psychological detachment from work and therefore does not establish a physical boundary that prevents continued work.
This highlights a gap in the market for a device specifically designed to facilitate psychological detachment from work by signalling a transition. The Auric Aromasphere is the only benchmarked product to achieve a score of five within this area, yet it performs comparatively poorly across several other criteria. Therefore, there is an opportunity to combine an effective transition signal with boundary-setting, recovery and recovery awareness within a single physical product.

02

THE RESEARCH

RESEARCH
ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Charlize Challen **n11239905**

RESEARCH

Overview

The purpose of conducting primary research was to validate identified market gaps, build upon existing research and direct investigation of knowledge gaps. This section outlines the methodology, research methods and rationale for the study.

Research

Methodological triangulation was used to improve the credibility and validity of the study. This approach enabled deeper insight into the challenges affecting people's ability to psychologically detach from work and generated data that could not be obtained through secondary or quantitative methods alone. Triangulation was particularly important for developing an evidence-based and human-centred design solution.
The research scope and methodology for the two primary data collection methods: semi-structured interviews (Table 2 & 3) and surveys (Table 4 & 5) are outlined below.

Interview

Research scope

Purpose of interviews	To understand the problem from different perspectives, combining expert insight with deeper exploration of the lived experiences of selected participants.
Interview participants	Industry experts • Expert 1: Psychologist • Expert 2: Design psychologist (Behavioural Interior Designer) Participants • P1: AI/Tech founder • P2: Business analyst • P3: Graphic designer
Data type	Qualitative data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis (see appendix).
Limitations	Snowball sampling bias was present because experts and participants were recruited through existing networks.

Table 2. Survey Research Scope Table

Methodology

Recruitment	Experts and participants were directly contacted by email through networking. Participants who completed the survey were also given the option to participate in a further interview.
Collection of data	Interviews were conducted online through Zoom and recorded using Voice Memos. Interviews were later transcribed using Otter.ai.
Data type	Expert questions focused on understanding how professional knowledge could inform the design of a psychological detachment device. Participant interview questions were developed from the survey findings, allowing the survey results to shape the direction of further inquiry. The semi-structured format provided flexibility to explore emerging topics while maintaining consistency across interviews. This enabled greater autonomy over the specificity and depth of the data collected.
Limitations	Limitations in data collection included one representative expert for each knowledge area. The participants are of various demographics and mixed occupations. For clearer needs and wants relating to managers and self-employed individuals, more interviews would need to be conducted.

Table 3. Survey Methodology Table

METHODS

Survey

Research scope

Purpose of survey	To explore key issues within after-work routines and understand target market needs.
Survey participants	A total of 20 participants, representative users of the potential end product, participated in the survey. Participants worked from home either fully or at least some of the time and were between 20 and 65 years old.
Data type	The quantitative data consisted of a 40-item questionnaire incorporating a combination of 1–5 Likert scales measuring agreement and likelihood, as well as multiple-choice responses. Qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions, enabling participants to describe their personal lived experiences in greater detail. Data analysis included categorical, ordinal and interval data.
Limitations	Snowball sampling bias was present because participants were recruited through existing networks.

Table 4. Interview Research Scope Table

Methodology

Recruitment	Participants were directly contacted by email through networking. A LinkedIn post and an email distributed by Melanie Finger to QUT faculties also assisted with additional recruitment. Participation was anonymous and entirely voluntary.
Collection of data	Data was collected through Microsoft Forms. See Appendix for the 40-item questionnaire.
Data type	The survey was divided into sections covering initial demographic information, current after-work routines, personal and work boundaries, the use of physical products to stop work, digital boundaries, the severity of psychological detachment difficulties, and opportunities for a design intervention.
Limitations	The primary limitation was the small sample size. The data pool was also limited by the spread of professional backgrounds represented within the sample. Although participants worked across a range of professions, the sample did not represent all industries due to time constraints and limited voluntary participation. Additionally, younger demographic outweigh older demographics influencing the dataset.

