A MANAGER'S GUIDE TO DIGITAL POSSESSION:

UNDERSTANDING, DIAGNOSING, & FIXING DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY



ROBBI ERICKSON-GUILD, PH.D.

A Manager's Guide to Digital Possession:

Understanding, Diagnosing, & Fixing Dysfunctional Relationships with Digital Technology

Robbi Erickson-Guild, Ph.D.



DataTales, Inc.
www.datatalesinc.com
Nova Scotia, Canada

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When did we stop possessing our digital technology—and start being possessed by it?

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Prologue: When Data Hurts

When I started in business in the 1990s, technology was just starting to creep into the workplace. People working in an office setting were expected to know how to use a personal computer for word processing, organize data in spread sheets, and navigate networks to use shared resources, such as printers and servers. Still, most data collected was done manually by looking at printouts, including budgets, receipts, invoices, timecards, and sales reports. While it felt like a lot of data was being handled by the business, it was manageable. Employees knew where the information came from, they had ways to verify it for accuracy and validity, and they knew where it was used and how it was stored. This is no longer the case.

Managing a business in 2026 is a very different experience from the 1990s. In just a few decades, the level of data use and infiltration into the work environment has intensified beyond belief. Previously, data flow management was possible through initiatives such as Bring-Your-Own-Devices to Work, privacy, social media, and cybersecurity policies. Today, these measures are inadequate to control the vast amounts of data floating through the workspace on countless devices, computers, and pieces of equipment. For example, small- and medium-sized enterprises use between 100 MB and 100GB of data per day,

depending on the data intensity of their business model, while medium-sized organizations use between 100 GB and 10 TB a day, and larger businesses can use a petabyte (or more) of data per day.[1]

At this volume, managers lack a comprehensive understanding of the data entering the business, its usage within the organization, and the channels and formats through which it exits the business. This is causing a lot of problems, affecting not just the company's security and performance, but also its employees' ability to think, engage with one another, and work effectively.

It is because of the quantity of data flooding workspaces today that employees are struggling to manage their relationship with it, technology, and each other. As a result, most of the problems businesses face stem from dysfunctional relationships people have with data and digital technology. The effects of these dysfunctional relationships come in several forms: poor decision-making, analysis paralysis, disengaged employees, fractured teams, and rising levels of anxiety, frustration, and burnout (Smith & Somayaji, 2024). As these symptoms escalate, they lead to something far more damaging to a business' functionality and morale: data overload.

Data overload, also known as information overload, occurs when a person has too much data and becomes overwhelmed (Bhambri, 2021). This feeling of being overwhelmed negatively affects the person's ability to think, analyze, reason, and make decisions. The cause of these problems is cognitive overload, which means more demands are placed on the person's brain than it can handle (Schmitt et al., 2021). If left untreated, data overload leads to data trauma.

Data trauma is when individuals suffer psychological harm from exposure to overwhelming volumes of controversial, ambiguous, or impactful types of data (Wilson, 2025). Its consequences include digital hoarding, compulsive checking, decision fatigue, and even digital addiction (we will explore all these things in this book). Data trauma goes beyond just being overwhelmed. Instead, it signifies the emergence of psychosis.

Employees in every industry are at risk of experiencing data trauma, but how it shows up can vary widely depending on the field. Studies across sectors reveal that data trauma affects the well-being of workers and other stakeholders in ways unique to each industry's environment, practices, and pressures. In healthcare, for

[1] These are estimates based on average data values for common types of digital transactions, files, and other activities, as well as the number of employees and data intensity of various businesses.

example, iatrogenic data trauma arises when the collection and use of sensitive data inadvertently cause harm (Smith & Somayaji, 2023). In the public sector, data trauma creates trust, integrity, and performance issues by creating cycles of data disclosure without meaningful action (Wilson, 2025). In construction, data overload leads to confusion and decision-making paralysis, as inconsistent, contradictory, or misleading data undermines decision-making (Cavallini & Cappelli, 2021). It would be easy to blame the data itself for all these issues, but the problem is not the presence of data, it is how it is designed, distributed, interpreted, and used.

