

## *Chapter Two*

# Deep Work Is Rare

In 2012, Facebook unveiled the plans for a new headquarters designed by Frank Gehry. At the center of this new building is what CEO Mark Zuckerberg called “the largest open floor plan in the world”: More than three thousand employees will work on movable furniture spread over a ten-acre expanse.

Facebook, of course, is not the only Silicon Valley heavyweight to embrace the open office concept. When Jack Dorsey, whom we met at the end of the last chapter, bought the old San Francisco Chronicle building to house Square, he configured the space so that his developers work in common spaces on long shared desks. “We encourage people to stay out in the open because we believe in serendipity—and people walking by each other teaching new things,” Dorsey explained.

Another big business trend in recent years is the rise of instant messaging. A *Times* article notes that this technology is no longer the “province of chatty

teenagers” and is now helping companies benefit from “new productivity gains and improvements in customer response time.” A senior product manager at IBM boasts: “We send 2.5 million I.M.’s within I.B.M. each day.”

One of the more successful recent entrants into the business IM space is Hall, a Silicon Valley start-up that helps employees move beyond just chat and engage in “real-time collaboration.” A San Francisco-based developer I know described to me what it was like to work in a company that uses Hall. The most “efficient” employees, he explained, set up their text editor to flash an alert on

their screen when a new question or comment is posted to the company's Hall account. They can then, with a sequence of practiced keystrokes, jump over to Hall, type in their thoughts, and then jump back to their coding with barely a pause. My friend seemed impressed when describing their speed.

A third trend is the push for content producers of all types to maintain a social media presence. The *New York Times*, a bastion of old-world media values, now encourages its employees to tweet—a hint taken by the more than eight hundred writers, editors, and photographers for the paper who now maintain a Twitter account. This is not

outlier behavior; it's instead the new normal. When the novelist Jonathan Franzen wrote a piece for the *Guardian* calling Twitter a “coercive development” in the literary world, he was widely ridiculed as out of touch. The online magazine *Slate* called Franzen’s complaints a “lonely war on the Internet” and fellow novelist Jennifer Weiner wrote a response in *The New Republic* in which she argued, “Franzen’s a category of one, a lonely voice issuing *ex cathedra* edicts that can only apply to himself.” The sarcastic hashtag #JonathanFranzenhates soon became a fad.

I mention these three business trends

because they highlight a paradox. In the last chapter, I argued that deep work is more valuable than ever before in our shifting economy. If this is true, however, you would expect to see this skill promoted not just by ambitious individuals but also by organizations hoping to get the most out of their employees. As the examples provided emphasize, this is not happening. Many other ideas are being prioritized as more important than deep work in the business world, including, as we just encountered, serendipitous collaboration, rapid communication, and an active presence on social media.

It's bad enough that so many trends

are prioritized ahead of deep work, but to add insult to injury, many of these trends actively *decrease* one's ability to go deep. Open offices, for example, might create more opportunities for collaboration,<sup>\*</sup> but they do so at the cost of "massive distraction," to quote the results of experiments conducted for a British TV special titled *The Secret Life of Office Buildings*. "If you are just getting into some work and a phone goes off in the background, it ruins what you are concentrating on," said the neuroscientist who ran the experiments for the show. "Even though you are not aware at the time, the brain responds to distractions."

Similar issues apply to the rise of real-time messaging. E-mail inboxes, in theory, can distract you only when you choose to open them, whereas instant messenger systems are meant to be always active—magnifying the impact of interruption. Gloria Mark, a professor of informatics at the University of California, Irvine, is an expert on the science of attention fragmentation. In a well-cited study, Mark and her co-authors observed knowledge workers in real offices and found that an interruption, even if short, delays the total time required to complete a task by a significant fraction. “This was reported by subjects as being very



detrimental,” she summarized with typical academic understatement.

Forcing content producers onto social media also has negative effects on the ability to go deep. Serious journalists, for example, need to focus on doing serious journalism—diving into complicated sources, pulling out connective threads, crafting persuasive prose—so to ask them to interrupt this deep thinking throughout the day to participate in the frothy back-and-forth of online tittering seems irrelevant (and somewhat demeaning) at best, and devastatingly distracting at worst. The respected *New Yorker* staff writer George Packer captured this fear well in

an essay about why he does not tweet: “Twitter is crack for media addicts. It scares me, not because I’m morally superior to it, but because I don’t think I could handle it. I’m afraid I’d end up letting my son go hungry.” Tellingly, when he wrote that essay, Packer was busy writing his book *The Unwinding*, which came out soon after and promptly won the National Book Award—despite (or, perhaps, aided by) his lack of social media use.