Table 2. Interview Methodology Table

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Overview

This section analyses the qualitative and quantitative data collected from both interviews and surveys to present meaningful insights. Survey data was analysed using univariate and bivariate methods, while qualitative data from both interviews and open-ended survey responses, was analysed through thematic coding. These findings establish the key factors influencing psychological detachment and inform the design implications discussed later in the report.

Interviews were audio-recorded, before being transcribed through Otter AI. Transcripts were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis. First, was organised into an individual affinity map in Miro to identify key themes and inferred codes. The affinity maps were then combined into a thematic analysis table to clarify the themes, codes and subcodes shared across participants and experts. This process strengthened the interpretation of recurring insights across the dataset.

Higher coding frequency indicated areas of significance within the interviews, although frequency was considered alongside closer qualitative analysis of the content and relationships between codes.

A total of four themes, 24 codes and 53 subcodes were identified. Transition & State Change was the most prominent theme, followed by Psychological Carryover & Awareness and Digital Technology & Recovery. The Alluvial Diagram (Figure 8) illustrates the three key themes and their corresponding connections to codes and subcodes. The Network Diagram (Figure 9) further demonstrates the strength of relationships between subcodes.

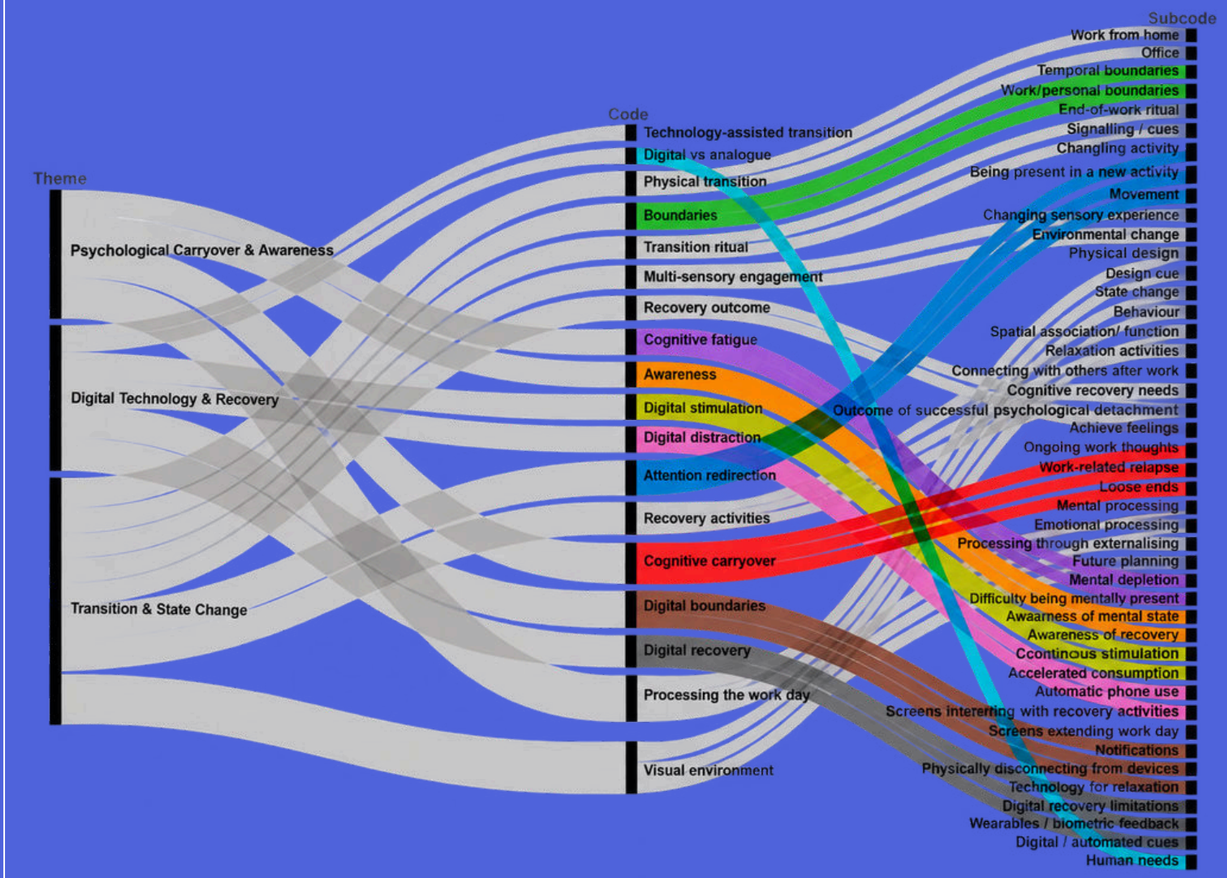


Figure 8. Alluvial Diagram

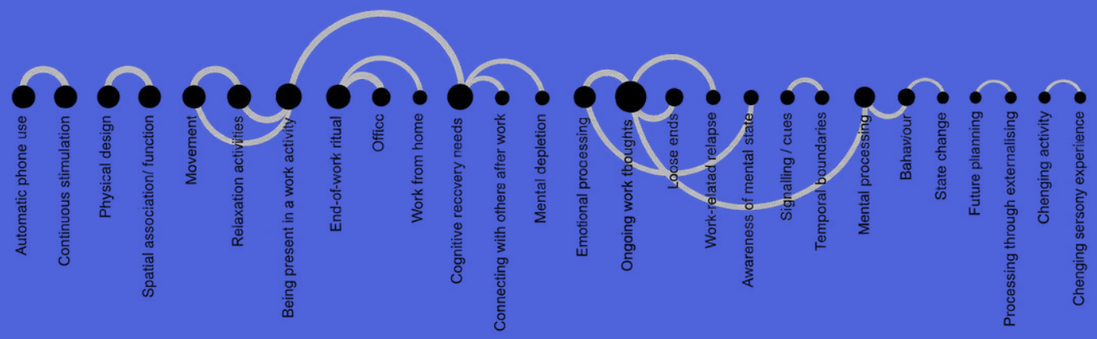


Figure 9. Network Diagram

Theme 1: Transition & State Change

As identified in the background research, transition and state change are key components of psychological detachment that are often missing for people who WfH. This emerged as the most prominent theme within the interviews.
Within this theme, Visual Environment was particularly important. The Design Psychologist explained the physical design of the workspace can influence spatial associations and functionality of an environment. The visual environment affects human behaviour and therefore, influences a state change.
