



TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND EFFICIENT PLANNING

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SELF-ASSESSMENT OF TIME MANAGEMENT ATTITUDE

To change a model, the previous one must be known.

The first, preliminary step that is necessary in order to acquire new skills and integrate them into our daily life is to know from which point we are starting.

The development of an individual (effective) time management plan is not a contingency strategy, but rather requires time, and adjustment. This can only be constructed over the self-assessment of our daily activity and habits.

The following questionnaire will enable you to acquire knowledge about the way time is managed in your life at the present moment. Please compile the questionnaire and submit it to your teacher for the score calculation.

Short-Range Planning					
1. Do you make a list of the things you have to do each day?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
2. Do you plan your day before you start it?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
3. Do you make a schedule of the activities you have to do on work days?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
4. Do you write a set of goals for yourself for each day?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
5. Do you spend time each day planning?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
6. Do you have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish during the next week?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
7. Do you set and honor priorities?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>

Time Attitudes					
1. Do you often find yourself doing things which interfere with your schoolwork simply because you hate to say "No" to people?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
2. Do you feel you are in charge of your own time, by and large?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
3. On an average class day do you spend more time with personal grooming than doing schoolwork?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
4. Do you believe that there is room for improvement in the way you manage your time?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
5. Do you make constructive use of your time?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
6. Do you continue unprofitable routines or activities?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
Long-Range Planning					
1. Do you usually keep your desk clear of everything other than what you are currently working on?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
2. Do you have a set of goals for the entire quarter?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
3. The night before a major assignment is due, are you usually still working on it?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
4. When you have several things to do, do you think it is best to do a little bit of work on each one?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>
5. Do you regularly review your class notes, even when a test is not imminent?	Always <input type="radio"/>	Frequently <input type="radio"/>	Sometimes <input type="radio"/>	Infrequently <input type="radio"/>	Never <input type="radio"/>

EXERCISE 1

PERSONALIZE YOUR AGENDA ACCORDING TO YOUR MOST PRODUCTIVE HOURS

Introduction

Finding our most productive hours becomes more relevant in a context where there is more autonomy in the organization of the work and in the time schedule. Classic 9 to 5 jobs are less prone to let people adjust their schedule according to their energy and concentration peaks. However, the modern society is going fast towards more flexible schedules and the recent events are making smart-working the rule instead of the exception in many contexts.

Therefore, it is very useful to find out when you are more productive (When? Where? Alone or together?) and concentrate there all your most difficult tasks.

Exercise

- 1) Discovering our productive peaks and valley requires self-observation. However, this does not need to be done over a long time-span, since there are exercises enable us to get a general idea of the conditions in which we are more productive.

Ask students to engage in the following activities every time they can during the day, for at least three days. Those exercises may seem time-consuming at first sight, but a few days of effort will enable to save time in the future.

- 2) At various times throughout the day, try to write a short story of maximum three sentences. Try to choose different context, environments and, of course, times of the day. Just sit down and try to write a story according to what comes on your mind at that moment.

E.g. Once there was a mouse that was looking for a new home. His last nest had been destroyed by a tractor and now he needed to find a new one before winter. He tried to ask around, until he found a beaver that led him to a beautiful shelter under a chestnut tree.

Please notice that the quality and the topic of the story are not important: what is important is to examine our attitude towards the activity.

Ask students to answer the following questions:

- How much time did it take to write the story (time of completion)?
 - Are there times when stories just pop up in your mind?
 - Are there times when, at the idea of writing a story, your mind answers “just not right now”?
- 3) Observe your work/study rhythms for at least a week:
 - Do you usually perform most of the tasks during the morning? (yes/no)
 - Do you usually feel tired and sluggish in the morning?
 - In the afternoon, do you have the impression that the day is finally come to an end? Or do you feel refreshed and ready to work?
 - Do you think that your energy pattern during the day is ascendant (from down to up, with a peak in the evening), or descendant (from up do down)?
 - Do you usually enjoy studying/working after dinner?
 - Will you be willing to wake up an hour earlier each day in order to have more free time in the afternoon?

