

TIME MANAGEMENT - A PARADIGM OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

Time management has increasingly become an issue of crucial relevance.

Time needs to be viewed as a complex mathematical value and not as a simple linear graphic, hence the current debate of whether it is better to follow classical methods to speed up the pace as the fast hare or the alternative view of actually slowing down the rhythm like the wise tortoise. The current paper aims at developing, besides the classical and the alternative views regarding time management, a third category of methods that focus on the individual, personal perception of time.

Keywords: *time management, industrial revolution, organizer, personal view of time.*

INTRODUCTION

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"Do you begin each day with a planner brimming with goals and to-dos that are important to you, or are you handcuffed by poorly planned days that result in nothing done by day's end? Plan and achieve." This is a constant slogan that we hear daily in all personal development and time management seminars. But is it all that easy as they say?

In today's hectic life style, it is becoming increasingly difficult to manage time effectively. There are so many things to do, and so little time!

Internet is supposed to be the ultimate means for bringing efficiency to your life. The information that you need, the business tool you use, everything is now at your finger tip thanks to the ubiquitous access to the Internet. But does it make your life easier? Most of us will probably say no. On the contrary! Easy access to virtually any information lures us to spend way too much time on the Internet. How to regain total control of our precious time?

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the earliest recorded philosophy of time belongs to the ancient Egyptian thinker Ptahhotep (c. 2650–2600 BCE), who said: "Do not lessen the time of following desire, for the wasting of time is an abomination to the spirit." (Dagobert Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy*).

Religious texts make many more references to the irreversible passage of time.

Artistic themes appeared in art (in the Netherlands in the early 17th century) such as *Vanitas*, a reminder of death in the form of a still life, which always included a watch, clock, or some other timepiece. The relentless ticking of a clock or watch, and the slow but certain movement of its hands, functioned as a visible and audible memento mori. Clocks and sundials would be decorated with mottos such as *ultima forsan* ("perhaps the last" [hour]) or *vulnerant omnes, ultima nequit* ("they all wound, and the last kills").

Mary, Queen of Scots was said to have owned a large watch made in the shape of a silver skull.

Even today, clocks often carry the motto *tempus fugit*, "time flies".

The concept of “time discipline” as a field of special attention in sociology and anthropology was studied by E.P. Thompson in *Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism*, published in 1967. Thompson (1967), having a Marxist viewpoint, argued that observance of clock-time is a consequence of the European industrial revolution, and that neither industrial capitalism nor the creation of the modern state would have been possible without the imposition of synchronic forms of time and work discipline. The new clock time imposed by government and capitalist interests replaced earlier collective perceptions of time, that Thompson believed flowed from the collective wisdom of human societies.

The invention of artificial units of time measurement made the introduction of time management possible, that, unfortunately was not universally appreciated by those whose time was managed.

The isochronous clock changed lives. Appointments are rarely “within the hour”, but at quarter hours (and being five minutes late is often considered being tardy). People often eat, drink, sleep, and even go to the bathroom in adherence to some time-dependent schedule.

Economically, the impact of clocks is even greater; an awareness that *time is money*, a limited commodity not to be wasted, has appeared and lasts even today.

For most of human evolution, laziness and short-term but fast thinking (impulsiveness) were overall adaptive. Laziness (Buck, 2003) was adaptive because energy and time were much more limited than today in developed countries for most people. Limited energy – e.g., lack of food – meant that avoidance of labor not necessary for short-term survival was adaptive. After all, the energy invested in longer-term plans might be wasted due to unexpected disasters (very common before human control over our surroundings – technology – grew). Similarly, needing to work on survival matters most of the time meant that time had to be conserved. For handling day-to-day survival, short-term thinking was most of what was needed, with planning limited to solving immediate problems; taking time to think about longer-term plans could be a distraction from short-term survival.