Attention redirection after work was also identified as important. The Psychologist described the value of “do something quite different” (7.17) because ”that changes the way we’re thinking” (8.10) (E1). Participants frequently discussed relaxation activities, particularly movement, as a way of becoming present within a new activity. This highlights mindfulness as an important component of after-work routines, supporting cognitive recovery and reducing mental depletion.

Theme 2: Psychological Carryover & Awareness

Expert 1 mentioned the need to release ongoing work-related thoughts before redirecting attention towards a new activity to find presence. This establishes Psychological Carryover & Awareness as another important component of psychological detachment.
Processing the workday as part of the after-work transition involves mental processing, emotional processing and future planning. These processes can reduce ongoing work-related thoughts, resolve loose ends and prevent work-related relapse. Reducing cognitive carryover into after-work routines may therefore decrease mental depletion.
P1 described mental depletion as a “hangover of lacking energy in recovery for the following day” (17.35). This can affect overall wellbeing and health, as well as the ability to Connect with Others After Work.

Theme 3: Digital Technology & Recovery

Digital technology was deeply embedded within participants’ after-work routines, establishing Digital Technology & Recovery as a core theme.
Digital boundaries were considered important for protecting recovery, particularly through muting notifications and physically disconnecting from devices to prevent screens from extending the workday. However, technology can also be used for relaxation. Expert 1 noted that digital distraction, including automatic phone use, can interfere with recovery activities.
Automatic phone use and continuous stimulation were closely connected, highlighting a broader pattern of digital stimulation and accelerated consumption.
Despite these challenges, participants also identified positive uses of technology. Technology-assisted Transitions, such as digital or automated cues that signal the shutdown of a workstation, can help protect recovery. Similarly, wearables and biometric feedback devices can support greater awareness by “instrumenting your physiology so that you can make better decisions” (21.03) (P1).
The Design Psychologist also emphasised the importance of analogue experiences for recovery and separation from a digitally simulated environment (E2).