To summarize, big trends in business today actively decrease people’s ability to perform deep work, even though the benefits promised by these trends (e.g., increased serendipity, faster responses

to requests, and more exposure) are arguably dwarfed by the benefits that flow from a commitment to deep work (e.g., the ability to learn hard things fast and produce at an elite level). The goal of this chapter is to explain this paradox. The rareness of deep work, I'll argue, is not due to some fundamental weakness of the habit. When we look closer at why we embrace distraction in the workplace we'll find the reasons are more arbitrary than we might expect—based on flawed thinking combined with the ambiguity and confusion that often define knowledge work. My objective is to convince you that although our current embrace of distraction is a real

phenomenon, it's built on an unstable foundation and can be easily dismissed once you decide to cultivate a deep work ethic.

## The Metric Black Hole

In the fall of 2012, Tom Cochran, the chief technology officer of Atlantic Media, became alarmed at how much time he seemed to spend on e-mail. So like any good techie, he decided to quantify this unease. Observing his own behavior, he measured that in a single week he received 511 e-mail messages and sent 284. This averaged to around

160 e-mails per day over a five-day workweek. Calculating further, Cochran noted that even if he managed to spend only thirty seconds per message on average, this still added up to almost an hour and a half per day dedicated to moving information around like a human network router. This seemed like a lot of time spent on something that wasn't a primary piece of his job description.

As Cochran recalls in a blog post he wrote about his experiment for the *Harvard Business Review*, these simple statistics got him thinking about the rest of his company. Just how much time were employees of Atlantic Media spending moving around information

instead of focusing on the specialized tasks they were hired to perform? Determined to answer this question, Cochran gathered company-wide statistics on e-mails sent per day and the average number of words per e-mail. He then combined these numbers with the employees' average typing speed, reading speed, and salary. The result: He discovered that Atlantic Media was spending well over a million dollars a year to pay people to process e-mails, with every message sent or received tapping the company for around ninety-five cents of labor costs. "A 'free and frictionless' method of communication," Cochran summarized, "had soft costs

equivalent to procuring a small company Learjet.”

Tom Cochran’s experiment yielded an interesting result about the literal cost of a seemingly harmless behavior. But the real importance of this story is the experiment itself, and in particular, its complexity. It turns out to be really difficult to answer a simple question such as: What’s the impact of our current e-mail habits on the bottom line? Cochran had to conduct a company-wide survey and gather statistics from the IT infrastructure. He also had to pull together salary data and information on typing and reading speed, and run the whole thing through a statistical model

to spit out his final result. And even then, the outcome is fungible, as it's not able to separate out, for example, how much value was *produced* by this frequent, expensive e-mail use to offset some of its cost.

This example generalizes to most behaviors that potentially impede or improve deep work. Even though we abstractly accept that distraction has costs and depth has value, these impacts, as Tom Cochran discovered, are difficult to measure. This isn't a trait unique to habits related to distraction and depth: Generally speaking, as knowledge work makes more complex demands of the labor force, it becomes harder to



measure the value of an individual's efforts. The French economist Thomas Piketty made this point explicit in his study of the extreme growth of executive salaries. The enabling assumption driving his argument is that "it is objectively difficult to measure individual contributions to a firm's output." In the absence of such measures, irrational outcomes, such as executive salaries way out of proportion to the executive's marginal productivity, can occur. Even though some details of Piketty's theory are controversial, the underlying assumption that it's increasingly difficult to measure individuals' contributions is generally

considered, to quote one of his critics, “undoubtedly true.”

We should not, therefore, expect the bottom-line impact of depth-destroying behaviors to be easily detected. As Tom Cochran discovered, such metrics fall into an opaque region resistant to easy measurement—a region I call the *metric black hole*. Of course, just because it’s hard to measure metrics related to deep work doesn’t automatically lead to the conclusion that businesses will dismiss it. We have many examples of behaviors for which it’s hard to measure their bottom-line impact but that nevertheless flourish in our business culture; think, for example, of the three trends that

opened this chapter, or the outsize executive salaries that puzzled Thomas Piketty. But without clear metrics to support it, any business behavior is vulnerable to unstable whim and shifting forces, and in this volatile scrum deep work has fared particularly poorly.