Today, most people in developed countries lack pressures for immediate survival most of the time; our motivations are more abstract. It is harder for such abstract motivations to overcome avoidance of tasks that do not give us short-term pleasure and may cause us short-term pain (e.g., due to boredom).

1. The Schumann Cavity Resonance is presented by contemporary geophysicists as the heart beat of our planet. Its value has been constant for thousands of years: 7.8 Hz. However, starting with 1980, an acceleration was noticed, first slow and then faster and faster, (after 1997), until today, it reached the value of 12 Hz. The increase in our planet’s vibratory frequency supposedly makes 24 hours of life correspond only to 16 actual hours. This seems like an explanation plausible enough for the harsh time crises we are dealing with currently.
2. Theories regarding the end of the world, although they did not pass the test of the year 2000, are now reborn in relation to 2012. It seems that more and more arguments converge towards the conclusion that something surprising is going to happen to our planet and implicitly with us, its inhabitants. Before accepting or rejecting such arguments, we should first get to know them. And, of course, ask ourselves: Are we ready for the end of 2012?

What can we say about ourselves in this context? It seems that we have no other choice but speed. With a planet rotating around its own axis at a speed of around 1000 miles per hour and around the Sun at a speed of approximately 67000 miles per hour, we seem to be propelled through the Universe against our will.

Hence, time management emerges as a way of slowing down this superimposed speed, in order to acquire the necessary independence in relation to the environment we live in. This paper focuses on a large diversity of such methods in order to conclude about the most effective one.

TIME MANAGEMENT METHODS

Stephen R. Covey (Covey, 1994) offered a categorization scheme for the hundreds of time management approaches that he reviewed:

- **First generation:** *reminders* based on clocks and watches, but with computer implementation possible. They can be used to alert a person, when a task is to be done.
- **Second generation:** planning and preparation based on calendar and appointment books; includes setting goals.
- **Third generation:** planning, prioritizing, controlling (using a personal organizer, other paper-based objects, or computer or PDA-based systems) activities on a daily basis. This approach implies spending some time in clarifying values and priorities.
- **Fourth generation** necessity of being efficient and proactive using any of the above tools; places goals and roles as the controlling element of the system and favors importance over urgency.

Time management literature (Covey, 1990) can be paraphrased as follows:

- “Get Organized” – paperwork and task triage.
- “Protect Your Time” – insulate, isolate, delegate.
- “Set gravitational goals” – that attract actions automatically.
- “Achieve through Goal management Goal Focus” – motivational emphasis.
- “Work in Priority Order” – set goals and prioritize.
- “Use Magical Tools to Get More Out of Your Time” – depends on when written.
- “Master the Skills of Time Management”.
- “Go with the Flow” – natural rhythms, Eastern philosophy.
- “Recover from Bad Time Habits” – recovery from underlying psychological problems, e.g. procrastination.

The classic version

Here we must ask ourselves if we are always chasing the clock or do we have the attitude of the wise tortoise, who paced himself and won the race at a steady pace. If we are part of the first category, then this is the answer for us.

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. **Prioritize** – your time and define your life by goals.
2. **Organizing** – things you have to accomplish regularly to be successful, (Family and Finances)
3. **Streamlining** – things you may not like to do, but must do. (Work and Chores)
4. **Economizing** – things you should do or may even like to do, but they’re not pressingly urgent. (Pastimes and Socializing)
5. **Contributing** – by paying attention to the few remaining things that make a difference. (Social Obligations).

Dwelling on the lists

According to Sandberg (Sandberg, 2004), 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”.

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.

Hendrickson (Hendrickson, 2005) asserts that rigid adherence to task lists can create a “tyranny of the to-do list” that forces one to “waste time on unimportant activities”.

A completely different approach which argues against prioritizing altogether was put forward by British author Mark Forster in his book, *Do It Tomorrow and Other Secrets of Time Management* (Forster, 2006). 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.