EXERCISE 2

DOING AND POSTPONING

Introduction

While setting short-term goals, the usual approach is to define which kind of results we want to achieve in one day/week/month. However, an efficient strategy of goal-planning cannot be performed if the definition of the activities is not accompanied by an actual implementation. In this context, it is important to understand our attitude towards the execution of a settled plan.

Often, our perception of an efficient use of time may be undermined by the fact that we **perform non-important tasks** and we **postpone important ones** (on the basis of a pre-determined set of goals).

Postponing creates the illusion of time, or lack thereof: setting aside an activity makes us think that there is still time to perform it, even if the deadline is close. At the same time, filling our time with other activities may develop the false impression we are fruitfully employing our time and resources.

Exercise

Try to set a weekly plan with the exact indications of the goals and activities they would like to achieve on the week. The plan can be done on Friday or Saturday.

In order to make the exercise more effective, the plan should be thematic: *e.g.* include only academic activities.

Week _____ (*dates*)
Activities and Goals (*plan*)

Take a take a diary (on the form of short notes) at the end of each day, in which to sign how you have actually spent your time. This does not need to be detailed, but it should give a general idea of activities actually performed during the week.

At the end of the week, compare your plan with the dairy, with the activities carried out.

A. Are there any activities or goals that you planned to achieve and you actually have achieved?

B. Are there any activities goals that you planned to achieve and you did not achieve?

C. Are there some activities that you have actually done and you may qualify as “non-important” compared to the prior-fixed goals?

D. Do you think that you engaged in some ‘postponing’ attitude towards your fixed activities and goals?

EXERCISE 3

THE POWER HOUR

Introduction

In time management, the Power Hour technique is used to clear up our schedules from small, yet necessary tasks that require a short amount of time but are prone to a high degree of procrastination. It is a 60-minute window during which you aim to complete a predetermined set of smaller tasks. Those are the activity that most often make our schedules busy and are always in our mind, yet we tend to postpone, because they are usually no subject to a deadline.

The Power Hour enables us to clear all those tasks in a fixed and predetermined amount of time that is exclusively dedicated to them and will enable us to put a short but consistent effort in eliminating them from our agenda.

Exercise

- 1) Identify the tasks that can be qualified as “small tasks”, since they are not priorities, but they need to be done anyway. In other words, they are the annoying little tasks that we are constantly ignoring (*e.g.* schedule a dentist appointment; organize the notes of a course; complete your monthly timesheets; send a mail).
- 2) Identify an hour during the day where you may effectively concentrate all these tasks (most probably, during office hours as these activities may require contacts with students’ offices, secretary staff, etc.).
- 3) Do it! Perform the Power Hour.

Evaluate

What was the impact of the Power Hour on the overall weekly organization?

Did the Power Hour have a beneficial impact over the week (both from an organizational and psychological point of view)?

Did you experienced benefits regarding the perceived control of time during the week?

EXERCISE 4

MANAGE YOUR DISTRACTIONS – SAVE YOUR TIME MANAGEMENT PLAN

Introduction

In most occasions, in particular where work is performed in groups, the possibility to carry our activities is greatly influenced by the surrounding environment. Colleagues and distractions (such as cell phone, social media, etc.) negatively affect your time management. Whereas some negative factors can easily be controlled (even though not necessarily completely eliminated as a moment of relaxation is not per se negative), a multitude of interruptions can prejudice if not even nullify a well-constructed time-management plan, obliging you to keep up with work or study at home, thus breaking the work-life balance time management should contribute to preserve.

This exercise will make possible that your well-reasoned time management plan is not negatively affected by outside elements and sources.