When digital systems are built on flawed behavioral models or reinforce harmful cognitive patterns, they do not just inform and support employees, they take possession of them. This leads to the third level of dysfunctional relationships with data in an organization, digital possession. This is when digital systems use data to control, manipulate, and puppeteer employees.

This book introduces a new framework to understand the psychological toll of dysfunctional relationships with data and digital technology in the workplace: *Disruptive Digital Possession*. Drawing on cultural and psychological models of possession, this metaphor offers a powerful lens for exploring how data can invade the workplace and compromise the psychological safety and stability of employees and other stakeholders.

The model's stages mirror those associated with traditional possession models: inciting event, vexation, obsession, infestation, oppression, and possession. While the metaphor may seem extreme, it reflects the lived experience of many employees who feel consumed by their digital environment. It also explains why managers can recognize the symptoms of Disruptive Digital Possession, such as data trauma and digital obsessions, but often feel powerless to intervene.

They ask:

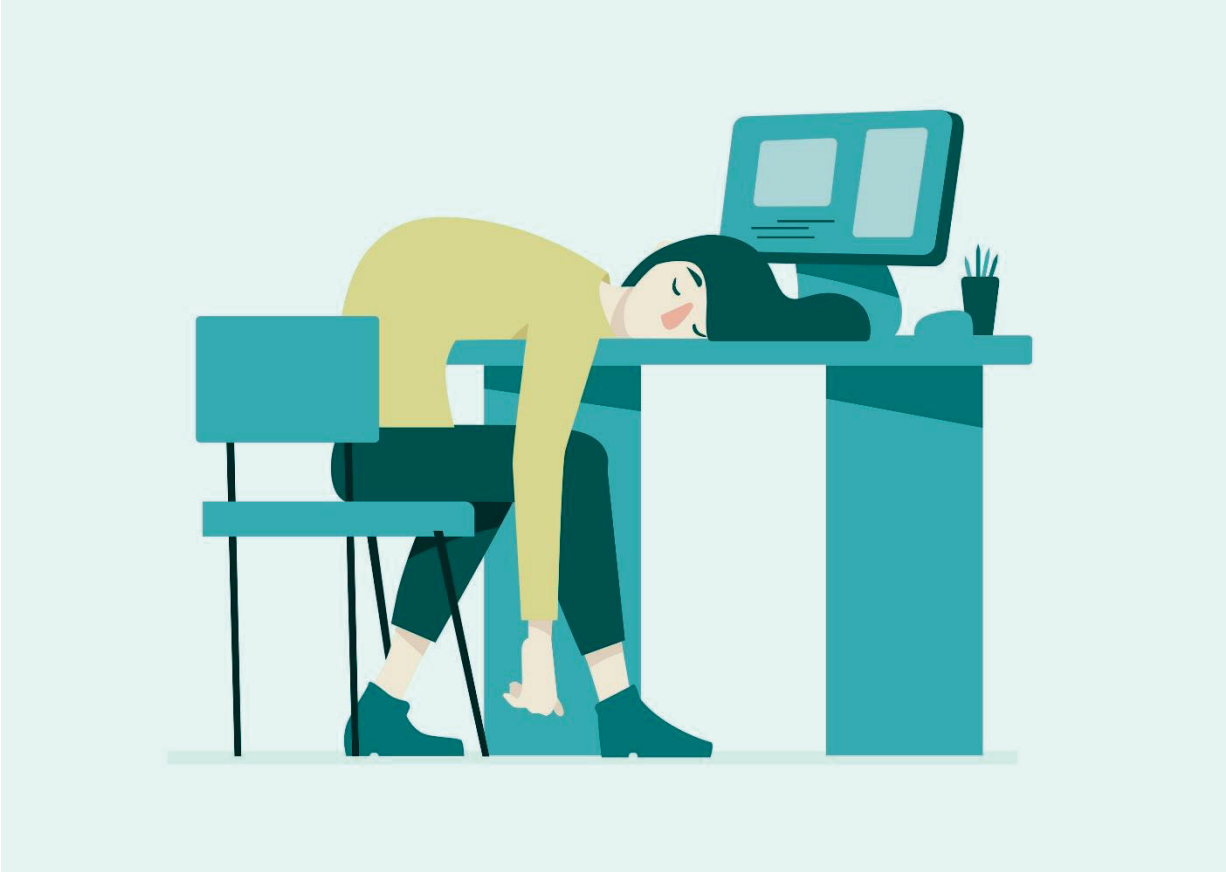
> *Why are my employees struggling so much?*
>
> *Is there anything I can do to help?*
>
> *Can anything fix the problem?*