The reality of this metric black hole is the backdrop for the arguments that follow in this chapter. In these upcoming sections, I'll describe various mind-sets and biases that have pushed business away from deep work and toward more distracting alternatives. None of these behaviors would survive long if it was clear that they were hurting the bottom line, but the metric black hole prevents

this clarity and allows the shift toward distraction we increasingly encounter in the professional world.

## The Principle of Least Resistance

When it comes to distracting behaviors embraced in the workplace, we must give a position of dominance to the now ubiquitous *culture of connectivity*, where one is expected to read and respond to e-mails (and related communication) quickly. In researching this topic, Harvard Business School professor Leslie Perlow found that the

professionals she surveyed spent around twenty to twenty-five hours a week *outside the office* monitoring e-mail—believing it important to answer any e-mail (internal or external) within an hour of its arrival.

You might argue—as many do—that this behavior is necessary in many fast-paced businesses. But here's where things get interesting: Perlow tested this claim. In more detail, she convinced executives at the Boston Consulting Group, a high-pressure management consulting firm with an ingrained culture of connectivity, to let her fiddle with the work habits of one of their teams. She wanted to test a simple question: Does it

really help your work to be constantly connected? To do so, she did something extreme: She forced each member of the team to take one day out of the workweek completely off—no connectivity to anyone inside or outside the company.

“At first, the team resisted the experiment,” she recalled about one of the trials. “The partner in charge, who had been very supportive of the basic idea, was suddenly nervous about having to tell her client that each member of her team would be off one day a week.” The consultants were equally nervous and worried that they were “putting their careers in jeopardy.” But the team didn’t

lose their clients and its members did not lose their jobs. Instead, the consultants found more enjoyment in their work, better communication among themselves, more learning (as we might have predicted, given the connection between depth and skill development highlighted in the last chapter), and perhaps most important, “a better product delivered to the client.”

This motivates an interesting question: Why do so many follow the lead of the Boston Consulting Group and foster a culture of connectivity even though it's likely, as Perlow found in her study, that it hurts employees' well-being and productivity, and probably doesn't

help the bottom line? I think the answer can be found in the following reality of workplace behavior.

**The Principle of Least Resistance:** In a business setting, without clear feedback on the impact of various behaviors to the bottom line, we will tend toward behaviors that are easiest in the moment.

To return to our question about why cultures of connectivity persist, the answer, according to our principle, is because *it's easier*. There are at least two big reasons why this is true. The first concerns responsiveness to your needs. If you work in an environment



where you can get an answer to a question or a specific piece of information immediately when the need arises, this makes your life easier—at least, in the moment. If you couldn't count on this quick response time you'd instead have to do more advance planning for your work, be more organized, and be prepared to put things aside for a while and turn your attention elsewhere while waiting for what you requested. All of this would make the day to day of your working life harder (even if it produced more satisfaction and a better outcome in the long term). The rise of professional instant messaging, mentioned earlier in this

chapter, can be seen as this mind-set pushed toward an extreme. If receiving an e-mail reply within an hour makes your day easier, then getting an answer via instant message in under a minute would improve this gain by an order of magnitude.

The second reason that a culture of connectivity makes life easier is that it creates an environment where it becomes acceptable to run your day out of your inbox—responding to the latest missive with alacrity while others pile up behind it, all the while feeling satisfyingly productive (more on this soon). If e-mail were to move to the periphery of your workday, you'd be

required to deploy a more thoughtful approach to figuring out what you should be working on and for how long. This type of planning is hard. Consider, for example, David Allen's *Getting Things Done* task-management methodology, which is a well-respected system for intelligently managing competing workplace obligations. This system proposes a *fifteen-element* flowchart for making a decision on what to do next! It's significantly easier to simply chime in on the latest cc'd e-mail thread.

I'm picking on constant connectivity as a case study in this discussion, but it's just one of many examples of business behaviors that are antithetical to depth,

and likely reducing the bottom-line value produced by the company, that nonetheless thrive because, in the absence of metrics, most people fall back on what's easiest.

To name another example, consider the common practice of setting up regularly occurring meetings for projects. These meetings tend to pile up and fracture schedules to the point where sustained focus during the day becomes impossible. Why do they persist? *They're easier.* For many, these standing meetings become a simple (but blunt) form of personal organization. Instead of trying to manage their time and obligations themselves, they let the

impending meeting each week force them to take some action on a given project and more generally provide a highly visible simulacrum of progress.

