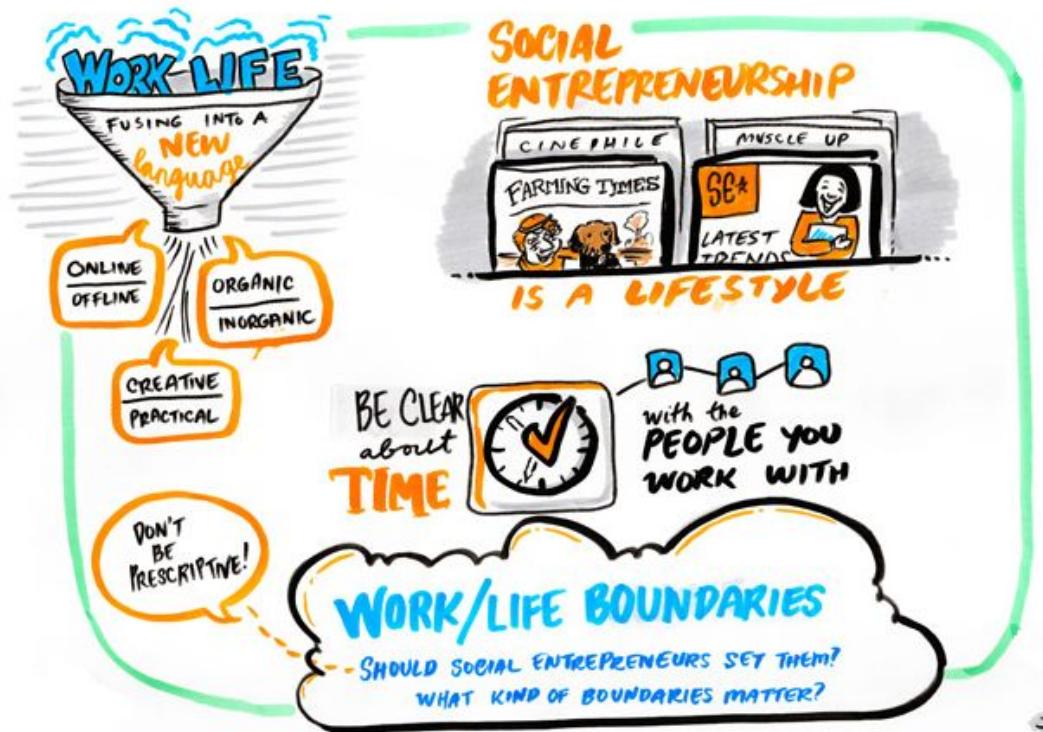


Work, Life, Social Enterprise: Where's the Boundary?



1. Summary

- **“Work, Life, Social Enterprise: Where’s the Boundary?”** on 25 January 2017 brought together social entrepreneurs, support organisations and academics to consider the implications of digital technologies for social entrepreneurs’ work-life boundaries. The aim was also to co-create potential solutions and ideas to share with the social enterprise community.
- The event was triggered by the **EPSRC Digital Brain Switch (DBS)** research project, co-curated by the Impact Hub Brixton and Royal Holloway University of London, and sponsored by the Health Foundry and the EPSRC Balance Network.
- **Prof Gillian Symon** (RHUL) provided an overview of the DBS research which highlights the paradox of social entrepreneur’s passion for their work which: encourages a holistic lifestyle but simultaneously can create feelings of overload; allows SEs to pursue their own work values but creates pressure to live a ‘perfect’ life; and is enabled by digital technologies but also sometimes overwhelmed by them.
- **Sinead Mac Manus** (Health Foundry; Impact Hub Brixton) outlined some of the lessons she has learned as a serial social entrepreneur such as differentiating between important and urgent work, setting deadlines and developing new habits.
- **Nikki Levitan** (Independent Consultant) drew on her experiences as a wellness coach in suggesting specific behavioural change activities such as self-compassion, active boundary management, habit audits and highlighting positive events in our lives.
- Attendees worked in groups to consider whether social entrepreneurs set boundaries between “work” and “life”, the role of technology in creating or undermining boundaries, ideas and tools for doing things differently, and what support social entrepreneurs need in this area.
- Two types of **Ideas for Action** were derived from the discussion:
 - ◆ **Individuals** It was recognised that any actions have to be pertinent and shaped for individual circumstances. Potential change activities/ behaviours include: undertaking a ‘habit audit’; organising work in terms of Most Important Tasks; considering different spaces/places of work to break routine; finding a support group to share experiences and engaging in peer learning; pursuing a ‘sane’ engagement with technology, including adopting useful digital tools
 - ◆ **Support Organizations** Funders, collective spaces and other support organizations could: demonstrate and embody best practices; design social enterprise spaces creatively to allow for wellness; provide back office support; create or facilitate support groups as ‘safe spaces’.
- Attendees were very positive about the event: they appreciated the opportunity to share with others, took away ideas and tools, and recognised a need to change some of their approaches to create work-life boundaries that work for them.

