

Time management

Dear students,

we mentioned the issue of time management in the second module devoted to information hygiene. As this is a current and useful topic not only for university students, we have decided to devote an entire module to it. With regard to the fact that the topic falls more within the category of soft skills and its e-learning teaching is thus slightly “complicated”, we will give you rather practical advice and recommendations. The material will also briefly mention the issue of procrastination. The module objective is not for you to start applying all rules immediately; you should rather think about them, choose one which suits you best, and start using it step by step.

Key concepts

Time management - a set of general recommendations, instructions and tools for an effective organization of your time with the purpose of its more effective use

Procrastination - a pathologic postponement of tasks and decisions accompanied by unpleasant feelings, most often anxiety.

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1 What can we imagine under the concept of time management?

Time management may be viewed from several angles although we usually end up with its traditional perception in the form of effective time planning. The objective of this material is to show you that this discipline includes far broader connections. Time management is actually a paradoxical phrase. Time flows by and we can hardly manage it. Therefore, the phrase rather means its effective use. In the most general terms we can say that time management tries to give time (equal to all of us) an unambiguous sense.



An effective time management should enable you to spend the minimum amount of time solving critical situations, and thus focus on the most beneficial things.

Some sentences from this material may seem mere phrases to you. Who does not want to use their time in such a way that they might get the most out of life, though?

One of the many mistakes associated with time management is the idea that it is intended only for managers. Selected techniques will have the best effect on busy people, that is true; however, anyone can use them. All you have to do is determine your personal priorities and objectives, and believe that every change (even a change in time organization) stems mainly from inside of you, not from your surroundings.

As you may read in John Caunt's **Time Management** –

Unlike most other sources, time is equally divided among people.

Everyone has the same amount of time every day.

The difference lies in the way we use it and to what degree we try to extend it.

With regard to progress in time management, we may speak of the so-called generations.

1. **First time management generation** - based on the creation of lists of tasks and activities which need to be solved. Put simply - my head is clear and I still know what to do.
2. **Second time management generation** - deadlines are added to the list of tasks - the use of diaries and planning systems. It is no longer only WHAT needs to be done, it is also WHEN it must be done. Many of you undoubtedly use such a system.
3. **Third time management generation** - expands the previous two generations and adds a new aspect, i.e. HOW to complete these tasks. At this point we can speak of setting objectives and priority according to importance. This generation is upgraded with a system of performance control. In the centre of it there is still time and tools for its effective management.
4. **Fourth time management generation** - it again uses the effective methods of the previous generations, only it adds the missing human factor. That is, this generation focuses on people and their contentment rather than on time management; after all, this contentment will lead to a long-term effectiveness of work.

“I don’t have time” is a mere pretext. That I really do not have time for trifles, that is the hard truth!

2 Priorities and objectives

If we look at priorities from the viewpoint of the different time management generations, then the third generation creates priorities based on objectives, and the fourth generation adjusts objectives to priorities. To set a principle is nothing more or less than to be able to choose what to prefer.

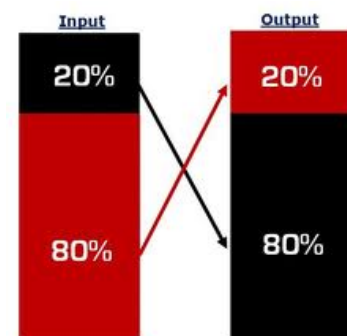
David Allen presents an interesting analogy to priorities and objectives in his book Getting Things Done. It is a parallel with altitude as used in aviation:

- above 50,000 feet - life
- 40,000 feet - an idea of the next 3-5 years
- 30,000 feet - objectives for the next year or two
- 20,000 feet - areas of responsibility
- 10,000 feet - current projects
- runway - current activities

This parallel, however, only offers a certain general view which should remind you that not only your work should be seen from a variety angles, and that all realized activities should be in accordance with a “higher altitude”. Let us now have a look at two selected methods of **setting priorities**: the Pareto principle; the Eisenhower principle

2.1 The Pareto principle

This is a principle widely used not only in time management but in other connections as well. Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, formulated it at the beginning of the 20th century; he works with a simple ratio of **80:20**. Pareto originally claimed that 80 % of wealth is controlled by 20 % of people. Therefore, this principle was then most frequently applied in the area of business (20 % of products of a given company often generates 80 % of profit etc.).



