

The Crofter: Sustainable Communications

SECTION EDITOR



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Editorial

Greetings from the croft! When I was growing up, my mother regularly reminded us about taking care of our health as it is our most important possession. I have to admit that during my teens and 20s, when I felt invincible, I would respond with a “Yeah, Mom” and roll my eyes. Then life happened, and I came to appreciate her words more and more on a

personal and professional level. Learning how to optimise my health and make the right choices for myself so that I can be a productive individual for as long as possible has been a lifelong quest, and has become especially important as a freelance medical writer working from home. So you can imagine how happy I was when – in my late 40s – I met Mariella Franker, a scientific writer turned natural productivity coach for introverts.

Our conversations have been filled with “aha” moments for me and I’m very thankful for Mariella’s contribution to this issue of the Crofter in which she shares her perspective and practical tips for sustaining our productivity.

Wishing you happy reading and many “aha” moments.

Best,
Kimi

Sustainable productivity: A new approach to work-life balance and helpful practices for introverts

Freelance medical writers are well accustomed to the virtual workplace, often doing their work remotely and connecting with their clients through technology rather than in person.

Remote work offers some valuable advantages compared to working in the office, for example, increased flexibility and not being bound for set working hours or a fixed work location. Working remotely provides many options to create a highly personalised version of work-life balance.

However, if you don’t pay attention, the boundaries between your personal life and your work life can become obscured, and you find yourself working all the time, spending less time with your loved ones, and not getting enough rest or caring for your health. In short: you are further away from the lifestyle you may aspire to. The answer to this is to focus on sustainable productivity from an individual standpoint and to pay attention to your specific needs. Specifically for introverts, I’ve included three helpful practices to stay mindful about your needs on a day-to-day basis.

What is sustainable productivity?

The Leadership circle from Clearwater Consulting, a consulting company specialised in effective leadership programmes, defines sustainable productivity as how well a leader balances human and technical resources to sustain long-term high performance.¹ A recent

article by MIT Sloan School of Management explains that sustainable productivity focuses on employee engagement and well-being in addition to more traditional metrics such as sales, inventory, and revenue.²

These definitions are seen from an organisation-wide standpoint and can also be transferred to individuals by asking questions like this: What’s needed in my life to balance my health and well-being with long-term high performance?

Well-being is the missing link in sustainable productivity for remote workers

Health and well-being aren’t the first things that come to mind when we think of being productive or having an impact with our work. In the aftermath of the recent crisis (and possibly recession still to come), many of us are being stretched to the limit. Mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and burn out, have increased during the pandemic, most notably among healthcare workers³ and remote workers.^{4,5}

Remote work by its very nature requires careful attention to find a healthy balance. Our personal life and our work life aren’t separated by a commute to the office or by office closing hours. It is our responsibility to set these boundaries and to actively work on a healthy work-life balance.

What’s needed in my life to balance my well-being with long-term high performance?

Busy does not equal productive

One of the common misconceptions is that when we’re busy, we’re automatically productive. Phrases like “get things done”, “just do it”, and “non-stop hustle”, which are eagerly thrown around in the productivity and motivation area, reinforce this belief.

However, busy does not equal productive. Busy means being engaged in activity, i.e., any activity. We can keep ourselves endlessly busy with unimportant tasks, like checking email, sitting in lengthy meetings, and browsing on social media, that don’t bring us any closer to our goals – or our desired lifestyle for that matter. Being busy instead of productive doesn’t help us to make real progress and we end up feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and dissatisfied with our work.

Productivity, on the other hand, is marked by abundant production or achievement. Being productive isn’t about engaging in any activity but it’s about doing those few things that have the most impact. When you engage in activities that have a big impact on your overall goal, you quickly make progress, and you can push that

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goal much further than you could have otherwise. It also reduces overwhelm and stress and you have a bigger sense of achievement because you can see that you're making progress. Sustainable productivity balances the impact of your work with your ability to sustain that impact over time, which is where our well-being comes into play.

Well-being on a day-to-day basis

While in the past taking care of our well-being was reserved for yearly vacations, lockdowns and travel restrictions have taught us that we need to adequately take care of ourselves on a day-to-day basis.

This is especially challenging in modern society where our attention is constantly pulled into different directions. Multi-tasking,⁶ increased sedentary time,⁷ and, more recently, zoom fatigue⁸ are health-related issues that have increased among remote workers in recent years. The demands of doing remote work without a set structure and our desire to live a flexible lifestyle require a new, individual approach to sustainable productivity.

Three helpful practices for sustainable productivity

Creating an individual approach to sustainable productivity doesn't necessarily require dramatic shifts, like switching fields or finding a new job. Small changes on a day-to-day basis have a big impact and can create a much more satisfying work-life balance. Here are three helpful practices that you could introduce into your life right now.