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Surveys

Participant profile

A total of 20 participants completed the survey, representing a diverse range of industries including technology, healthcare, engineering, mining, professional services, education, creative industries and other sectors. The majority of participants were from Generation Z (Figure 10). Interestingly, most respondents also occupied leadership or management roles (Figure 11).

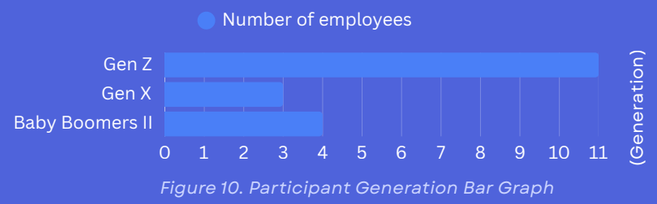


Figure 10. Participant Generation Bar Graph

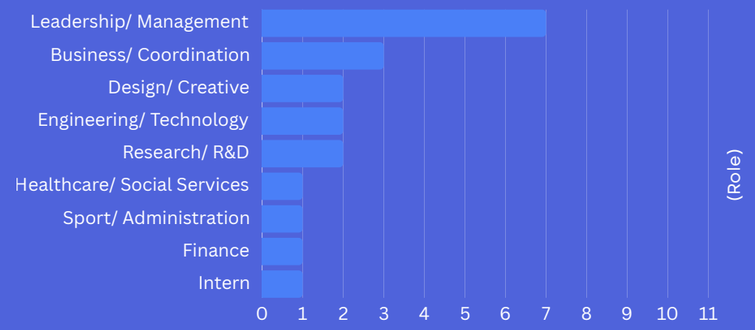


Figure 11. Participant Role Bar Graph

WfH

Most respondents worked from a home office, typically two days per week (Figure 12). Nearly three-quarters of participants reported that their work schedules varied from day to day, affecting both their workday end time and after-work routine. This variation highlights the importance of flexibility within any potential intervention rather than relying on a fixed end-of-day schedule.

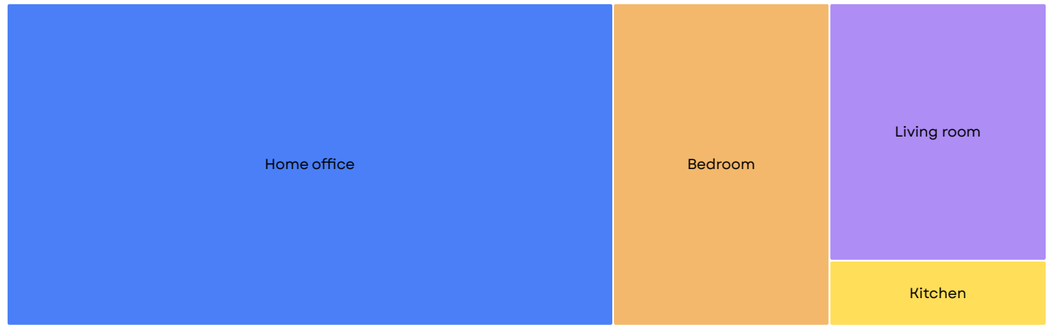


Figure 12. Hierarchy of preferred workspace when WfH

Transition

For home-working professionals, the traditional commute home is absent. Instead, participants used several behaviours to signal the end of the workday: 16 participants closed their laptop, 12 left their workstation and 9 moved to another room.
Similarly, more than 35% of participants reported that they often left the house after work, although this depended on their end-of-day time and existing plans.
Despite these attempts to physically leave the work environment, 60% of participants agree they “find it difficult to psychologically detach from work” (Figure 13). Ideally, participants would like their transition from work to home to feel accomplished, mentally clear and relaxing.