2. Background

Digital technologies and media such as smartphones and social networking sites can be very helpful to social entrepreneurs as they provide a low cost method of knowledge sharing, marketing and interacting with others. But how does this affect our work-life boundaries? Is always-on connectivity a good thing because it gives us freedom to work flexibly? Or does it cause problems because we never switch off?

'Work, Life, Social Enterprise: Where's the Boundary?' event brought together social entrepreneurs, support organisations and academics to consider the implications of digital technologies for social entrepreneurs' work-life boundaries. Taking place at the Health Foundry - a collaborative workspace for people using digital technologies to improve health and wellbeing - the event was co-curated by Impact Hub Brixton and Royal Holloway and partially supported by the EPSRC Balance Network. It was triggered by the EPSRC [Digital Brain Switch](#) research project which investigated work-life boundaries in the digital age and involved research teams from Royal Holloway, University of London, Lancaster University, Open University and the University of Kent.

The aim was to offer a space for participants to reflect on their experiences of work-life boundaries and to co-create potential solutions and ideas to share with the social enterprise community.

3. Provocations

"I was living in South Africa very happily. Now I run a social enterprise to tackle food waste. I've gone from a place with no tech to back in London and surrounded by tech, and noticed my anxiety levels have gone up, as have my depression levels. I want to try to understand it by finding some useful tools."
Dee, social entrepreneur

Gillian Symon, Professor of Organisation Studies, Royal Holloway, University of London

Gillian gave some background about the Digital Brain Switch research project as context for the event. Social entrepreneurs kept a video diary and filmed themselves when they 'switched' boundaries between different life roles, as well as taking part in an interview. Gillian presented some of the issues that emerged from this work.

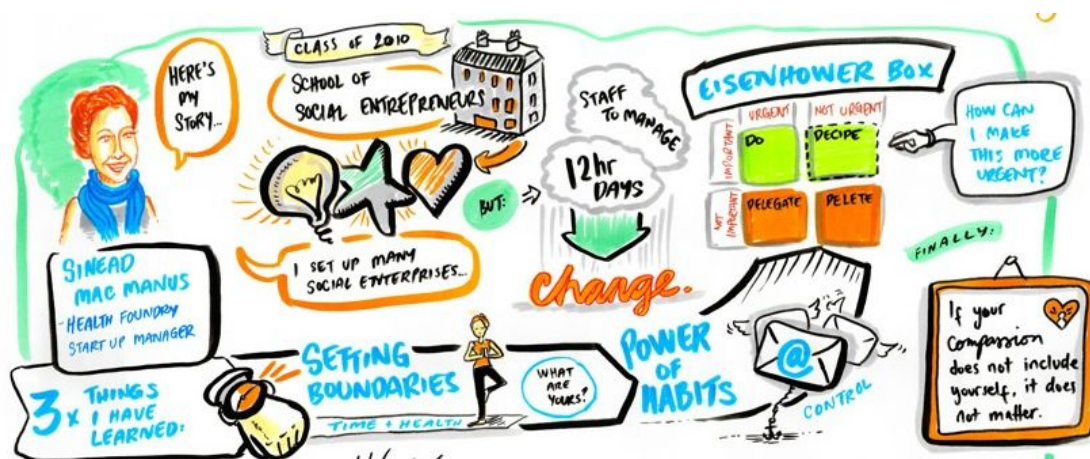


- The paradox of availability** Social entrepreneurs' passion and value for their work means having a "social life fused very much in with your work life" (Stephen). Many social entrepreneurs want this holistic lifestyle and social networking technology can support it. However, paradoxically, the lack of boundaries can also be problematic as constant availability can undermine that same passion.
- Feeling the pressure of achieving work-life balance** The concept of work-life balance is problematic - seemingly another thing that social entrepreneurs need to get right. This kind of pressure can lead to social entrepreneurs assuming that they have the personal responsibility to achieve a 'perfect' life.
- Observing ourselves and reflecting** The video diaries gave social entrepreneurs a chance to observe themselves. Mark noticed he kept switching between different email accounts and concluded this contributed to: "A sense of overwhelmedness, never really getting anything completely done because it just never ends." His self-observation upheld Cressida's conclusion that social entrepreneurs need "sane engagement with technology rather than insane engagement".