Also consider the frustratingly common practice of forwarding an e-mail to one or more colleagues, labeled with a short open-ended interrogative, such as: “Thoughts?” These e-mails take the sender only a handful of seconds to write but can command many minutes (if not hours, in some cases) of time and attention from their recipients to work toward a coherent response. A little more care in crafting the message by the sender could reduce the overall time spent by all parties by a significant

fraction. So why are these easily avoidable and time-sucking e-mails so common? From the sender's perspective, *they're easier*. It's a way to clear something out of their inbox—at least, temporarily—with a minimum amount of energy invested.

The Principle of Least Resistance, protected from scrutiny by the metric black hole, supports work cultures that save us from the short-term discomfort of concentration and planning, at the expense of long-term satisfaction and the production of real value. By doing so, this principle drives us toward shallow work in an economy that increasingly rewards depth. It's not, however, the

only trend that leverages the metric black hole to reduce depth. We must also consider the always present and always vexing demand toward “productivity,” the topic we’ll turn our attention to next.

## Busyness as a Proxy for Productivity

There are a lot of things difficult about being a professor at a research-oriented university. But one benefit that this profession enjoys is clarity. How well or how poorly you’re doing as an academic researcher can be boiled down to a simple question: Are you

publishing important papers? The answer to this question can even be quantified as a single number, such as the *h-index*: a formula, named for its inventor, Jorge Hirsch, that processes your publication and citation counts into a single value that approximates your impact on your field. In computer science, for example, an h-index score above 40 is difficult to achieve and once reached is considered the mark of a strong long-term career. On the other hand, if your h-index is in single digits when your case goes up for tenure review, you're probably in trouble. Google Scholar, a tool popular among academics for finding research papers,



even calculates your h-index automatically so you can be reminded, multiple times per week, precisely where you stand. (In case you're wondering, as of the morning when I'm writing this chapter, I'm a 21.)

This clarity simplifies decisions about what work habits a professor adopts or abandons. Here, for example, is the late Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman explaining in an interview one of his less orthodox productivity strategies:

*To do real good physics work, you do need absolute solid lengths of time... it needs a lot of*

*concentration... if you have a job administrating anything, you don't have the time. So I have invented another myth for myself: that I'm irresponsible. I'm actively irresponsible. I tell everyone I don't do anything. If anyone asks me to be on a committee for admissions, "no," I tell them: I'm irresponsible.*

Feynman was adamant in avoiding administrative duties because he knew they would only decrease his ability to do the one thing that mattered most in his professional life: "to do real good physics work." Feynman, we can

assume, was probably bad at responding to e-mails and would likely switch universities if you had tried to move him into an open office or demand that he tweet. Clarity about what matters provides clarity about what does not.

I mention the example of professors because they're somewhat exceptional among knowledge workers, most of whom don't share this transparency regarding how well they're doing their job. Here's the social critic Matthew Crawford's description of this uncertainty: "Managers themselves inhabit a bewildering psychic landscape, and are made anxious by the vague imperatives they must answer to."

Though Crawford was speaking specifically to the plight of the knowledge work middle manager, the “bewildering psychic landscape” he references applies to many positions in this sector. As Crawford describes in his 2009 ode to the trades, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, he quit his job as a Washington, D.C., think tank director to open a motorcycle repair shop exactly to escape this bewilderment. The feeling of taking a broken machine, struggling with it, then eventually enjoying a tangible indication that he had succeeded (the bike driving out of the shop under its own power) provides a concrete sense of accomplishment he struggled to

replicate when his day revolved vaguely around reports and communications strategies.

A similar reality creates problems for many knowledge workers. They want to prove that they're productive members of the team and are earning their keep, but they're not entirely clear what this goal constitutes. They have no rising h-index or rack of repaired motorcycles to point to as evidence of their worth. To overcome this gap, many seem to be turning back to the last time when productivity was more universally observable: the industrial age.

To understand this claim, recall that with the rise of assembly lines came the

rise of the Efficiency Movement, identified with its founder, Frederic Taylor, who would famously stand with a stopwatch monitoring the efficiency of worker movements—looking for ways to increase the speed at which they accomplished their tasks. In Taylor's era, productivity was unambiguous: widgets created per unit of time. It seems that in today's business landscape, many knowledge workers, bereft of other ideas, are turning toward this old definition of productivity in trying to solidify their value in the otherwise bewildering landscape of their professional lives. (David Allen, for example, even uses the specific

phrase “cranking widgets” to describe a productive work flow.) Knowledge workers, I’m arguing, are tending toward increasingly visible busyness because they lack a better way to demonstrate their value. Let’s give this tendency a name.