This guide provides answers. It offers trauma-informed, purposeful, and strategic interventions that facilitate an evidence-based roadmap for problem recognition, response, recovery, and resilience. In this book, you will learn how to:

- Find signs of digital dysfunction in individuals and teams,
- Understand the psychological mechanisms behind data trauma and Disruptive Digital Possession,
- Implement strategies to restore autonomy, clarity, and engagement, and
- Design systems that support human performance.

A Manager's Guide to Digital Possession: Understanding, Diagnosing, & Fixing Dysfunctional Relationships with Digital Technology is not a rejection of data or digital technology. These are both valuable tools we need to understand to remain competent and competitive in our business environment. However, it is time to stop allowing data and digital technology to roam free and unchecked. This book serves as a guide to help managers diagnose and understand organizational problems stemming from data overload, data trauma, and digital possession, enabling them to respond effectively to the challenges of a digitally saturated world and build a new work environment that is purposeful, strategically aligned, and supportive of both employee and corporate needs.





Part I: A Manager's Primer on Dysfunctional Relationships with Data and Digital Technology

Most managers today feel confident using data and digital technology, and for good reason. They've picked up valuable skills through their work experience, running teams, managing departments, and studying business in school. They know what worked in their past roles and how specific tools helped them get things done. But here's the catch: that knowledge is often limited to only what they've seen and done before. So, while they might understand how data and technology help their part of the business, they may not understand how everything connects across the company. For example, they might not know how data moves between departments, how digital systems interact, or how decisions in one area affect another. This can lead to a patchwork approach, where each manager does their own thing without a shared strategy. Over time, this creates gaps, missed opportunities, and confusion about who's responsible for what. To fix these problems, managers need more than just technical know-how. They need a broader understanding of how data and technology support the entire organization. That means learning how to manage these tools strategically, not just by using them, but by guiding how they're used.

This shift in thinking is important because the value offered by data and digital technology is no longer just utility, they're now strategic and key to how businesses grow, adapt, and compete. When used well, they help teams make smarter decisions, spot trends early, and work more efficiently. They can even open the door to new products, services, and ways of working. But to unlock that value, companies need leaders who see the big picture. That means building a culture where data and digital skills are part of everyday thinking, instead of being viewed as just some abstract concept managed by the IT team. Building a digitally driven culture is, therefore, about making sure everyone, from frontline managers to senior executives, understands how these tools drive success.

One question being asked more frequently with each passing year is: Are data and digital technology friends or foes? While researchers and professionals promote both as essential and valuable, their benefits come at a steep price: rising digital addiction, compulsive data hoarding, and even mental health issues linked to constant exposure to data-driven technologies. Worse still, data can be weaponized and used to manipulate people, spread misinformation, and erode public trust. This does not sound like something a friend would do; however, it is not the data or digital technology that is the problem.

The truth is that data and digital technology do exactly what we design them to do. Problems emerge because of our programming and interactions with them. For example, information system designers and coders build many data systems on flawed models of human behavior, including ones that reflect biases, logical fallacies, and discriminatory patterns (Lopez, 2021; Nishant et al., 2024). Others use psychological concepts and theories related to behavior modification, motivation, and addiction to encourage people to engage mindlessly and relentlessly with digital technology and data (Orhan et al., 2021; Rajan et al., 2025; Wang & Wang, 2025). Both approaches create positive feedback loops that encourage unhealthy engagement and threaten the psychological safety of users of digital technology.