"How can social entrepreneurs develop "sane" engagement with technology?"

Sinead Mac Manus, Start-Up Manager at Health Foundry and Head of Business Development at Impact Hub Brixton

Sinead shared her story of being a serial social entrepreneur and some of the lessons she learned around managing her work-life boundaries.



- The difference between urgent and important work** Sinead shared The Eisenhower Matrix, which she has found useful. This productivity tool helps you decide on and prioritize tasks by urgency and importance, sorting out less urgent and important tasks which you should either delegate or not do at all.
- Setting deadlines** One of the issues with being a social entrepreneur, like any self-employed person, is that there is no-one to manage your time, you have to do it yourself. One strategy Sinead uses is setting artificial boundaries for herself, such as

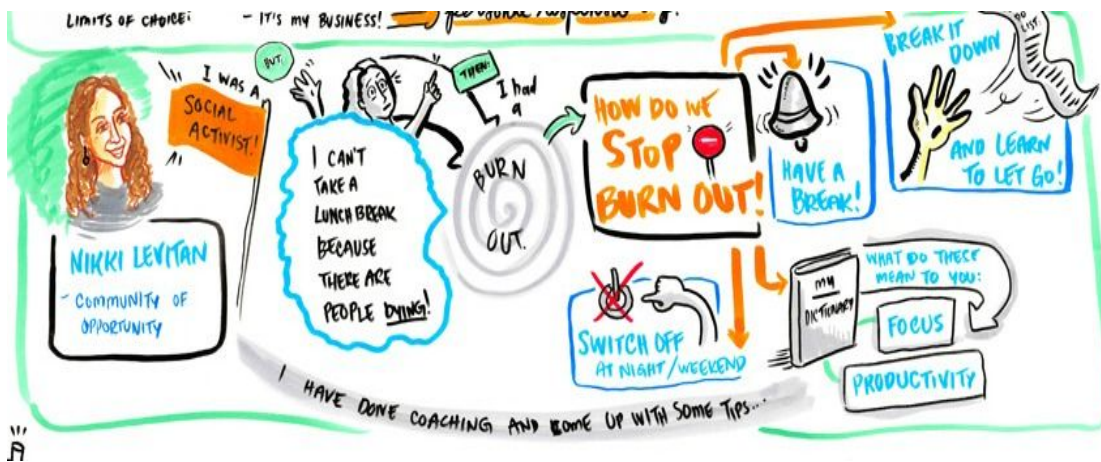
finishing a funding application before lunch or meeting a friend for a coffee after work, which she feels means she works more effectively.

- **The power of habits** We can cultivate good habits and practices that help rather than hinder our workflow. New habits that Sinead shared with us was not looking at email on her phone or at all on weekends, creating space first thing in the morning to stop and plan her day rather than jumping straight in, and designating set times for social media rather than being online all the time.

“What habits have you developed and how can you manage your work effectively?”

Nikki Levitan is an Empowerment Coach and Wellness at Work expert.

Nikki shared a personal story of her own journey as a social entrepreneur starting with being an activist working in the UK on the Darfur humanitarian crisis. After months of working 12 hour days, she suffered burnout and depression. She shared what she has learnt from coaching others.



