BUSINESS NEWS LESSONS

onestopenglish

Life with digital calendars

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions.

1. Do you use a digital calendar for your work schedule, personal schedule or both? If so, which calendar do you use?

2. If your company uses a digital calendar, is it open and shared with everyone, or private so that only you can see it?

2 Key words

a. Choose the key words that match the definitions. The paragraph numbers are in brackets to help you find the words quickly. Check your answers and your understanding of how the words are used by using the same word to complete the example sentence immediately after each definition. Use a capital letter where necessary. Then read the complete article to see how each of the words is used in context.

convener (2)	agentic (11)	etiquette (9)	tyrannical (1)
phishing (2)	haggling (14)	afforded (6)	
rectify (5)	warranted (6)	intrusive (4)	

1. when criminals send fake emails or websites to make people give personal information

   _____

   Cyber criminals steal millions of dollars by _____.

2. controlling everything, as a dictator does _____

   _____ *leaders don't allow criticism of themselves or their actions.*

3. the rules of polite behavior in society or business _____

   The _____ of business meetings varies in different cultures and types of business.

4. a person who requests or organises a meeting _____

   The _____ scheduled the meeting at a time when I couldn't attend.

5. justified something _____

   I think that employee's actions _____ a strong response from management.

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6. with the ability to act independently and make decisions _____

_____ AI bots can save you time by managing your schedule.

7. given something or allowed to do something _____

My new job _____ me the opportunity to travel.

8. to correct a situation or correct a problem _____

Hiring more people will _____ our problems with production deadlines.

9. accessing a person's private actions or information _____

Some people think giving their bosses access to their personal calendars is

_____.

10. negotiating a price or the terms of an agreement _____

We spent months _____ over the terms of the contract before we reached an agreement.

Intermediate

The tyranny of the digital calendar

AS WORKERS STRUGGLE WITH COMPLICATED SHARED SCHEDULES, TECH COMPANIES SAY THEY CAN HELP

BY EMMA JACOBS

1 At this time of year, juggling social drinks, work parties and pre-Christmas deadlines, while also scheduling when to pick up the turkey and host relatives, the electronic calendar can feel tyrannical rather than helpful.

2 I hate mine so much, I am considering returning to a paper diary next year. This is not a humble brag about being busy, but a whinge about overcomplicated scheduling. Most of us recognise the email back-and-forth, flipping between apps to hold multiple times in diaries, or discovering a meeting convener in a different timezone has reserved 30 minutes to chat when you should be tucked up in bed. One San Francisco-based executive I know repeatedly sent me a bunch of dates via Calendly, all for 10pm. I blocked him. At least I have not fallen victim (yet) to scammers adding phishing links to my diary.

3 The digital calendar has become a staple of office life, with companies such as Google as well as newer, smaller tools like Motion and Reclaim offering to streamline and optimise scheduling. These ubiquitous shared calendars have brought some interesting dynamics to the surface.

4 When teams have access to each other's schedules, it can help protect time or it can become intrusive, as one man revealed on social media. He discovered his calendar was not private after his boss asked if they could "do the product intro" on Friday — at a time the busy employee had blocked out to "get a chicken".

5 Patrick Lightbody is attempting to rectify some of these problems with Reclaim.ai, the artificial intelligence app he co-founded that promises to schedule work, meetings and life. He says shared electronic calendars have historically suffered from a lack of nuance, unable to denote whether an appointment is open to negotiation.

6 Social dynamics — and tensions — inevitably come into play. Vanessa Ciccone, a social scientist at the London School of Economics and Political Science, studied an organisation that set employees' default calendars to "open", giving them the option to make them private. "People were largely willing to accept that senior-level workers had things to do that warranted calendar privacy, whereas non-senior-level workers were not afforded this same level of understanding." Junior workers opting to keep their calendars hidden were described as "secretive", with suspicions that they were hiding something.

7 Open calendars can help with logistics if, for example, only two people are booked to use a giant boardroom that could be repurposed for a larger meeting, notes Ciccone. The flipside is surveillance, with managers monitoring their teams' time.

8 There can be other outcomes from such transparency. One man used colleagues' schedules like Instagram, scrolling "through people's calendars as a person might scroll through a social media website", says Ciccone. "He also felt exclusion at times due to this scrolling, where he would occasionally find a meeting or an after-work drinks event that he wasn't invited to."

9 Then there's the etiquette. Julian Givi, associate professor of marketing at West Virginia University, found that a "maybe" response to diary invitations was seen as kinder, by those RSVPing, than a hard "no"; it was, in reality, far more annoying, making it harder to plan a party or arrange a meeting. "While a 'maybe' leaves you with flexibility, it's not really good for those who invited you," says Givi. "They might be left feeling disrespected that you left them in limbo."

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10 While my instinct is to return to paper-based diaries, efforts by tech enthusiasts to solve such problems look promising. Already, Google's Gemini is proving useful to me by entering suggested meeting times in my electronic calendar based on discussions in email exchanges.

11 "Right now, your calendar is a passive tool that lets others claim your time," says Louise Ballard, co-founder of Atheni, an AI-powered coach that helps users navigate agentic tools. "Soon, AI agents will actively defend it, learning when you do your best thinking, blocking out focus time, even negotiating meeting slots on your behalf. I'm certainly going to train my agent to protect the hours I need to get stuff done."