The more exposure employees have to these issues, the more overwhelmed, frustrated, and obsessed with data they become in the workplace. Their environment starts to feel cluttered with digital noise, and their ability to think clearly and act independently is compromised. These symptoms mirror something unexpected: the psychological dysfunction often described in cases of diabolical possession, also referred to as spirit or demonic possession.

Before you panic, please note that his book does not aim to debate religious or cultural beliefs. Instead, it introduces a new concept, Disruptive Digital Possession (DDP), to help managers explore how excessive, unregulated exposure to data can impact our mental and emotional well-being and autonomy. In particular, DDP helps managers understand how employees' dysfunctional relationships with data and digital technology can lead to emotional instability, compulsive behaviors, and a loss of personal accountability. By understanding this phenomenon through trauma-informed and strategic management lenses, we can begin to reclaim control and restore a healthier, more autonomous relationship with the digital world in our businesses. To develop this understanding, Part I provides an overview of the concept of digital possession, the anatomy of the disruption it causes, the comprehensive cost of this issue, and the assessment of managerial vulnerability to data overload, data trauma, and digital possession.





Chapter 1: The New Possession Experience

When most people hear the word *possession*, they think back to graphic scenes from horror movies with someone writhing, screaming, and being overtaken by a dark, malevolent force. It is terrifying, not just because of the dramatic symptoms, but because it taps into a more profound fear: losing control over our own minds, bodies, and souls. While most people do not believe in diabolical possession, such as those portrayed in films like *The Exorcist* and *The Conjuring*, possession remains a near-universal cultural phenomenon (de Oliveira Maraldi et al., 2021). Cultures around the globe describe situations in which people are overwhelmed by an external force that takes control of them in totality, fundamentally changing who and what they are. But what if possession isn't limited to the spiritual or supernatural? What if, in our hyperconnected age, a new kind of possession has emerged, one that is not ruled by demons or rituals, but instead algorithms, streaming data feeds, and digital technology?

Luckily, digital possession does not involve digitalized demonic entities or possessed digital technology. It is not even about demonic messages transmitted in zeros and ones to produce mass hysteria. Instead, it is a psychological response to being overwhelmed by our digital environment to a point where we surrender control of our minds, bodies, and environment to digital technology. In this

chapter, we'll explore how digital environments can possess us, shaping our thoughts, behaviors, and identities in ways that mirror the terrifying loss of control seen in traditional possession narratives. The question is no longer whether we can be possessed by data and digital technology, but whether if, in fact, we already are.

Cultural Model of Possession

What is possession?

Across cultures, possession has long been seen as a spiritual or religious event, serving two distinct purposes. One was as a method for exploring different dimensions of consciousness or connecting with meaningful, often carefully chosen, spiritual entities (Závoti, 2013). In these contexts, possession wasn't seen as something to fear but rather used as a tool. Possession was invoked by a shaman or spiritual leader through various techniques, including the use of psychoactive substances, meditation, rhythmic music, fasting, and exposure to extreme conditions (Kapchan, 2023; Trnka & Lorenscova, 2022). Through these processes, the shaman gained insight or knowledge needed to address pressing issues, such as illness, environmental threats, or conflict. These traditions viewed possession, not as dysfunction caused by a lack of understanding, but rather a sacred strategy to resolve uncertainty.

The second cultural purpose of possession was to help societies make sense of extreme, disruptive, or disturbing behavior (Chirico et al., 2022; Bell, 2024; Craffert, 2018). In this context, possession became a way to explain sudden changes in someone's mental or emotional state, especially when those changes seemed irrational or alarming. Sometimes the behavior was acute, meaning it lasted only a fleeting moment. Often, there was a perceived supernatural trigger that overwhelmed the brain's ability to process and respond, leading to a behavioral disturbance or episode. Other times, the abnormal behaviors resulted from long-term stress or oppression by a demonic entity that subjected the person or group to ongoing emotional or environmental pressures that slowly wore down their resilience. When that stress reached a tipping point, the mind and body responded with possession-like symptoms, acting as a dramatic signal that something deep within the person had splintered, shattered, or for a more modern term, malfunctioned.