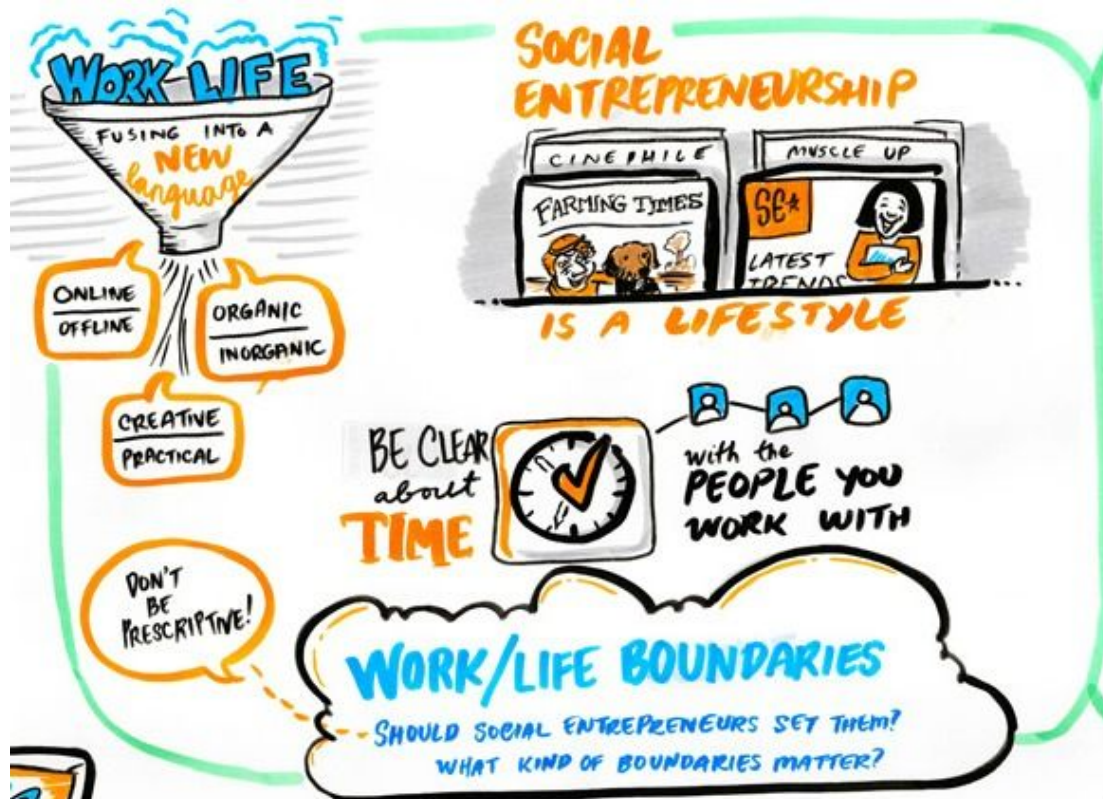
- **Compassion** *“If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.”* Jack Kornfield. There is a lot of pressure on social entrepreneurs to be seen to be succeeding all the time. How can we be more compassionate to ourselves and to others and say when things aren't going great?
- **Managing boundaries** Each morning Nikki has a 'meeting with herself' and completes a sheet that designates time for her to spend on herself and makes time for things that aren't work.
- **Auditing habits** Nikki regularly undertakes what she calls a 'habit audit' - a simple sheet of paper with two columns - Nourishing and Depleting – which helps her keep track of valued and unhelpful habits.
- **Noticing positives** Nikki emphasised that we should take more notice of the things that go well in our work lives. Nikki uses an app called Gratitude Garden which encourages her to regularly note down three good things that have happened over the past 24 hours.

“How can social entrepreneurs see each other as peers to help rather than as competition?”

4. The Big Questions

We broke into groups to explore some of the big questions around work-life boundaries triggered by the previous talks and to work on potential solutions.

Should social entrepreneurs set boundaries between “work” and “life”?