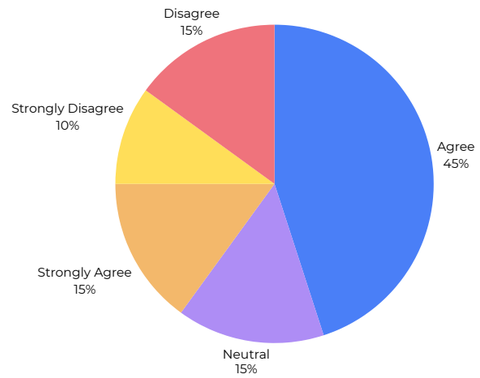


Figure 13. Level of agreeance of WfH workers who “find it difficult to psychologically detach from work”

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Relaxation

As identified in Theme 1, psychological detachment from work can be understood partly through a person's ability to remain present during after-work activities. More than 50% of participants believed their current routine was effective at helping them switch off and relax. However, only 30% reported actually feeling mindful and present after work. This suggests a potential discrepancy between perceived effectiveness and the lived experience of recovery.

Furthermore, 70% of participants reported that they 'occasionally', 'rarely' or 'never' intentionally chose to relax after the workday. Participants attributed this partly to the possibility that they would need to work overtime.

This finding aligns with Figure 15, which illustrates that 65% of respondents work past 5pm on a typical WfH day. Together, these findings suggest that participants may not have sufficient time to intentionally engage in recovery activities. When participants do relax, screens are frequently involved (Figure 14).

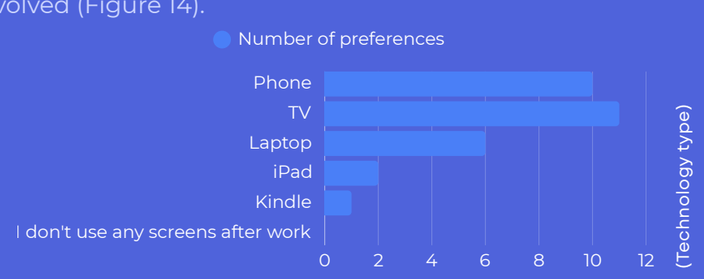


Figure 14. WfH preferred screens afterwork

Overall, most participants reported feeling only 'occasionally' to 'rarely' restored for the following workday, highlighting a need for greater recovery (Figure 16).

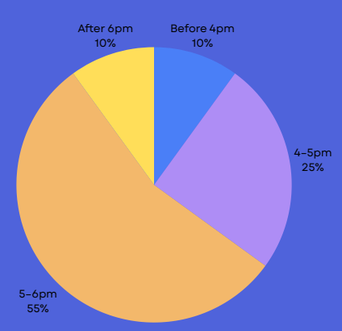


Figure 15. WfH workday start and end hours

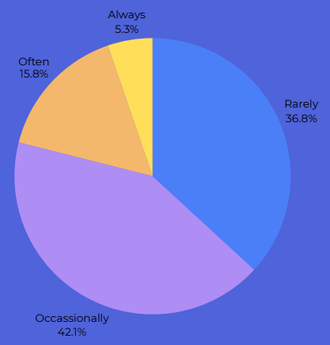


Figure 16. HWf frequency of restoration

Summary

The combination of expert interviews, participant interviews and survey data provided insight into both the psychological mechanisms underlying detachment from work and the lived experiences of professionals who work from home.

Quantitative analysis and inductive thematic analysis identified three key themes: Transition and State Change, Psychological Carryover and Awareness, and Digital Technology & Recovery. Together, these themes demonstrate that psychological detachment is not solely dependent on physically leaving the workspace, but involves transitioning between states, processing ongoing work-related thoughts and managing digital stimulation.

03

DISCUSSION & DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

DISCUSSION
DESIGN IMPLICATIONS
CONCLUSION

Charlize Challen **n11239905**

DISCUSSION

Overview

This section synthesises the combined findings from the primary research and compares the key themes against the secondary research presented in the background and benchmarking sections.

Understanding the target market

The qualitative research identified particular personality characteristics and types of workloads that may increase difficulty with psychological detachment from work.