Psychological Model of Possession

How do psychologists define possession? Is it real?

While cultural explanations of possession focus on the supernatural, researchers propose that trauma is what causes possession trance disorder (PTD), which is a part of the dissociative disorders group found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* (Pietkiewicz et al., 2022). However, the current version of the *DSM*, talks about possession as a cultural explanation for the symptoms associated with various mental health disorders, such as acute stress disorder, dissociative identity disorder, and conversion disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

What these conditions have in common is an overwhelming experience or trauma that triggers cognitive overload (Chirico et al., 2022; Bell, 2024; Craffert, 2018). When the brain experiences cognitive overload it is unable to integrate this flood of information into its existing constructs, and it may effectively "short-circuit," exposing the individual to disordered thinking and maladaptive coping strategies (Sewell et al., 2020). The result is a person who is extremely stressed and who has impairments to their cognition and executive functioning, and who is trying to find a way to restore their functionality by any means available.

What do people do in this situation to restore functionality?

In general cases of possession, from a psychological perspective, people seek to restore functionality and equilibrium in three ways. The first way people seek to restore their functionality is by going numb and pretending that everything is okay. They hide their dysfunction, ignore their problems, and hope it goes away on its own. The second way people try to restore their functionality when possessed is to adopt a new identity, one that works with the demands of their possessive entity. This results in changes in personality, behavior, and the ways they engage with others. The third way that people try to regain their functionality when first experiencing possession is to surrender fully to the control of the possessive entity, thereby becoming the entity's zombie or puppet.

That's interesting, but this book is about digital possession, right? What is digital possession and how does it compare to the psychological model?

The Disruptive Digital Possession model that I present in this book will be fully described in Part II. However, I do want to present you with a basic overview here so you can understand how it compares to the psychological and cultural models of possession.

You first need to know that the possessive entity for DDP is digital technology, as opposed to a perceived supernatural entity. When a person develops a dysfunctional relationship with digital technology, it can create situations in which the individual is overwhelmed by the amount of data and technology they need to deal with and use. The condition of being overwhelmed by data and digital technology can be so severe that it causes trauma. This makes the person vulnerable to cognitive overload and a breakdown of the brain's ability to cope effectively with the data and digital technology infesting their work environment. This vulnerability is exploited by the design of digital technology, which uses positive reinforcement, micro-rewards, and behavior modification techniques to addict people to its use. This process will be discussed in more detail later.

The next thing you need to know about the DDP model is that its remaining symptoms and the condition's general progression are similar to the psychological and cultural models of possession, only with digital themes. An effective way to understand this difference is to see how people with DDP attempt to restore their functionality when first experiencing digital possession. As you will see, these coping mechanisms are the same three options that were presented in the cultural and psychological model of possession, only they have a digital twist.

Mouse-Jigglers

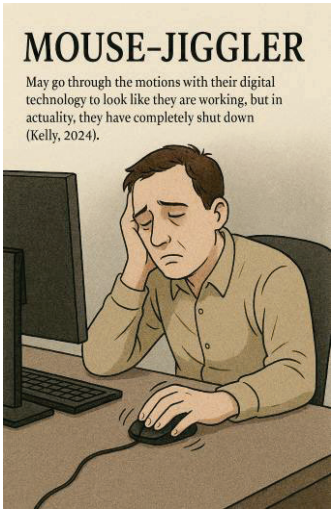


Figure 1 - Mouse Jiggler, 2025

Many different strategies can be used in cases of digital possession to find stability. One way is to go numb and become what is now called a mouse jiggler. A mouse jiggler is someone who may go through the motions with their digital technology to appear to be working, but they have completely shut down (Kelly, 2024). They stop feeling, thinking, and engaging with the world. Managers may notice their employees withdrawing socially, not wanting to take part in team activities, increasing absenteeism, reporting work they did not actually do, and missing out on communication and engagement opportunities.