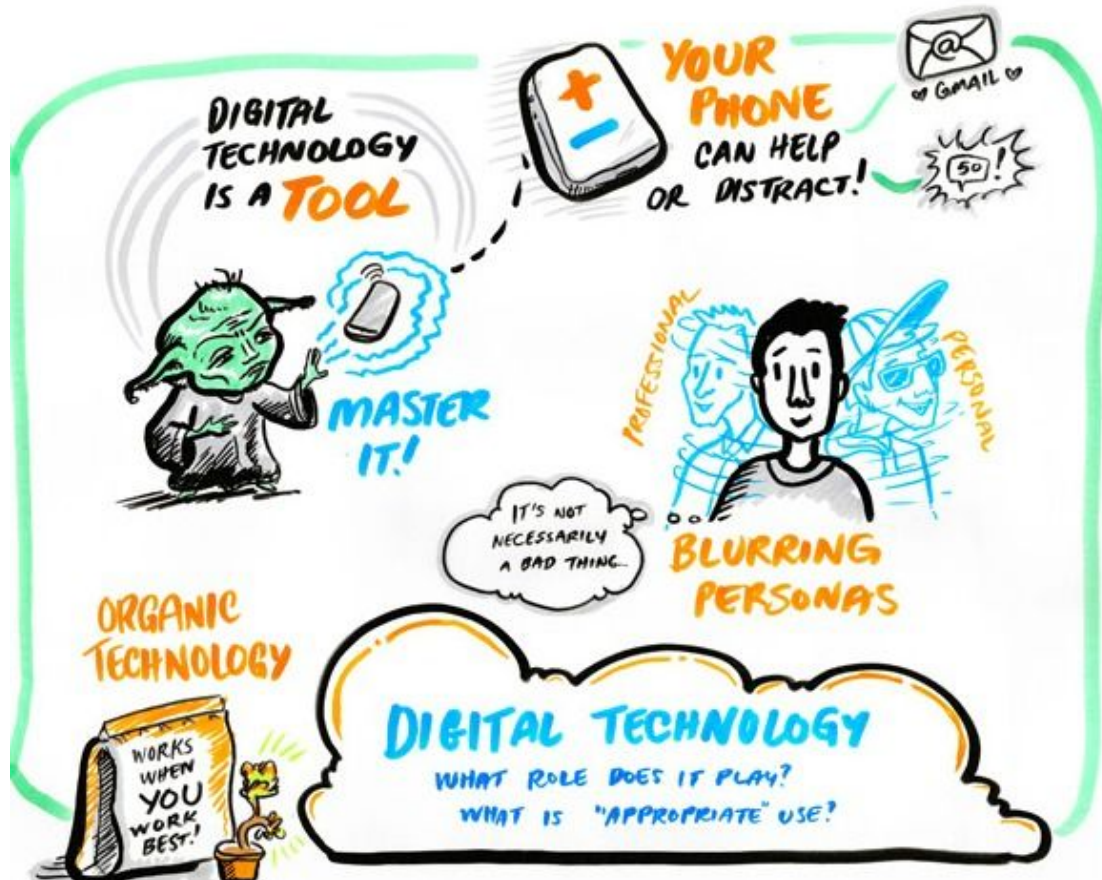


Emerging themes

“Boundaries are difficult as an social entrepreneur as you live and breathe your work”.

- **A desire to change:** social entrepreneurs wanted to manage their work better but felt a challenge in separating their work and their life and on focussing on their important work.
- **Constant availability:** social entrepreneurs felt that there was an expectancy to answer people instantly with digital technologies and to be constantly ‘on’. There was also a pressure to be in the know and be ‘out there’ on the social enterprise scene which takes time.
- **Loneliness:** many social entrepreneurs work in isolation. Having a community to connect with and provide a sounding board is crucial to their mental wellbeing.
- **Individualised change:** there is an implied assumption that work=stress and life=fun but for social entrepreneurs it’s not as black and white as that. We need to figure out what works for the individual rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

What role does digital technology play in creating or undermining work-life boundaries for you?



Emerging themes

"Master digital rather than let it master you!"

- **Working organically:** digital technologies have allowed social entrepreneurs to be more flexible about where and when they work. Working organically and figuring out what's the best time of the day to get focussed work done was seen as a benefit.
- **Awareness of our working habits on others:** many social entrepreneurs liked to work in the evenings. However, we need to be mindful of the impression or pressure this can create in others eg sending an email at 4am.
- **Using digital as a tool:** there was lots of great advice shared on how social entrepreneurs use different digital tools to manage their time better. For example, using tools like Boomerang App to schedule emails to return to your inbox at a better date.
- **Organic working and negotiating hours:** many social entrepreneurs are self employed and don't work set hours, preferring to work when they are most productive. Digital technologies can support this flexible working. However, friends and family can be confused about our working patterns and put us under pressure to conform. Consequently, some created set work hours for themselves (gave themselves a 'job') to separate work and life.

What could you be doing differently in relation to your working patterns and what support would help with this?