If we should express the Pareto principle in more general terms, we might say that important elements form only a relatively small part of the whole. In terms of time management, this means that 80% of your time brings only 20% of results!

This sounds rather depressive, though?

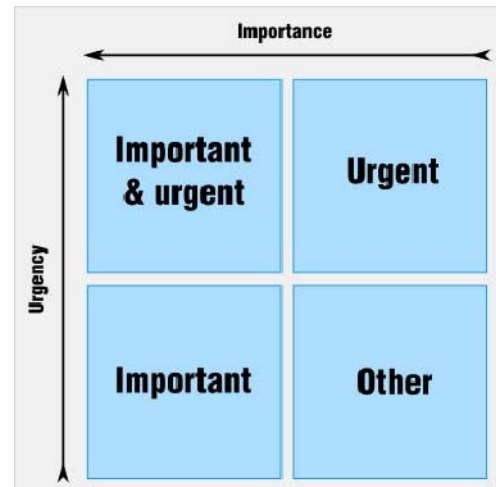
Let us do it the other way round then!

20% of your time is enough to bring you up to 80% of results.

2.2 The Eisenhower principle

This principle divides all activities into four groups according to their urgency and importance:

- I. **Urgent and important** - current problems or pressing matters usually need to be dealt with today
- II. **Non-urgent but important** - this category contains for instance further education, personal growth, maintaining social relations or relaxation. If there are such tasks, they do not need to be dealt with immediately; however, you should bear them in mind so that they do not end up in the previous category one day.
- III. **Urgent but unimportant** - this category usually comprises matters you have to deal with, even if they distract you from your tasks. Among practical examples may be certain phone calls or answering your mail.
- IV. **Non-urgent and unimportant** - some publications call this group trash basket; it contains trivial and unimportant things. These activities are best ignored or dealt with as fast as possible because they will not bring any benefit.



Scientific literature sometimes states that it is ideal to deal only with activities falling within the first quadrant, and to plan those falling within the second quadrant well but not to deal with them. Such a principle would, however, often lead to constant stress and hurry, and such people would become mere “fire-fighters”.

We recommend you to **devote as much time as possible to activities in the second quadrant**. Activities in the first quadrant usually result from activities in the second quadrant (provided you solve those, they will not arise at all) or come of their own accord - mostly unexpectedly, e.g. you get a pressing task from your boss.

3 Time planning

The basis of every planning is to start from already defined priorities. Always remember that an ideal start of planning is writing things down. Do not be afraid to write down even minor and possibly negligible tasks.

Before you start using any planning system (see below), we recommend you to make the so-called time survey, i.e. a description of activities you usually pursue, and whether they agree with your priorities.

Try to follow the activities you pursue every day (all day) for two weeks.

It is not necessary to write everything down precisely every minute; however, at the end of the period you should be able to say to what you devote most time. It is then up to you whether you choose the system of daily or weekly planning.

3.1 Planning tools

The basis of each planning is notes. If you make a list of all items you need to buy before every shopping, you are halfway to victory. All you have to do is apply this habit on other common situations.

Making notes eliminates stress that you might forget something, and your subconscious will be free for other more important activities. As the saying goes, what is written is given!



There is an unlimited number of tools you can use for regular planning - **from a blank sheet of paper and diaries to PC and mobile devices such as smartphones.**

It is only up to you what system suits you most, and it is not possible to recommend one most suitable system. Whether you decide for a paper diary or a mobile phone application, remember that your choice should correspond with your needs and, above all, your habits.

In the following chapter we will describe three selected (very frequently used) web tools which are not only multi-platform but also supported as mobile applications, which means you can use them both on your PC and on your smartphone. There is an unlimited number of such tools and you can use even for example Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft OneNote, Things on a Mac, or tasks in Gmail.

If you are interested in this topic, have a look at <http://www.gtdtimes.com>.

Perhaps it is not worth it to buy a new super-powerful mobile phone only because of an effective time management; at the same time, a web tool or a mobile application will suit people who spend most of their time on the PC.