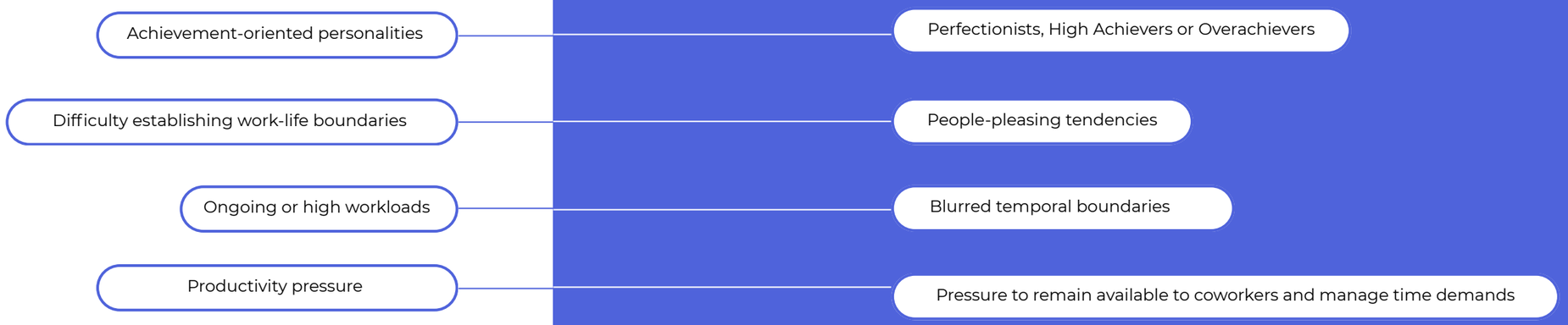


Figure 17. Personality Types who struggle with Psychological Detachment

Psychologist (Expert 1) expressed concern for people who do not know how to establish effective work-life boundaries and may not recognise their need for recovery.

The background research identified managers and self-employed professionals as having some of the highest rates of working from home. The qualitative research further supports the relevance of this market by demonstrating how high work demands and boundary-management challenges can contribute to difficulties with psychological detachment.

Although a range of occupations were discussed throughout the research, managers and self-employed professionals demonstrate a particularly strong relationship between work demands, autonomy and boundary management. This presents a clear opportunity for a design intervention targeted towards these users.

Existing literature establishes that WfH knowledge workers can experience an increased risk of burnout due to blurred physical, digital and temporal boundaries. However, the research undertaken in this project demonstrates that these contributing factors are interconnected and require further consideration as part of the psychological detachment process. This reinforces the identified gap for a physical design solution.

DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Transition & State Change

The traditional commute provides a period of transition between work and home. P3 described this as "a nice transition into like I can make an active decision what I'm going do with my evening" (5.36). Without this transition, "it all bleeds together" (5.48) (P3).
The removal of this transitional period means that the spatial and temporal separation between work and home is reduced, contributing to blurred physical, temporal and digital boundaries. Building upon the existing literature, Expert 2 emphasised the importance of establishing strict boundaries through the function and association of spaces in order to psychologically detach.
Although the majority of participants worked from a home office, 60% of survey participants agreed that they found it difficult to 'switch off' after work (Figure 13). This demonstrates that psychological detachment involves more than simply separating the physical work environment from the rest of the home.
The findings instead suggest that an effective transition must facilitate a broader state change, involving physical, behavioural and cognitive shifts between work and personal life.

Theme 2: Psychological Carryover & Awareness

Secondary research establishes the importance of psychological detachment in enabling effective recovery. The primary research further demonstrates that cognitive processing is a significant component of this transition.
Expert 1 highlighted the importance of a cognitive reset for recovery. Similarly, P3 described the commute as providing "30 minutes where I'm like forced to do nothing" (5.33). This suggests that the absence of a commute removes an opportunity for decompression and processing.
For WfH professionals, mindfulness may therefore need to be intentionally incorporated into both the workday and after-work routine to prevent mental depletion. Expert 1 identified Macro, Meso and Micro breaks, as well as behavioural techniques such as stepping outside and asking "what can I see, what can I hear, what can I feel" (13.51).
These techniques do not require significant amounts of time. Expert 1 noted that even "some big deep breaths" (13.42) can contribute to a cognitive reset. This supports the importance of mindfulness and presence during after-work relaxation activities, both as a mechanism for supporting recovery and as an indication of successful psychological detachment from work.