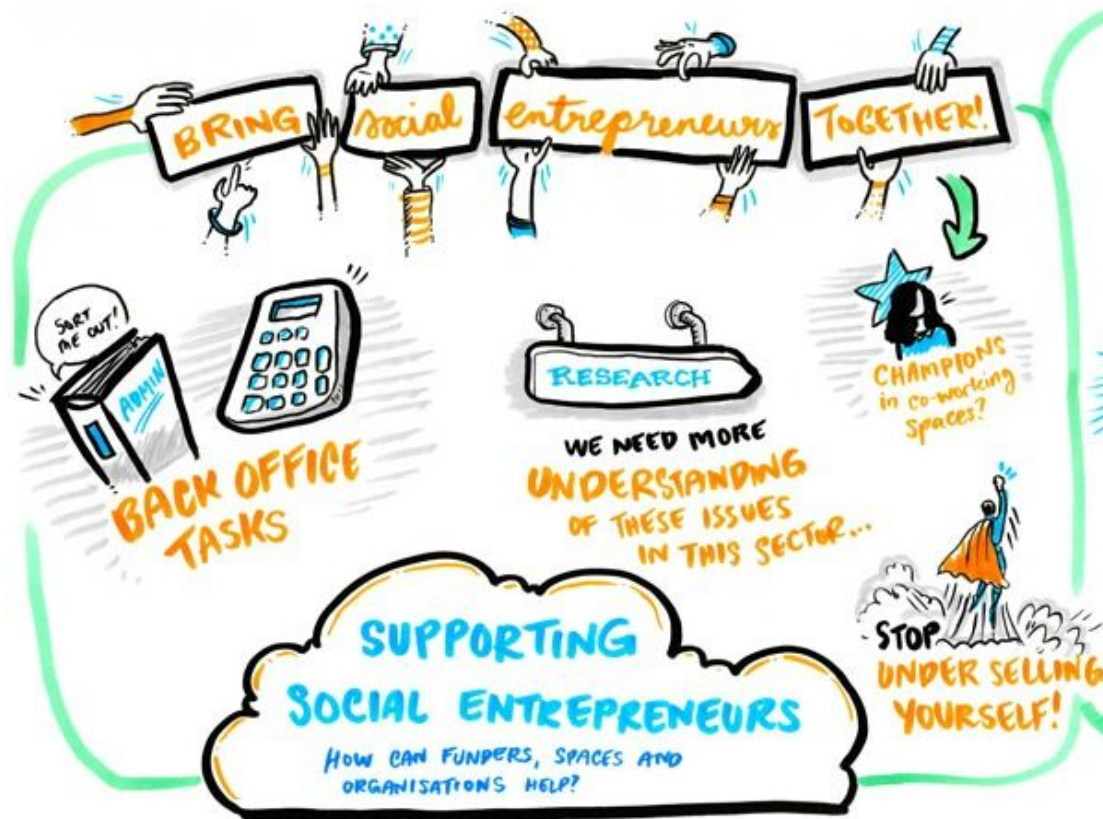


Emerging themes

"Not be 'swayed' by others' patterns and have the courage to develop what works for me".

- **Developing better communication methods:** communicating with others is time intensive, albeit important. Finding effective ways to communicate via email, social media and in person can help in managing workload.
- **Getting help:** we can't do it all alone. Asking for and getting help, including delegating to family, volunteers or employees is key.
- **Make yourself a "learning organisation":** a learning organisation is a company that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself. Social entrepreneurs could see themselves as learning organisations - a place for experimenting, learning and evolving rather than a perfectly formed entity.
- **Peer learning:** get tips about how to manage workflow from peers / other social entrepreneurs but orient these to your own needs.
- **Change your space:** we can get stuck in patterns of behaviour by being in the same place and space all the time. Try out new spaces/places to work from.
- **Conduct an annual review with yourself:** employees usually have annual reviews - a chance to stop and reflect on the previous year and plan goals for the coming year. Make the time to conduct a review with yourself.

How can funders / spaces / support organisations better support social entrepreneurs with achieving their preferred ways of working?



Emerging themes

"Support social entrepreneurs to step back without feeling failures".

- **Demonstrating best practice:** funders and support organisations could share examples of good practice and different models of working.
- **'Awareness' spaces/times:** sharing can help social entrepreneurs reflect on their working patterns, and this could be made routine e.g. Impact Hub Islington have a 4pm bell when members are invited to get up from their desks and share how they are doing.
- **Make work-life balance normal:** social entrepreneurs and funders should be able to have honest conversations about work-life balance as part of any funding application process and engagement.
- **Back office support:** fund / organise shared back office support to free up social entrepreneurs' time.
- **Support groups as 'safe spaces':** support groups such as Freelancer's Anonymous at Impact Hub Brixton or the Wellbeing Group at Impact Hub Islington are important as places where it is okay to express negative experiences. Funders and others should encourage such groups to form or instigate them themselves.
- **Design of spaces:** spaces should be designed with reflection, mindfulness and awareness in mind. For example, spaces should not just provide desks or tables for working but soft spaces to relax in and spaces to read and contemplate.