### **Busyness as Proxy for Productivity:**

In the absence of clear indicators of what it means to be productive and valuable in their jobs, many knowledge workers turn back toward an industrial indicator of productivity: doing lots of stuff in a visible manner.

This mind-set provides another

explanation for the popularity of many depth-destroying behaviors. If you send and answer e-mails at all hours, if you schedule and attend meetings constantly, if you weigh in on instant message systems like Hall within seconds when someone poses a new question, or if you roam your open office bouncing ideas off all whom you encounter—all of these behaviors make you seem busy in a public manner. If you're using busyness as a proxy for productivity, then these behaviors can seem crucial for convincing yourself and others that you're doing your job well.

This mind-set is not necessarily irrational. For some, their jobs really do



depend on such behavior. In 2013, for example, Yahoo's new CEO Marissa Mayer banned employees from working at home. She made this decision after checking the server logs for the virtual private network that Yahoo employees use to remotely log in to company servers. Mayer was upset because the employees working from home didn't sign in enough throughout the day. She was, in some sense, punishing her employees for not spending more time checking e-mail (one of the primary reasons to log in to the servers). "If you're not visibly busy," she signaled, "I'll assume you're not productive."

Viewed objectively, however, this

concept is anachronistic. Knowledge work is not an assembly line, and extracting value from information is an activity that's often at odds with busyness, not supported by it. Remember, for example, Adam Grant, the academic from our last chapter who became the youngest full professor at Wharton by repeatedly shutting himself off from the outside world to concentrate on writing. Such behavior is the opposite of being publicly busy. If Grant worked for Yahoo, Marissa Mayer might have fired him. But this deep strategy turned out to produce a massive amount of value.

We could, of course, eliminate this

anachronistic commitment to busyness if we could easily demonstrate its negative impact on the bottom line, but the metric black hole enters the scene at this point and prevents such clarity. This potent mixture of job ambiguity and lack of metrics to measure the effectiveness of different strategies allows behavior that can seem ridiculous when viewed objectively to thrive in the increasingly bewildering psychic landscape of our daily work.

As we'll see next, however, even those who have a clear understanding of what it means to succeed in their knowledge work job can still be lured away from depth. All it takes is an

ideology seductive enough to convince you to discard common sense.

## The Cult of the Internet

Consider Alissa Rubin. She's the *New York Times*' bureau chief in Paris. Before that she was the bureau chief in Kabul, Afghanistan, where she reported from the front lines on the postwar reconstruction. Around the time I was writing this chapter, she was publishing a series of hard-hitting articles that looked at the French government's complicity in the Rwandan genocide. Rubin, in other words, is a serious

journalist who is good at her craft. She also, at what I can only assume is the persistent urging of her employer, tweets.

Rubin's Twitter profile reveals a steady and somewhat desultory string of missives, one every two to four days, as if Rubin receives a regular notice from the *Times*' social media desk (a real thing) reminding her to appease her followers. With few exceptions, the tweets simply mention an article she recently read and liked.

Rubin is a reporter, not a media personality. Her value to her paper is her ability to cultivate important sources, pull together facts, and write

articles that make a splash. It's the Alissa Rubins of the world who provide the *Times* with its reputation, and it's this reputation that provides the foundation for the paper's commercial success in an age of ubiquitous and addictive click-bait. So why is Alissa Rubin urged to regularly interrupt this necessarily deep work to provide, for free, shallow content to a service run by an unrelated media company based out of Silicon Valley? And perhaps even more important, why does this behavior seem so normal to most people? If we can answer these questions, we'll better understand the final trend I want to discuss relevant to the question of why

deep work has become so paradoxically rare.

A foundation for our answer can be found in a warning provided by the late communication theorist and New York University professor Neil Postman. Writing in the early 1990s, as the personal computer revolution first accelerated, Postman argued that our society was sliding into a troubling relationship with technology. We were, he noted, no longer discussing the trade-offs surrounding new technologies, balancing the new efficiencies against the new problems introduced. If it's high-tech, we began to instead assume, then it's good. Case closed.

He called such a culture a *technopoly*, and he didn't mince words in warning against it. "Technopoly eliminates alternatives to itself in precisely the way Aldous Huxley outlined in *Brave New World*," he argued in his 1993 book on the topic. "It does not make them illegal. It does not make them immoral. It does not even make them unpopular. It makes them invisible and therefore irrelevant."