Eisenhower Method

All tasks are evaluated using the criteria important/unimportant and urgent/not urgent and put in according quadrants. Tasks in unimportant/not urgent are dropped, tasks in important/urgent are done immediately and personally, tasks in unimportant/urgent are delegated and tasks in important/not urgent get an end date and are done personally. This method is said to have been used by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and is outlined in a quote attributed to him: *What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important.* (Eisenhower, 1955)

Given this relative non-effectiveness of the classical methods, many resort to the more “mature” version of the wise turtle.

The alternative method

We don't have to rush to get where we are going to be on time. A little bit of creative scheduling and discipline will allow us to slow down, de-stress and be there a few minutes ahead.

Organization sometimes is about “triage” – or deciding what interruptions must get our attention.

Writer Julie Morgenstern (Morgenstern, 2004) 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.

Given this addition of the personal element, regardless of the strategy to be used, there is obviously a powerful tendency towards the relativity of the result or of the means to get there and therefore we can move on to a third category of methods.

The relativity view

More unconventional time usage techniques, such as those discussed in *Where Did Time Fly* (Swift, 2010), include concepts that can be paraphrased as “Less is More” (quality over quantity), which de-emphasizes the importance of squeezing every minute of your time, as suggested in traditional time management schemes.

In recent years, several authors have discussed time management as applied to the issue of digital information overload, in particular, Tim Ferris with *The 4 hour workweek* (Ferris, 2007), and Stefania Lucchetti with *The Principle of Relevance* (Lucchetti, 2010).

Pareto analysis

Continuing on the line that the relativity element as far as time management is concerned, we arrive at the Pareto analysis. This is the idea that 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. If productivity is the aim of time management, then these tasks should be prioritized higher.

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

In a paradox-like manner, the search of alternative methods for a maximum efficiency can easily degenerate in a phenomenon called *procrastination*, due to the very personal element of relativity added to the linear, objective manner of time flow.

In psychology, *procrastination* refers to the act of replacing high-priority actions with tasks of lower priority, or doing something from which one derives enjoyment, and thus putting off

important tasks to a later time. In accordance with Freud, the pleasure principle may be responsible for procrastination; humans do not prefer negative emotions and handing off a stressful task until a further date is enjoyable. The concept that humans work best under pressure provides additional enjoyment and motivation to postponing a task. Some psychologists cite such behavior as a mechanism for coping with the anxiety associated with starting or completing any task or decision.

Procrastination (Thomas, 1992) may result in stress, a sense of guilt and crisis, severe loss of personal productivity, as well as social disapproval for not meeting responsibilities or commitments. These feelings combined may promote further procrastination. While it is regarded as normal for people to procrastinate to some degree, it becomes a problem when it impedes normal functioning. *Chronic procrastination* may be a sign of an underlying psychological disorder – again, the human factor that induces the relativity of time management. Such procrastinators may have difficulty seeking support due to social stigma, and the belief that task-aversion is caused by laziness, low willpower or low ambition.

One source of procrastination is the planning fallacy, where we underestimate the time required to analyze research. Many students devote weeks to gathering research for a term paper, but are unable to finish writing it because they have left insufficient time for subsequent stages of the assignment. Similarly, students know better than anyone whether or not an assignment or task is feasible. Many students believe in the common method of cramming when studying for an exam or writing up a research paper in one sitting rather than spacing everything out. Despite the stress, lack of sleep, and inefficiency involved, students become trapped into a perpetual mode of procrastination. Cal Newport (Newport, 2011) argues that actually the student's brain that subconsciously acknowledges such daunting tasks will not yield positive results, which results in procrastination.

The "student syndrome" refers to the phenomenon where a student will only begin to fully apply themselves to a task immediately before a deadline. This negates the usefulness of any

buffers built into individual task duration estimates. Students also have difficulties when self-imposing deadlines.

Time is a relative concept

In the physical world time indeed is a relative matter. In Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity time's relative value was exemplified in the paradox often referred to as "Paradox of Twin".

