Time management

Time management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity.

It is a meta-activity with the goal to maximize the overall benefit of a set of other activities within the boundary condition of a limited amount of time.

Time management may be aided by a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects, and goals complying with a due date. Initially, time management referred to just business or work activities, but eventually the term broadened to include personal activities as well. A time management system is a designed combination of processes, tools, techniques, and methods. Time management is usually a necessity in any project development as it determines the project completion time and scope.

The major themes arising from the literature on time management include the following:

- Creating an environment conducive to effectiveness

- Setting of priorities

- Carrying out activity around those priorities

- The related process of reduction of time spent on non-priorities

- Incentives to modify behavior to ensure compliance with time-related deadlines.

Time management has been considered to be a subset of different concepts such as:

- Project management: Time Management can be considered to be a project management subset and is more commonly known as project planning and project scheduling. Time Management has also been identified as one of the core functions identified in project management.[1]

- Attention management: Attention Management relates to the management of cognitive resources, and in particular the time that humans allocate their mind (and organize the minds of their employees) to conduct some activities.

1 Creating an effective environment

Some time-management literature stresses tasks related to the creation of an environment conducive to "real" effectiveness. These strategies include principles such as:

- "get organized" - the triage of paperwork and of tasks

- "protecting one's time" by insulation, isolation and delegation

- "achievement through goal-management and through goal-focus" - motivational emphasis

- "recovering from bad time-habits" - recovery from underlying psychological problems, e.g. procrastination

Writers on creating an environment for effectiveness refer to such matters as having a tidy office or home for unleashing creativity, and the need to protect "prime time". Literature also focuses on overcoming chronic psychological issues such as procrastination.

Excessive and chronic inability to manage time effectively may result from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Diagnostic criteria include a sense of underachievement, difficulty getting organized, trouble getting started, many projects going simultaneously and trouble with follow-through.[2] Some authors focus on the prefrontal cortex which is the most recently evolved part of the brain. It controls the functions of attention-span, impulse-control, organization, learning from experience and self-monitoring, among others. Some authors argue that changing the way the prefrontal cortex works is possible and offer a solution.[3]

2 Setting priorities and goals

Time management strategies are often associated with the recommendation to set personal goals. The literature stresses themes such as -

- "Work in Priority Order" - set goals and prioritize

- "Set gravitational goals" - that attract actions automatically

These goals are recorded and may be broken down into a project, an action plan, or a simple task list. For individual tasks or for goals, an importance rating may be established, deadlines may be set, and priorities assigned. This process results in a plan with a task list or a schedule or calendar of activities. Authors may recommend a daily, weekly, monthly or other planning periods associated with different scope of planning or review. This is done in various ways, as follows.

2.1   ABC analysis

A technique that has been used in business management for a long time is the categorization of large data into groups. These groups are often marked A, B, and C—hence the name. Activities are ranked by these general criteria:

- **A** – Tasks that are perceived as being urgent and important,

- **B** – Tasks that are important but not urgent,

- **C** – Tasks that are unimportant. (whether urgent or not)

Each group is then rank-ordered by priority. To further refine the prioritization, some individuals choose to then force-rank all "B" items as either "A" or "C". ABC analysis can incorporate more than three groups.[4]

ABC analysis is frequently combined with Pareto analysis.

2.2   Pareto analysis

This is the idea 80% of tasks can be completed in 20% of the disposable time. The remaining 20% of tasks will take up 80% of the time. This principle is used to sort tasks into two parts. According to this form of Pareto analysis it is recommended that tasks that fall into the first category be assigned a higher priority.

The 80-20-rule can also be applied to increase productivity: it is assumed that 80% of the productivity can be achieved by doing 20% of the tasks. Similarly, 80% of results can be attributed to 20% of activity.[5] If productivity is the aim of time management, then these tasks should be prioritized higher.[6]

It depends on the method adopted to complete the task. There is always a simpler and easier way to complete the task. If one uses a complex way, it will be time consuming. So, one should always try to find out alternative ways to complete each task.

2.3   The Eisenhower Method

A basic "Eisenhower box" to help evaluate urgency and importance. Items may be placed at more precise points within each quadrant.

The "Eisenhower Method" stems from a quote attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower: "I have two kinds of problems, the urgent and the important. The urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent."[7][8]

Using the Eisenhower Decision Principle, tasks are evaluated using the criteria important/unimportant and urgent/not urgent,[9][10] and then placed in according quadrants in an Eisenhower Matrix (also known as an "Eisenhower Box" or "Eisenhower Decision Matrix"[11]). Tasks are then handled thus: those in...