5. Some Ideas for Action

Individuals

Find out what works for you

Some ideas for change are noted below, as they emerged from the day's discussion. It is important that we own the changes we make so experiment but only adopt practices that fulfil your needs and requirements and don't feel pressurised into making changes. Bear in mind also the impact your working patterns have on others in your life and remember you may have to negotiate new practices.

To instigate change in your working practices, undertake a 'Habit Audit'

On a sheet of paper make two columns with 'energising' and 'depleting' at the top. Go about your normal day, but perform an audit on yourself. Every 30 minutes stop and write down what you have done. This will help you realise what you are doing that energises you, and what drains you. Try replacing one depleting habit from your list with an energising one. Try one new thing at a time and give it some time to work.

→ *To shake up your routines, consider different places and space of work*

Self-employment can be lonely; consider working in shared spaces or team up with similar social entrepreneurs in a cooperative rather than competitive relationship. Different places may suit different kinds of work for you, experiment to find what works.

To pursue 'organic working', start with your Most Important Tasks (MITs)

Most Important Tasks (MITs) are the tasks you most want or need to get done today. Spend a few minutes each morning or the night before, deciding on no more than three MITs — the three things that if you accomplish today you will feel that this was a productive day. Get at least one MIT out of the way before you get stuck in to reactive work such as emailing.

To share experiences in a safe space, find a support group

Find like minded people or peers and create a support group (or join an existing one - see the Resources section for ideas). Use the group to share challenges and solve them together. Recognising others struggle with similar issues will help avoid self-blame.

→ *To master the digital, pursue a 'sane' engagement with technology.*

Audit your current use of digital technologies, decide what is helpful and what is merely over-loading and think about how you can make changes to get the best out of these support tools. Ask for recommendations from others of digital tools that will help you in achieving your own goals.

Support Organisations

Demonstrate best practice

Funders, spaces and support organisations could help by sharing examples of good practice and different models of working with the social entrepreneurs they work with. Social entrepreneurs and funders should be able to have honest conversations about work-life balance and self-care as part of any funding application process and engagement.

→ *Ensure social enterprise spaces are accessible*

Social enterprise spaces like the Impact Hubs can provide alternative spaces of work and reduce loneliness in social entrepreneurs. Spaces can help by offering and maintaining affordable workspace tariffs to social entrepreneurs and access to free spaces where possible (for example through [Open Project Night](#) at Impact Hub Brixton).

Design social enterprise spaces creatively

Spaces like Impact Hub Brixton can help social entrepreneurs by the design and operation of their space. Research suggests that creating collisions—chance encounters and unplanned interactions, both inside and outside the organization—improves performance. These interactions can be ‘designed’ in by creating physical spaces for collaboration, social spaces for mixing and diverse programming. Coworking spaces should be designed not just to support work but also reflection, relaxation and interaction.

Create or facilitate support groups

The importance of support groups was a recurring theme at the event. Funders and spaces should encourage such groups to form or instigate them themselves as a ‘safe space’ for social entrepreneurs to share challenges and problem solve.