12 She says the time drag of negotiating scheduling with others could be fixed by an agent, for example by setting a future date to meet in response to a discussion over Zoom. "Tools like Motion are already doing this — automatically rescheduling your day when plans change and protecting deep work time. We tried it last year, and it wasn't brilliant, but things are moving at breakneck speed."

13 Lightbody says AI's ability to work beyond the simple binary between busy or free will be transformative. "You'll actually have more of a conversational state with someone's personal assistant, a digital personal assistant."

14 The future, says Ballard, will be "two agents haggling over diary slots while you get on with actual work. Liberating or terrifying, depending on your outlook."

FT

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Intermediate

3 Understanding the article

a. Choose the correct option to complete each sentence according to the information in the article.

1. Digital calendars are a 'staple of life' in many offices because they …

   a. make scheduling easier and faster.

   b. allow employees to see each other's personal schedules.

2. When workers can see each other's schedules, it can help save time, but it can also …

   a. cause scheduling conflicts.

   b. invade people's privacy.

3. Most people think that employees should have access to the schedules of …

   a. other employees only.

   b. other employees and their superiors.

4. Some employees worry that shared calendars will be used to …

   a. manage logistics.

   b. monitor what employees do with their time.

5. If an employee is not going to go to an office social event, it is more respectful to RSVP …

   a. maybe.

   b. no.

6. Soon, AI agents will be able to …

   a. cancel meetings.

   b. negotiate times for meetings.

7. In the future, … will negotiate times for meetings.

   a. two AI agents

   b. an employee and an AI agent

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4 Business language – scheduling and office dynamics

a. Complete the sentences with the phrases in the box.

deep work time	default calendar	blocked out time
time drag	juggling deadlines	streamline scheduling

1. I usually have several different projects at the same time, so _____ to get everything done on time is sometimes difficult.

2. Meetings can be a(n) _____ if they are not planned and managed well.

3. I don't check email or allow interruptions during my _____ so that I can concentrate on the work I'm doing.

4. We use electronic calendars at work to help us _____ and avoid time conflicts.

5. When I worked at a big company, I usually _____ every day to check and answer emails rather than constantly interrupting my other work to do it.

6. Our company uses a(n) _____ so that all employees can automatically see each other's schedules.

b. Complete the sentences from the article with phrases from the previous activity. When you have finished, scan the article to check your answers.

1. She says the _____ of negotiating scheduling with others could be fixed by an agent, for example by setting a future date to meet in response to a discussion over Zoom. "Tools like Motion are already doing this — automatically rescheduling your day when plans change and protecting _____.

2. Vanessa Ciccone, a social scientist at the London School of Economics and Political Science, studied an organisation that set employees' _____ to "open", giving them the option to make them private.

3. At this time of year, _____ social drinks, work parties and pre-Christmas _____, while also scheduling when to pick up the turkey and host relatives, the electronic calendar can feel tyrannical rather than helpful.

Intermediate

4. He discovered his calendar was not private after his boss asked if they could "do the product intro" on Friday — at a time the busy employee had _____ to "get a chicken".

5. The digital calendar has become a staple of office life, with companies such as Google as well as newer, smaller tools like Motion and Reclaim offering to _____ and optimise _____.

5 Discussion

a. **Discuss these questions.**

1. According to the article, what are some advantages and disadvantages of shared calendars?

2. Do you prefer to use a paper diary or an electronic calendar? Why?

3. Do you think employees should be able to see their colleagues' calendars? Why or why not?

4. Would you use an AI assistant to help you schedule your time? Why or why not?

6 Wider business theme – AI in business

a. **Look at some of the pros and cons of AI in the business world. Then think about your answers to the questions below.**

Positive uses and effects of AI in business:

• AI can process data and do other tasks very quickly, which saves time and money.

• AI can work all the time, which humans cannot do. This means that it can do more work than humans and can provide customer service to all time zones.

• It can easily identify patterns and trends in the economy and in consumer habits, which makes it easier and faster for companies to make decisions.

• It can do routine tasks like scheduling or data entry, which gives employees more time for creativity and strategic planning.

• It can process data or do mechanical tasks with far fewer errors than humans make.

Negative uses and effects of AI in business:

• AI is replacing many human workers, especially in jobs related to manufacturing and data processing.

• AI systems and the training to use them are very expensive, so most small or medium-sized businesses can't afford them.

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- AI cannot judge certain situations like humans can, so it may sometimes make bad decisions.

- Because AI systems collect all kinds of data, there is a danger that criminals could access personal details, bank accounts and other private information.

- If there is too much dependence on technology, nothing will be able to function if there is a problem with electricity or an AI system. Many people also worry that we will lose the ability to think critically if we depend on technology to think for us.

1. In what ways is AI used (or will be used) in your professional field?

2. What are, or will be, some of the effects of AI on your field? On you personally? Are there more positive or more negative effects?

3. Do you think that, in general, AI is more positive or more negative for business? For workers?

b. **Discuss your ideas in groups.**

Useful language

AI can be used effectively to …

Sometimes AI is used unethically. For example, …

I think that, in general, AI is a positive / negative development because …