Exercise

- 1) Analyse the environment you usually work in and count i) the number of times that you check the phone (to check what time it is; to check social media account, etc.); ii) the number of times you are interrupted by people (even if they are just passing by and greeting);
- 2) How many minutes in average in 3 working hours did you lose due points i) and ii) above?
- 3) Try to identify “silence working areas” in libraries (or close the doors in offices with “no disturb” signs) for 2 hours in the morning and identify one hour for work in common spaces (or work in the office with open door). For the same time, avoid using cell phones for non-professional purposes.
- 4) Check after two weeks if your perception of external distraction has increased your capacity of time management.

Evaluate

The “concentration” of “distractions” in one single, “controlled” and pre-defined time-slot (most probably, the working hours where you feel yourself less able to better perform) should allow you to better keep you on track with your time-management schedule without necessarily being unfriendly in a working place – as your door will always be open (just in specific times, your times!).

EXERCISE 5

THE ART OF SETTING PRIORITIES AND PUT THEM INTO ACTION

Introduction

Most people think time management is about doing as more activities as possible in the shortest amount of time. However, time management is an instrument that allows us to achieve previously established goals according to our desires and duties. In establishing goals (and the executive activities that are necessary to achieve them), we set them in a hierarchical order on the basis of priority.

As Stephen Covey wrote in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, “The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities”.

We should rely to our priority hierarchy while deciding:

- 1) In which tasks to engage first;
- 2) The amount of time to dedicate to each task.

Exercise

- 1) Make a list of goals they want to achieve in the upcoming week or month (the time span can be modulated according the course schedule).
- 2) Do examine the list and to give a score to each goal:
 - 1 = Extremely important
 - 2 = Very important
 - 3 = Somewhat important
 - 4 = Less important

Warning: Avoid the **procrastination trap!** This scoring should avoid lists filled with unimportant goals that gives us the impression that we are progressing in something, instead of addressing the elephant in the room.

- 3) Take into consideration each goal and to split it in a list of activities which are necessary in order to reach that goal. Activities should be as specific as possible. Subsequently, rank each activity (within a single goal), according to its importance in achieving that goal:
 - a = extremely important
 - b= very important
 - c = somewhat important
 - d = **unimportant**
- 4) Make a new list of goals, with the order that reflects the score given to each goal (1 to 4). At the right side of each goal, the students shall put the list of the activities assigned to each goal, with the order that reflects the ranking given to each activity (a to c). Activities with ranking “d” should be left out.
- 5) Fill in a weekly (or a monthly) calendar, in which to plan the activities that they would like to perform each day (or each week) according to the fixed set of priorities.
- 6) At the end of the week (or month), make an assessment of:

- goals reached;
- activities effectively performed;
- amount of effort dedicated to the activities performed, compared with the importance ranking given to each activity at the beginning of the exercise.

EXERCISE 6

THE URGENT IMPORTANT MATRIX

Introduction

The Urgent Important Matrix has been developed by Stephen Covey following an inspirational quote of the former US President Eisenhower: "*What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important*". It is an important tool to move us towards our goals, because it enable us to manage our time more effectively.

Using a simple grid, Covey helps us to define our tasks according to two parameters:

- 1) **Urgent tasks** are the tasks that we are required to perform immediately, or within a short time framework. We are usually obliged to stop what we are doing to focus on the urgent task instead. Not dealing with urgent tasks usually brings immediate consequences.
E.g.
- 2) **Important tasks** are the tasks that move us towards our bigger goals and projects. Since those tasks are often not associated with a close deadline, it is easier to procrastinate on them: we are more likely to prioritize tasks with a deadline, even if other tasks may have major payoffs in the long term.

Starting from this, the urgent Important Matrix consists in four quadrants that classify your daily/weekly/monthly activities on the basis of the aforementioned parameters.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<p><i>Quadrant 1 - Crises</i></p>	<p><i>Quadrant 2 – Preparation and planning</i></p>
NOT IMPORTANT	<p><i>Quadrant 3 - Interruptions</i></p>	<p><i>Quadrant 4 - Distractions</i></p>

Quadrant 1 (Crises) – contains all the activities that are urgent and require our immediate attention. They may be unexpected events, emergencies at work or in personal life (like sudden health issues), sudden deadlines, urgent meetings, pressing problems. Those activities are also qualified as important, because we cannot avoid to perform them.