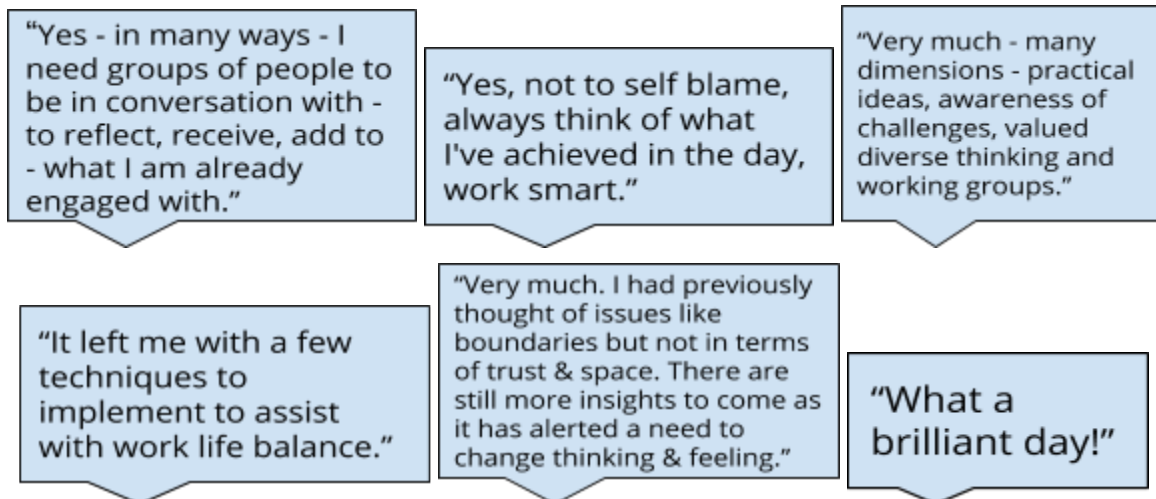
Provide shared back-office support

Support organizations, shared working spaces and funders could consider providing access to shared back-office support services (e.g. financial, marketing) to provide expertise and free up time for social entrepreneurs to focus on their work and reduce their workload.

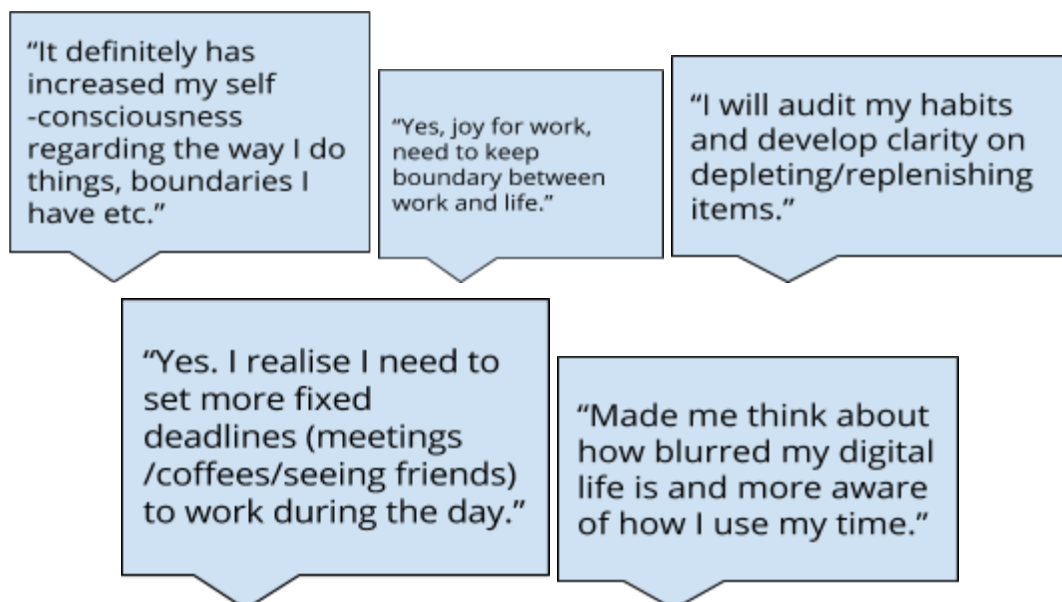
6. Feedback

We asked attendees two questions at the end of the event to get their feedback. Here's a handful of the responses.

Has the event influenced your thinking, or increased your awareness or knowledge in any way? If so, how?



Will the event affect how you do things? This might relate to your professional practice, or to life outside. If so, what may you do differently?



Please note: The illustrations in this report are by Laura Sorvala from [Auralab](#), created during live graphic recording on the day.

7. Resources and Further Reading

→ Support Groups

[Impact Hub Brixton: Freelancers Anonymous](#)

Impact Hub Brixton have a group for solo entrepreneurs every Monday at 9.30am to share what they are working on and get support from peers.

[Impact Hub Islington: Mindful Mondays](#)

Impact Hub Islington have two weekly events that provide support groups for members. Mindful Mondays with Zen at Work takes place 12.30pm to 1.30pm and starts with stretching and meditation before ending with a BYO lunch and supportive chat. Sexy Salad is a weekly potluck-style lunch and a great way to meet people and take a break from work. Every Thursday at 12.30pm.

[Impact Hub King's Cross: Peer to Peer Support Group](#)

Impact Hub King's Cross have a peer to peer support group every Tuesday at 1pm for members to share their work challenges.

→ Apps and tools referred to during the day

[Gratitude Garden](#)

[Headspace Meditation App](#)

[Online timer apps](#)

[Boomerang for Gmail](#)

→ Articles referred to by Sinead and Nikki

[Mindtools: The Urgent/Important Matrix](#)

[Zenhabits: Purpose Your Day: Most Important Task \(MIT\)](#)

→ Video from our event

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTknHs0FEik&feature=youtu.be>