Hyperconnected Avatar

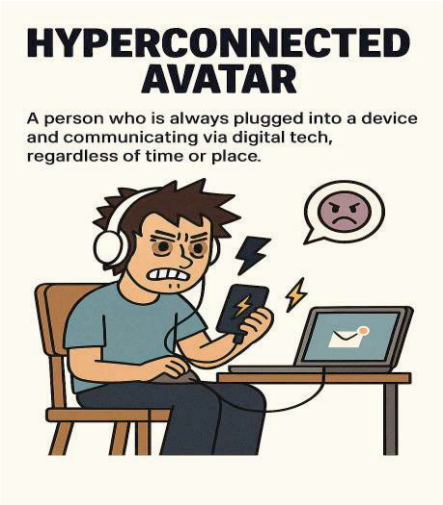


Figure 2 - Hyperconnected Avatar, 2025

Another way to restore functionality is for the employee to adopt a new identity, one that aligns with the reality that caused their cognitive or digital overload in the first place (Wang et al., 2024). They create a hyperconnected avatar. This term describes a person who is hyperconnected, always plugged into a device, and always communicating via digital technology, regardless of when it is or where they are. These people never switch off, and as a result, they experience sleep deprivation and they may have violent mood swings and become extremely unpredictable.

Digital Zombies



Figure 3 - Digital Zombie, 2026

Still another way that people look to restore their functionality in cases of digital possession is to be passive and allow what overwhelmed them to take control. This would mean allowing digital technology to tell them when they have meetings, what to think, what to do, when to do it, how to act, and who to engage with via what genres and channels. They essentially become digital zombies.

As a manager, why do I need to know about or use the DDP model?

As a manager, your job is to manage staff and empower them to do their jobs well, so that the company can achieve its goals and objectives. When a workforce is affected by digital possession, they develop a dysfunctional relationship with data and digital technology. As a result, mental health issues and behavior patterns appear that destabilize them. People don't like to be out of balance, because it is distressing and causes anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, and fear. Subsequently, they constantly seek solutions to the causes of their dysfunction.

Unfortunately, as discussed above, the coping strategies associated with DDP are all dysfunctional. They are not going to help the employees stabilize, instead, they will make things worse for them and the organization. For example, the listed coping strategies (mouse jiggler, hyperconnected avatar, and digital zombie strategies) will negatively affect employees' ability to function in a social environment, apply their knowledge, skills, and abilities to their work, and remain emotionally and psychologically stable. Additionally, these consequences increase the risk of productivity declines, errors, injuries, workplace toxicity, and workplace violence.

All those things are bad, but how big of a risk are data overload, data trauma, and Disruptive Digital Possession? I mean, how can someone's mind short-circuit? Doesn't the human brain have an extraordinary amount of capacity to think, reason, and remember?

The risk of data overload, data trauma, and digital possession escalates each year as the use of data and digital technology increases. As use rates increase, employees will struggle to keep up and to remain cognitively balanced. Subsequently, managers will see more employees showing signs of data-driven psychological problems if they do not intervene.

The reason for this scenario is that, while the human brain is amazing, it is not without its limits and design flaws. The computational power of the human brain is often overestimated. People think that they can manage all the data and sensory inputs the world can throw at them. And while the brain can store approximately 2.5 million gigabytes of data using its 100 billion neurons and trillions of synaptic connections, its ability to access this data is limited by working memory constraints (Al-Malah, 2021). These constraints limit how much data can be retrieved and used. For example, research by George Miller (1989) proposed that the average person can hold about seven chunks of information at once when the information is familiar. However, more recent studies show that working memory can use far fewer data chunks when the information is not familiar, only three to four chunks at a time (Huang & Awh, 2018). This suggests that the brain is more susceptible to dysfunction when confronted with a large amount of unfamiliar information or information that directly contradicts the person's existing cognitive constructs. As a result, when too much of this radical information is presented, the person experiences cognitive overload.

How do we know when a person is exposed to too much data, digital technology, or radical information?