When our schedule becomes very busy and we are overwhelmed by the workload, we tend to operate mostly in *Quadrant 1 (Crises)*. Therefore, we find ourselves shifting from one activity to another, in the attempt to manage all the sudden emergencies. At the same time, if we spend all day dealing only with urgent tasks, the latter will most probably pile up because we do not have time to plan our work and to work on the real priorities.

Quadrant 2 (Preparation and planning) – contains all the activities that lead us towards our goals and projects and are not urgent in the present moment. Their positive impact is experienced in the long term. If we make sure to have enough time to deal with this things properly, we will significantly reduce the load of *Quadrant 1* and we will spend our energies on what really matters. If we deal with activities in *Quadrant 2* before they become urgent, we will gain more control over our daily schedule.

Quadrant 3 (Interruptions) – contains the activities that are not important for the purposes of our goals, but we have to do anyway. In addition, they need to be done immediately. For instance, in this quadrant there are unimportant meetings, interruptions from co-workers, unnecessary checking our emails or phone calls. Those activities are not “important” under the perspective of our personal goals (although they may be important for others).

Those activities usually interrupt or take us away from important tasks. It is important to minimize our time in this quadrant by reviewing and prioritizing our tasks.

Quadrant 4 (Distractions) – If the activities in *Quadrant 3* are distractions with deadlines, the activities in *Quadrant 4* are the frivolous distractions: checking social media, surfing the web without a purpose, watching TV, etc. Sometimes, it is important to linger in those activities when we feel tired and we need a break. However, if we spend too much time in this quadrant we will be late on our projects and deadlines

The objective of the Urgent Important Matrix is to spend as much time as possible in Quadrant 2, in order to prevent the overflow of Quadrant 1, and to limit the time spent on Quadrants 3 and 4.

Exercise

- 1) List all the activities that you must and want to perform in one day, one week or one month. It is also possible to use the list developed in Exercise 5, point 3).
- 2) At the beginning of the day/week/month, fill the four quadrants according to the qualifications given in the introduction.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT		
NOT IMPORTANT		

- 3) Please keep in mind that it is not always possible to foresee all the activities that may fall in *Quadrant 1 (Crises)* and in *Quadrant 3 (interruptions)*. Therefore, you should regularly update the chart, signing up those activities that come unexpectedly and can be classified into those quadrants.
- 4) During the day/week/month, try to operate as much as possible in *Quadrant 2 (Preparation and Planning)*. You may prepare a daily/weekly/monthly plan that fits with this objective.

Evaluate

- 1) If you find *Quadrant 1* filled with a lot of urgent and important activities, are there some activities that you could have foreseen? How those activities could have been scheduled in advance in order to deal with them before they became urgent?
- 2) Did you manage to spend as less time as possible in *Quadrant 3* and *Quadrant 4*?
- 3) On average, do you think that you have spent enough time on *Quadrant 2*?

EXERCISE 7

“SEE” YOUR DEADLINES

Introduction

Time management requires proper identification of priorities and management of deadlines. This presupposes that persons clearly have in mind their deadlines. A good and well-organised agenda for that purpose is key in time management and deadline management. Noticing deadlines close to their expiration is detrimental to time management and quality of work.

Exercise

- 1) Examine your methodology to entry deadlines and keep track of them
- 2) Carefully check for upcoming deadlines, so as not to be “surprised” when they come across to near (academic / working or other) deadlines
- 3) Enter deadlines in agendas (paper or electronic, e.g. their phones)
- 4) Set “pre-warning” alarms, based on the importance of the deadline (5 days before, 10 days before) etc.

Evaluate

After some major deadlines have expired with the new system of deadline management, is your awareness of deadlines increased?

Did you meet deadlines having had the opportunity to better manage your time with increased quality of the deliverable or the product?