1. Important/Urgent quadrants are done immediately and personally[12] (e.g., crises, deadlines, problems[11])

2. Important/Not Urgent quadrants get an end date and are done personally[12] (e.g.,. relationships, planning, recreation[11])

3. Unimportant/Urgent quadrants are delegated[12] (e.g., interruptions, meetings, activities[11])

4. Unimportant/Not Urgent quadrants are dropped[12] (e.g., time wasters, pleasant activities, trivia[11])

This method is said to have been used by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower[12]

2.4   Domino Reaction method

This is the idea that there are actions that you invest in once and which produce over time in different channels.

Writing a book is such an action, because it requires a one-time effort, and once you finish it, it continues serving you.[13]

2.5 POSEC method

POSEC is an acronym for ***Prioritize by Organizing, Streamlining, Economizing and Contributing***. The method dictates a template which emphasizes an average individual's immediate sense of emotional and monetary security. It suggests that by attending to one's personal responsibilities first, an individual is better positioned to shoulder collective responsibilities.

Inherent in the acronym is a hierarchy of self-realization, which mirrors Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

1. **P**rioritize - Your time and define your life by goals.

2. **O**rganize - Things you have to accomplish regularly to be successful (family and finances).

3. **S**treamline - Things you may not like to do, but must do (work and chores).

4. **E**conomize - Things you should do or may even like to do, but they're not pressingly urgent (pastimes and socializing).

5. **C**ontribute - By paying attention to the few remaining things that make a difference (social obligations).

2.6 Implementation of goals

A to-do form tattooed *into a person's arm, with some items already written out with a black pen.*

There are also time management approaches that emphasise the need for more focused and simple implementation, including the approach of "Going with the Flow" - natural rhythms, Eastern philosophy. More unconventional time usage techniques, such as those discussed in

Where Did Time Fly, include concepts that can be paraphrased as "Less is More", which de-emphasizes the importance of squeezing every minute of one's time, as suggested in traditional time management schemes.[14]

A **task list** (also *to-do list* or *things-to-do*) is a list of tasks to be completed, such as chores or steps toward completing a project. It is an inventory tool which serves as an alternative or supplement to memory.

Task lists are used in self-management, grocery lists, business management, project management, and software development. It may involve more than one list.

When one of the items on a task list is accomplished, the task is checked or crossed off. The traditional method is to write these on a piece of paper with a pen or pencil, usually on a note pad or clip-board. Task lists can also have the form of paper or software checklists.

Writer Julie Morgenstern suggests "do's and don'ts" of time management that include:

- Map out everything that is important, by making a task list

- Create "an oasis of time" for one to control

- Say "No"

- Set priorities

- Don't drop everything

- Don't think a critical task will get done in one's spare time.[15]

Numerous digital equivalents are now available, including Personal information management (PIM) applications and most PDAs. There are also several web-based task list applications, many of which are free.

2.7 Task list organization

Task lists are often tiered. The simplest tiered system includes a general to-do list (or task-holding file) to record all the tasks the person needs to accomplish, and a daily to-do list which is created each day by transferring tasks from the general to-do list.[15]

Task lists are often prioritized:

- A daily list of things to do, numbered in the order of their importance, and done in that order one at a time until daily time allows, is attributed to consultant Ivy Lee (1877-1934) as the most profitable advice received by Charles M. Schwab (1862-1939), president of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.[16][17][18]

- An early advocate of "ABC" prioritization was Alan Lakein, in 1973. In his system "A" items were the

most important ("A-1" the most important within that group), "B" next most important, "C" least important.[4]

- A particular method of applying the *ABC method*[19] assigns "A" to tasks to be done within a day, "B" a week, and "C" a month.

- To prioritize a daily task list, one either records the tasks in the order of highest priority, or assigns them a number after they are listed ("1" for highest priority, "2" for second highest priority, etc.) which indicates in which order to execute the tasks. The latter method is generally faster, allowing the tasks to be recorded more quickly.[15]

- Another way of prioritizing compulsory tasks (group A) is to put the most unpleasant one first. When it's done, the rest of the list feels easier. Groups B and C can benefit from the same idea, but instead of doing the first task (which is the most unpleasant) right away, it gives motivation to do other tasks from the list to avoid the first one.

- A completely different approach which argues *against* prioritising altogether was put forward by British author Mark Forster in his book "Do It Tomorrow and Other Secrets of Time Management". This is based on the idea of operating "closed" to-do lists, instead of the traditional "open" to-do list. He argues that the traditional never-ending to-do lists virtually guarantees that some of your work will be left undone. This approach advocates getting all your work done, every day, and if you are unable to achieve it helps you diagnose where you are going wrong and what needs to change.[20]

Various writers have stressed potential difficulties with to-do lists such as the following:

- Management of the list can take over from implementing it. This could be caused by procrastination by prolonging the planning activity. This is akin to analysis paralysis. As with any activity, there's a point of diminishing returns.