Theme 3: Digital Technology & Recovery

Digital technology can extend the workday through continued work and overtime, but it can also interfere with recovery when used for relaxation. As Expert 2 explained, "Digital devices don't give [the brain] permission to turn off" (27.28).
Technology can "provide a switch off for a short period of time" (12.41) (E1); however, digital activities that interfere with recovery, such as doomscrolling, are less beneficial (E1). This creates a tension within the role of technology: it can either facilitate recovery or contribute to continued cognitive stimulation.
Expert 1 also identified recovery measurement as important for increasing recovery awareness, asking: "Have I really switched off?" (29.30) (E1). Digital technology can facilitate recovery through wearable devices such as Whoop and Apple Watches. P1 explained that these devices "basically a read on your biometrics and confirms probably what you're thinking" (20.03), which can encourage greater investment in recovery (P1).
However, wearables are primarily reactive rather than preventative. They provide biometric feedback after the body has already experienced stress or strain. The Muse Headband provides an exception by using EEG brainwave measurement alongside guided meditation to support preventative recovery.
This presents an opportunity for a preventative recovery and biometric-feedback device specifically designed around psychological detachment from work.

DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

Overview

The research findings reveal several design opportunities for WfH managers and self-employed professionals. Existing literature and qualitative research emphasise the transition from work to personal life as a critical component of psychological detachment.

Because WfH professionals lack the physical separation created by a traditional commute, there must be an alternative signal to clearly mark the end of the workday and facilitate the transition into personal life. However, signalling the end of work alone is unlikely to be sufficient.

The findings indicate that WfH professionals also require time and space to decompress by mentally and emotionally processing the workday. This can help release ongoing work-related thoughts and prevent work-related relapse. Attention redirection towards a different activity can further help change the brain's current mode of thinking and reduce the persistence of work-related thoughts.

Being present within this activity is critical for successful psychological detachment and supports a cognitive reset. Finally, measuring recovery can increase awareness of whether the individual has successfully 'switched off', providing reassurance that the recovery period has been beneficial and supporting overall performance.

Together, these findings establish a design opportunity for a product that does not simply signal the end of work, but actively facilitates the transition, cognitive reset and recovery process.

Opportunities

MUST

- Signal after-work routine
- Be frictionless to use and provide a seamless user experience
- Be durable
- Be flexible in relation to time and individual routines
- Prevent work-related relapse
- Support cognitive reset and restoration
- Give the user control over features and the device
- Be personable and customisable to individual recovery needs
- Be functional
- Be novel
- Provide ease of use

SHOULD

- Incorporate wearables and biometric feedback to measure recovery
- Be visually attractive to the target market
- Physically discourage or block the user from continuing work-related actvities
- Prevent mental fatigues and burnout
- Be immersive and sensory
- Create calm and relaxation
- Support the release of ongoing work-related thoughts
- Create mindfulness, peace or quiet

SHOULD NOT

- Be digital as its primary function; digital technology may be secondary (e.g app)
- Allow continuous stimulation
- Create pressure or expectations
- Use low-quality materials or construction
- Be difficult to use
- Be rigid
- Introduce unnecessary friction
- Have an unclear design signal or cue
- Allow continued stress or strain
- Be visually unattractive
- Be boring
- Be generic

Figure 19. Design Brief

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the key themes and factors influencing home-working professionals' ability to psychologically detach from work, while identifying the value of a potential design solution and the needs of the target market.

Difficulties with psychological detachment can negatively affect health and wellbeing and contribute to the risk of burnout. The findings demonstrate that successful psychological detachment requires a transition and state change before entering an after-work routine. This transition can help prevent ongoing work-related thoughts and work-related relapse.

The identified opportunity is therefore to develop a design solution that signals the transition from work into home life while supporting the release of work-related thoughts. Recovery awareness and the ability to recognise when the individual has successfully 'switched off' also emerged as important components of the solution.

Ultimately, successful psychological detachment should result in restoration: entering the following workday with greater energy, while supporting personal health, wellbeing and enjoyment of life.

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