Examples

- Doit.im
- Toodledo.com
- Rememberthemilk.com
- Linoit.com

4 And what about procrastination?

Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today... but the day after tomorrow is a day, too. :)

Most of us have experienced procrastination in our lives; some people fight against it constantly and there are even those who lose the battle from time to time. In this study material we will learn what procrastination is and how to fight it successfully.

What is procrastination, what are its symptoms and who is most often in danger?

“Procrastination (also sluggishness or loitering) is a pathologic postponement of tasks and decisions accompanied by unpleasant feelings, most often anxiety.”

For the purposes of this material, we will deal, above all, with academic procrastination, which we most often feel during our studies in the exam period and while writing papers.

Procrastination usually has an increasing tendency. “Surveys indicate that the longer a student studies at university, the higher their procrastination tendencies are.”

Procrastination is most frequent in the case of students but it might show up in other groups as well, e.g. at work or anywhere else while completing deadline tasks.

A procrastinated day usually starts with your reluctance to get up; then you spend a long time in the bathroom and even a longer time having breakfast. Then you get to your task. If you work with your computer, you check your e-mails, Facebook, blogs etc. Then you go to make tea/coffee and get to work. You read the instructions and think for a while, and it is time for lunch. In case you are productive, you have come up with the paper title. Then you spend a long time cooking and eating. You should return to your work but first you have to do the washing up after all! In the afternoon you return to your work, read the instructions again and reformulate the title. It is time for another coffee. By now you are so exhausted that you watch a TV series. One, two, three episodes... In the evening you get to your work again and come up with a few keywords. It is time for dinner and the evening news, and you do not feel like doing anything. You watch a movie and go to bed. The following day is similar, only your apartment is more tidy and you feel growing dissatisfaction over the (un)completed task. Finally you do write the paper in the last minute but you are far more stressed than you need to be.



If this fits to you perfectly, there is no need to worry; many people deal with this problem. *“In university population the estimates in developed Western countries speak of values from 20% over 50% up to unbelievable 90!”* If you do not suffer from procrastination, then, you are rather an exception. Now we will discuss a few methods which may help us overcome procrastination successfully.

4.1 How to fight procrastination?

- **Focus** - get rid of things which distract you, arrange your work environment, do not let yourselves be distracted (i.e. disconnect your PC from the Internet, lock the kitchen, take your hamster to a different room...)
- **Be motivated** => make your task more pleasant by means of a positive motivation (tell yourselves the reason why you want to work on the task, determine a reward)

for its completion, make a list of tasks - and put it where you can see it well - cross out completed items, stop looking for excuses why you could not do this and that)

- **Divide your task into several smaller tasks** => if you get up and decide you will finally start writing your Bachelor's thesis, you are not likely to do much. If you make a list of minor tasks, e.g. I will find 10 sources I could use, I will make the title page, I will write the introductory paragraph etc., there is a chance you will complete such tasks and your work will move on. (And this is when a list of tasks is useful because what can be more beautiful than a long list of crossed-out items?)
- If you do not have a pressing deadline, do not start working thinking that you will complete your work today! Or at least write down minor tasks so that you can see the progress!
- **Work together with more people** => you will force yourselves to study/work more easily. If you invite a friend to study with you, you will not feel the need to tidy up, be on Facebook or go shopping. Just choose carefully so that your fellow student/colleague does not procrastinate even more than you. You should pick a careful and disciplined person.
- **Try to improve your "time management"** => set your priorities, do not tell yourselves that it is not worth to start anything for half an hour, try to use one of the proven methods (e.g. Getting Things Done, the effort not to break the chain...). This recommendation should be taken with some reserve because some specialists say that procrastination is not a problem of bad time management: "Telling someone who procrastinates to buy a diary is like telling someone with chronic depression to cheer up."
- **Do not try to be perfect** => problems with procrastination are said to be connected with perfectionism - you are simply afraid that your work will not be perfect - you are afraid to start in the first place, so you usually submit your papers five minutes before the deadline.
- **If nothing helps, enrol in a help centre** => at the beginning of 2011, an online help centre for students fighting against procrastination and Internet addiction was founded (<http://poradna.adiktologie.cz/>). There you can read much interesting information on procrastination (but do not do so instead of writing papers and studying!), test yourselves and enrol in an online program of the fight against procrastination.

Try to start with an hour of concentrated work every day and gradually form fixed habits.