Currently, there is no rule of thumb for establishing how much unfamiliar data a person can be exposed to before their brain malfunctions. However, current and historical research has identified predictive factors that explain what can overload a person's computing capacity.

Here are a few of these factors:

- **Working memory overload**: People are exposed to too much new, radical, or conflicting data (Huange & Awh, 2018; Miller, 1989).
- **Stress, distraction, and fatigue:** People are physically, emotionally, and/or psychologically stressed out, exhausted, and unable to handle any other information (Van Dam, 2021)
- **Physiological deterioration**: Brain injury, brain infections, aging, neurological degenerative diseases, sleep deprivation, and cognitive development disorders all increase vulnerabilities to cognitive overload (Azam et al., 2021; Chaudhary et al., 2023).

What happens when a person experiences cognitive overload?

When the brain is overwhelmed, it becomes extremely vulnerable to disorganized, dysfunctional, and erratic thought patterns and behavioral responses (Guerin, 2023; Rodrigues & Santo Wagner, 2022). In this fragile state, the mind may grasp onto an external force, whether real or imagined, to impose meaning on the chaos of trauma. This suggests that the experience of possession is just the mind seeking equilibrium amid chaos, constructing a new narrative to make sense of its new reality.

What happens when the new construct is adopted?

In the psychological model of possession, the adoption of the new construct causes dissociation (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Dissociation is when the person disconnects from their familiar reality and identity, and shifts into a state of numbness (mouse jiggler), an alternative identity (hyperconnected avatar), and/or an alternative reality (digital zombie) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; VanPool & VanPool, 2023). These acts of surrender can offer temporary relief by allowing the individual to relinquish responsibility and accountability in the face of overwhelming, irrational conditions. However, this disengagement can lead to dysfunction, turning the individual into a disruptive

force within their social and organizational systems, often amplifying the trauma they've experienced and spreading it to others.

What's the big picture message here?

The answer to this question is simple, real-world organizations are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by data and digital technology. Their workforces also exhibit behavior patterns consistent with DDP symptoms, such as fake work, digital burnout, disengagement, and over-reliance on digital technology to get work done. For managers and business leaders, these examples underscore the urgency of recognizing and addressing DDP before it undermines operational stability, safety, and performance.

What are some examples of data trauma and digital overload in the field?

There are countless examples of organizations and industries being negatively impacted by data trauma and digital overload. Below are a few examples that illustrate why most businesses need to address data overload, data trauma, and Disruptive Digital Possession within their organizations.

Case Studies – Businesses Overwhelmed by Digital Systems

The drive for corporate digital transformation is both cultural and global. Across industries and borders, organizations are rapidly increasing their reliance on digital technologies. However, without a clear strategic framework and well-defined objectives, many businesses are losing control over their digital systems and data, leading to operational inefficiencies, security risks, and costly disruptions.

Clorox Generative AI

Clorox invested $580 million in generative AI to help revolutionize its brand, reinvigorate its product development process, and boost the efficacy of its marketing strategies (Tehrani, 2025). Unfortunately, the company lacked a solid plan for implementing their new generative AI, resulting in inconsistencies, team fragmentation, and a decline in product image. The digital technology functioned, but without clear guidance on what the team was trying to accomplish, it produced results that pulled the company in too many directions. The entire organization was disorganized, as employees were given conflicting information, data, and competing digital tools to do their jobs. Like in any other system with weak infrastructure, the project failed and nearly brought the company down with it.

Walmart's Digital Transformation and the Onset of Data Trauma

Anyone trying to use Walmart's first online ordering platform experienced data trauma. While this system was intended to help the company provide grocery pickup and delivery services, making grocery shopping more convenient, the shock-therapy approach to implementing it traumatized millions of internal and external stakeholders (DigitalDefynd.com, 2025). Data trauma, in this case, came from forcing too many people to accept too many changes, new information, and new digital technologies at once. This caused operational misalignments between in-store capabilities and the digital platform. Frontline employees were overwhelmed by the need to learn the new system and keep up with demand for grocery pickup and delivery. Customers were overwhelmed by the ordering process, including their inability to secure a slot and issues with undelivered orders (DigitalDefynd.com, 2025). As problems mounted, stakeholders experienced data overload. This led to frustration, anxiety, decline of employee morale, loss of brand value, and performance problems within the organization (DigitalDefynd.com, 2025). In this case, data overload and trauma emerged when digital transformation practices outpaced organizational readiness.