Postman died in 2003, but if he were alive today he would likely express amazement about how quickly his fears from the 1990s came to fruition—a slide driven by the unforeseen and sudden rise of the Internet. Fortunately, Postman has



an intellectual heir to continue this argument in the Internet Age: the hypercitational social critic Evgeny Morozov. In his 2013 book, *To Save Everything, Click Here*, Morozov attempts to pull back the curtains on our technopolic obsession with “the Internet” (a term he purposefully places in scare quotes to emphasize its role as an ideology), saying: “It’s this propensity to view ‘the Internet’ as a source of wisdom and policy advice that transforms it from a fairly uninteresting set of cables and network routers into a seductive and exciting ideology—perhaps today’s uber-ideology.”

In Morozov’s critique, we’ve made

“the Internet” synonymous with the revolutionary future of business and government. To make your company more like “the Internet” is to be with the times, and to ignore these trends is to be the proverbial buggy-whip maker in an automotive age. We no longer see Internet tools as products released by for-profit companies, funded by investors hoping to make a return, and run by twentysomethings who are often making things up as they go along. We’re instead quick to idolize these digital doodads as a signifier of progress and a harbinger of a (dare I say, brave) new world.

This Internet-centrism (to steal

another Morozov term) is what technopoly looks like today. It's important that we recognize this reality because it explains the question that opened this section. The *New York Times* maintains a social media desk and pressures its writers, like Alissa Rubin, toward distracting behavior, because in an Internet-centric technopoly such behavior is not up for discussion. The alternative, to not embrace all things Internet, is, as Postman would say, "invisible and therefore irrelevant."

This invisibility explains the uproar, mentioned earlier, that arose when Jonathan Franzen dared suggest that novelists shouldn't tweet. It riled people

not because they're well versed in book marketing and disagreed with Franzen's conclusion, but because it surprised them that anyone serious would suggest the irrelevance of social media. In an Internet-centric technopoly such a statement is the equivalent of a flag burning—desecration, not debate.

Perhaps the near universal reach of this mind-set is best captured in an experience I had recently on my commute to the Georgetown campus where I work. Waiting for the light to change so I could cross Connecticut Avenue, I idled behind a truck from a refrigerated supply chain logistics company. Refrigerated shipping is a

complex, competitive business that requires equal skill managing trade unions and route scheduling. It's the ultimate old-school industry and in many ways is the opposite of the lean consumer-facing tech start-ups that currently receive so much attention. What struck me as I waited in traffic behind this truck, however, was not the complexity or scale of this company, but instead a graphic that had been commissioned and then affixed, probably at significant expense, on the back of this entire fleet of trucks—a graphic that read: “like us on Facebook.”

Deep work is at a severe

disadvantage in a technopoly because it builds on values like quality, craftsmanship, and mastery that are decidedly old-fashioned and nontechnological. Even worse, to support deep work often requires the rejection of much of what is new and high-tech. Deep work is exiled in favor of more distracting high-tech behaviors, like the professional use of social media, not because the former is empirically inferior to the latter. Indeed, if we had hard metrics relating the impact of these behaviors on the bottom line, our current technopoly would likely crumble. But the metric black hole prevents such clarity and allows us

instead to elevate all things Internet into Morozov's feared "uber-ideology." In such a culture, we should not be surprised that deep work struggles to compete against the shiny thrum of tweets, likes, tagged photos, walls, posts, and all the other behaviors that we're now taught are necessary for no other reason than that they exist.

## Bad for Business. Good for You.

Deep work *should* be a priority in today's business climate. But it's not. I've just summarized various

explanations for this paradox. Among them are the realities that deep work is hard and shallow work is easier, that in the absence of clear goals for your job, the visible busyness that surrounds shallow work becomes self-preserving, and that our culture has developed a belief that if a behavior relates to “the Internet,” then it’s good—regardless of its impact on our ability to produce valuable things. All of these trends are enabled by the difficulty of directly measuring the value of depth or the cost of ignoring it.

If you believe in the value of depth, this reality spells bad news for businesses in general, as it’s leading



them to miss out on potentially massive increases in their value production. But for *you*, as an individual, good news lurks. The myopia of your peers and employers uncovers a great personal advantage. Assuming the trends outlined here continue, depth will become increasingly rare and therefore increasingly valuable. Having just established that there's nothing fundamentally flawed about deep work and nothing fundamentally necessary about the distracting behaviors that displace it, you can therefore continue with confidence with the ultimate goal of this book: to systematically develop your personal ability to go deep—and by

doing so, reap great rewards.