- Some level of detail must be taken for granted for a task system to work. Rather than put "clean the kitchen", "clean the bedroom", and "clean the bathroom", it is more efficient to put "housekeeping" and save time spent writing and reduce the system's administrative load (each task entered into the system generates a cost in time and effort to manage it, aside from the execution of the task). The risk of consolidating tasks, however, is that "housekeeping" in this example may prove overwhelming or nebulously defined, which will either increase the risk of procrastination, or a mismanaged project.

- Listing routine tasks wastes time. If you are in the habit of brushing your teeth every day, then there is no reason to put it down on the task list. The same goes for getting out of bed, fixing meals, etc. If you need to track routine tasks, then a standard list or chart may be useful, to avoid the procedure of manually listing these items over and over.

- To remain flexible, a task system must allow for disaster. A company must be ready for a disaster. Even if it is a small disaster, if no one made time for this situation, it can metastasize, potentially causing damage to the company .[21]

- To avoid getting stuck in a wasteful pattern, the task system should also include regular (monthly, semi-annual, and annual) planning and system-evaluation sessions, to weed out inefficiencies and ensure the user is headed in the direction he or she truly desires.[22]

- If some time is not regularly spent on achieving long-range goals, the individual may get stuck in a perpetual holding pattern on short-term plans, like staying at a particular job much longer than originally planned.

2.8   Software applications

Many companies use time tracking software to track an employee's working time, billable hours etc., e.g. law practice management software.

Many software products for time management support multiple users. They allow the person to give tasks to other users and use the software for communication.

Task list applications may be thought of as lightweight personal information manager or project management software.

Modern task list applications may have built-in task hierarchy (tasks are composed of subtasks which again may contain subtasks),[23] may support multiple methods of filtering and ordering the list of tasks, and may allow one to associate arbitrarily long notes for each task.

In contrast to the concept of allowing the person to use multiple filtering methods, at least one software product additionally contains a mode where the software will attempt to dynamically determine the best tasks for any given moment.[24]

2.9   Time management systems

Time management systems often include a time clock or web based application used to track an employee's work hours. Time management systems give employers insights into their workforce, allowing them to see, plan and manage employees' time. Doing so allows employers

to control labor costs and increase productivity. A time management system automates processes, which eliminates paper work and tedious tasks.

2.9.1 GTD (Getting Things Done)

GTD Getting Things Done was created by David Allen and the basic idea behind this method is to finish all the small tasks immediately and a big task is to be divided into smaller tasks to start completing now. The reasoning behind this is to avoid the information overload or "brain freeze" which is likely to occur when there are hundreds of tasks. The thrust of GTD is to encourage the user to get their tasks and ideas out and on paper and organized as quickly as possible so they're easy to manage and see.

2.9.2 Pomodoro

Pomodoro was created by Francesco Cirillo in the early 90s with the idea that frequent breaks make the user more productive as long as they stay committed to the work and don't allow themselves to be distracted. The Pomodoro technique is very simple: measure the task before the user begins and divide it into 25-minute intervals. Each 25-minute interval is measured as one "Pomodoro" and between each "Pomodoro" there is a short break (usually 5 minutes). After doing 4 "Pomodoros" the user can take a longer break.

2.9.3 Triskelion

Triskelion system is the time management system created by Gamelearn. Triskelion time management system is learnt by playing the graphic-adventure game *Triskelion*. The system is based on the three pillars of time management: manage, plan, and do-it now.

3 Elimination of non-priorities

Time management also covers how to eliminate tasks that do not provide value to the individual or organization.

According to Sandberg,[25] task lists "aren't the key to productivity [that] they're cracked up to be". He reports an estimated "30% of listers spend more time managing their lists than [they do] completing what's on them".

Hendrickson asserts[26] that rigid adherence to task lists can create a "tyranny of the to-do list" that forces one to "waste time on unimportant activities".

4 See also

- Action item

- African time
- Attention management
- Calendaring software
- Chronemics
- Flow (psychology)
- Gantt chart
- Goal setting
- Interruption science
- Maestro Concept
- Opportunity cost
- Order
- Polychronicity
- Procrastination
- Professional organizing
- Prospective memory
- Punctuality
- Time and attendance
- Time perception
- Time to completion
- Time value of money
- Work activity management
- Workforce management

Systems:

- Getting Things Done
- Pomodoro Technique
- Time allocation

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6   Further reading

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