Consider that in a not so far future time there lived a pair of twins – Rob and Mary – somewhere on the Earth. Mary decided to visit a star eight light years away, stop there for a while and come back. The technology at that time allows her to travel at a speed of 80 percent of the speed of light on a fast spaceship. She made her trip and came back to the Earth. What will she see? While by Earth's time 20 years has passed since she left, she has aged only 12 years and definitely looks younger than her twin.

Maybe we don't see this relative physical characteristic of time in real life, one thing we all know is when we are busy with things that interest us, we feel that time passes faster and when we are engaged in a boring or dull job, we feel that the time is passing slowly.

Piers Steel (Steel, 2010) recommends being aware of one's "power hours", when a person's internal circadian rhythms are best suited for the most challenging work (often, but not always, between 10am and 2pm). Increasing one's feelings of self efficacy (e.g. learning optimism) can also be effective. Steel says that it can be helpful to avoid too much commitment; commit only to the first step. As Steel explains: "If you can't run a mile, then run a block. Stop when you've done that and the next time try two blocks... personal stories of triumph can bolster people's spirits for years."

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion actually comprises two dimensions: a psychological and a philosophical one, being necessary for the two, from the perspective of this paper, to combine harmoniously.

The psychological solution

Time urgency relates to the need for quick response or action, to achieve a particular goal (or non existence of this feeling). It can be described as an axis ranging from high to low.

The two dimensions described above produce four types of personalities that can be described as follows (Cooper, 2001):

- **Organizers** have high time urgency and future time perspective and are characterized by high awareness of time, scheduling tasks and activities and high achievement striving.
- **Crammers** have high time urgency and present time perspective and are characterized by high awareness of time, needing to exert control over deadlines, competitiveness, high achievement striving and impatience.
- **Relators** have low time urgency and present time perspective and are characterized by attending little to deadlines or passage of time, taking risks, acting impulsively, focusing on present tasks and focusing on relations with others.
- **Visioners** have low time urgency and future time perspective and are characterized by attending little to deadlines or passage of time, taking risks, acting impulsively and focusing on future goals.

The philosophical answer

Time is not an unlimited currency and therefore we must do our best in order to use it to the maximum of our possibilities. By integrating ourselves in one of the categories that best suits our structure, we can prioritize our main goals in life and thus detect that special moment for us, when action will achieve best results.

The Greek language denotes two distinct principles, Chronos and Kairos. The former refers to numeric, chronological or sequential time. The latter, literally “the right or opportune moment”, relates specifically to metaphysical or divine time, a time in between, a moment of indeterminate time in which something special happens. While *chronos* is quantitative, *kairos* has a qualitative nature.

In rhetoric *kairos* is “a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved”.

Kairos was central to the Sophists, who stressed the rhetor’s ability to adapt to and take advantage of changing, contingent circumstances. In *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates writes that educated people are those “who manage well the circumstances which they encounter day by day, and who possess a judgment which is accurate in meeting occasions as they arise and rarely misses the expedient course of action”.

In the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes, traditionally ascribed to Solomon (970-928 BC), time was traditionally regarded as a medium for the passage of predestined events. (Another word was current as meaning *time fit for an event*, and used by modern Arabs – famous for their non-orthodox view on time management – as an equivalent of the English word “time”.)

Therefore we can say with the words of the Ecclesiastes, that: “*There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven – A time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.*”(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

So we need to find this Right Time and then act accordingly. In this respect, experience is the key. “Mastery experience” is the most important factor deciding a person’s self-efficacy. Simply put, success raises self-efficacy, failure lowers it.

Personal Time Management is a systematic application of common sense strategies. It requires little effort, yet it promotes efficient work practices by highlighting wastage and it leads to effective use of time by focusing it on our chosen activities. Personal Time Management does not solve our problems; it reveals them, and provides a structure to implement and monitor solutions. It enables us to take control of our own time – how we use it is then solely up to us.

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