1 The start of your day is for you

How often do you start the day rushed? Perhaps you go straight from the frenzy of the school run to your desk and quickly get to work on your next assignment. Or perhaps there are already hundreds of to-dos bouncing around in your head the moment you wake up. With so many things on our plate and so many things that are pulling at our attention, it's not surprising that we feel rushed and "already behind" from the moment we wake up. However, how we start our day can set the tone for the rest of our day.

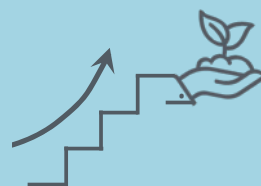
The greatest practice to go from rushed and stressed to calm and capable is to give yourself permission to prioritise your own goals and to give them a place of honour in your day. That place of honour could be right at the start of your day, to make sure that they don't get bumped to the end of the list (again) and to set the tone for your day.

Figure 1. Infographic: An individual approach to sustainable productivity.

A sustainable productivity approach will be important for remote workers to adapt to the recent and future changes of the remote workforce. Here, I summarise what productivity is and what it is not and I include 3 helpful daily practices for sustainable productivity on an individual level.

Productivity is about doing those few things that have the most impact

An individual approach to sustainable productivity



WHAT SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTIVITY IS NOT

- ✗ working all the time
- ✗ spending less time with loved ones
- ✗ constantly feeling busy
- ✗ your health and well-being come last
- ✗ work comes first and the rest of your life slots in

WHAT SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTIVITY IS

- ✓ healthy work-life balance
- ✓ productive instead of busy
- ✓ doing the few things that have the most impact
- ✓ prioritising your health and well-being
- ✓ your work supports your desired lifestyle

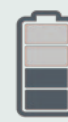
3 HELPFUL DAILY PRACTICES



1. Start your day with inspiration and joy



2. Make space for your natural working process



3. Rest before your energy is depleted



Mariella Franker

process is different, but one is not more valuable than the other. By making space for yours, you're supporting your unique strengths and bringing unique value to the people around you.

3 Rest before your energy is depleted

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is to not wait for the yearly vacation or until we have a big chunk of time to take a rest. Sustainable productivity is equal parts working and resting. Small snippets of daily self-care are very effective to achieve a healthy work-life balance. For introverts especially, resting plenty and often is a key element of sustainable productivity. Because of the way introverts process the world around them, they can easily become overstimulated and are prone to energy fatigue. Replenishing this energy is essential to their well-being and to work at their best.

Resting includes getting enough sleep and getting "quiet time" during the day. Quiet time allows introverts to go through their natural self-reflection process. This is important for problem solving

and deciding which next steps to take. When introverts don't get enough quiet time many of them experience anxiety and stress and their inner critic becomes very dominant, further hampering their progress.

Creating opportunities for quiet time doesn't have to be difficult and you can start with something as simple as taking a 5-minute break after a zoom meeting. Keep a list of shorter and longer activities that help you to relax and to recharge your energy and plug them in whenever you feel fatigue setting in. This will ensure that you get enough rest and quiet time during the day and that you don't deplete your energy.

Adapting to today's – and tomorrow's – virtual workforce

Although the remote workforce isn't new, the pandemic has accelerated technological advances

It can take as little as ten minutes a day to make this change. Look for things that inspire you and that bring you joy. This could be anything from a short meditation, to watching an inspiring video, to taking a short walk. Giving yourself permission to prioritise your own needs and wishes is the basis for sustainable productivity: doing those few things that have the most impact while caring for your well-being.

2 Make space for your natural working process

Your natural working process connects to the way that you naturally solve problems and how you work at your best. Everyone's natural working process is a little bit different and what you need to work at your best is unique. When we look at the general personality traits of introverts and extroverts, we can already see a few differences.

For example, most extroverts formulate their thoughts and ideas while speaking and will engage in conversation quite early in the exploration process (the classical brainstorm technique). Introverts, on the other hand, explore and formulate their thoughts and ideas through an extensive self-reflection process and it's only after that process that most introverts will engage in conversation.

Western society generally adheres to a more extroverted standard and qualities like decisiveness, quick action, and charming talkers are admired. As a result, many introverts feel pressure to adopt these qualities at the expense of their natural process. However, the closer you stay to your natural working process, the easier it is to have a big impact with your work without feeling overwhelmed or forcing yourself to be someone you're not. Everyone's natural working

and has shifted our approach to work-life balance. With the many benefits that remote work offers, there are also challenges. A new, individual approach to sustainable productivity requires day-to-day attention to our well-being. Remember to:

- Start each day with inspiration and joy.
- Make space for your natural work process.
- Rest before your energy is depleted.

This will help you to stay productive in a sustainable way and to adapt to the changing circumstances in today's – and tomorrow's – virtual workforce.

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Author information

Mariella Franker, PhD, is a certified Natural Advantage® Productivity Coach. A former scientist and scientific writer, she now helps introverts discover their unique strengths and to be productive in a way that feels natural to them. She is co-founder of the Science and Medical Writer's Network in the Benelux, Associate Coach at De Succesvolle Introvert, and Founder and CEO of The Franker Message. Mariella can be reached at www.thefrankermesssage.com.



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