Data Trauma in Canada's Public Health Digital Transformation

The Canadian Public Health System is a prime example of data trauma. The Canadian government pushed to modernize and digitalize its healthcare system to make it more effective and more efficient. Unfortunately, the efforts invested in the digital transformation of this system traumatized internal and external stakeholders by exposing deep-rooted vulnerabilities across electronic health records (EHRs), scheduling platforms, and system integration efforts (Onwyekwe, 2024; Public Health Ontario, 2023). Additionally, disparities in service access and treatment quality were reinforced by the digital systems implemented, instead of resolving institutionalized discrimination in the healthcare system (Public Health Ontario, 2023). Several issues drove internal data trauma, including gaps in management strategies for the new digital system's impact on public health operations, the undertraining of staff, slow responses to reported problems and glitches, and poor data migration planning (Onwyekwe, 2024; Public Health Ontario, 2023). Missteps led to treatment delays, staff burnout, and mounting administrative burdens, all hallmarks of data trauma.

Digital Transformation Barriers Among Canadian SMEs and Nonprofits

Deloitte Canada (2023) reported that many small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), nonprofit organizations, and Indigenous-led groups have limited access

to technology experts and professionals with intermediate to advanced levels of digital literacy. Subsequently, when directed to digitally transform their organizations, they struggled. Making the situation worse was the time pressure to implement changes, with authority figures and experts urging them to complete all their digital transformations in one go, rather than by using an incremental implementation strategy (Deloitte Canada, 2023). These conditions caused data overload, staff burnout, resistance to digital tools, and resource waste. Additionally, these problems strained the organization's capacity, reduced engagement and morale, left employees feeling unprepared and unsupported, and led the organizations to spend their limited resources on digital tools that were either underutilized or completely abandoned (Deloitte Canada, 2023). These consequences are ones no organization can afford, yet they are a growing problem across industries.

Data Trauma Risks in Canadian Manufacturing Businesses

One of the sectors that the Canadian government wants to develop is its manufacturing industry (Government of Canada, 2024). Naturally, the digital transformation of this industry should help businesses become more competitive by using AI and other digital technologies to improve cost-effectiveness, performance, productivity, and supply chain management (Government of Canada, 2024). However, when organizations in this sector adopted advanced AI and machine learning solutions to manage their complex supply chains, most experienced data overload and data trauma. The problem was that despite having digitally literate workforces, these organizations remained vulnerable to data trauma because of the high complexity of digital tools, compatibility issues with legacy platforms and existing information systems, over-reliance on AI and machine learning outputs to make decisions and control routine activities, and problematic employee buy-in caused by a failure to communicate value propositions and to manage the change process effectively. This case illustrates that even highly technical organizations can experience data trauma. Without proper training, realistic goal-setting, and thoughtful integration strategies, digital transformation efforts can overwhelm employees and destabilize operations, regardless of baseline digital literacy.

Conclusion

Possession in the digital age is no longer just a metaphor; it's a management challenge. Today's technologies don't twist limbs or speak in tongues, but they do something more sinister: they infiltrate attention, shape behavior, and quietly erode autonomy. These systems know your team's habits, vulnerabilities, and

motivations, often better than you do. To be a good manager in today's data-driven, digitally saturated work environment, you must recognize that data-driven influence can become possessive when left unchecked.

In the Next Chapter

In the next chapter, we'll explore the anatomy of data overload, data trauma, and digital possession. These issues can undermine your team's ability to focus, collaborate, and perform. Managers need to know how such problems appear, what behavioral patterns to watch for, and how to intervene early to support a healthier, more balanced digital culture within your team.

