



Time management

Resource book

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What is time management?

LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE YOUR TIME AND RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY

Time management is not so much about managing time itself, but about how you manage using that time. Time management is about how you prioritise your time and energy on the most important tasks so that you achieve the best possible outcome. Understanding the barriers or obstacles that you will need to overcome is an essential starting point, because without knowing what is holding you back you are unable to focus your time and energy strategically and specifically on the areas that matter the most to you.

Successful and effective time management begins with the principle notion that you are committed to change. Understanding how to implement effective management is worthless if it is not linked to a commitment to action.

Once you have begun to put your plan into action you then need to ensure that you adhere to it. This often involves a re-organising of your environment and the will of others to amend their expectations.

Time management helps individuals to be more productive which in turn leads to greater fulfilment and happiness. Poor or good time management skills don't just affect individuals but have a huge impact on the organisation as a whole.

The Pareto principle known sometimes as Pareto Law or the 80/20 Principle for example, is a helpful tool to bring swift and easy clarity to difficult and complicated situations and problems. It is particularly useful when applying it to decisions around effort and resources.

Pareto's principle is named after Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), the man who first discovered and developed the 80:20 theory. He first observed the principle when researching wealth and income distribution in nineteenth century Italy (some people suggest England). He concluded that 20% of the population owned 80% of the wealth. He continued to apply this 'imbalance' to illustrate for example, 10 percent would have 65 percent of the wealth, and 5 percent of people would own 50 percent of the wealth.

In other words, the Pareto principle suggests that where two related data sets or groups exist (typically cause and effect, or input and output):

80% of output is produced by 20% of input

80% of outcomes are from 20% of causes

80% of contribution comes from 20% of the potential contribution available

Importantly there is no definitive Pareto example, and it is not relevant in every situation. However, it can be very useful as a model in leadership and management. See attached link for a more detailed analysis and explanation.

<http://www.projectsmart.co.uk/pareto-analysis-step-by-step.html>

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It is a very useful tool to refer to in planning especially when applied to an individual's current situation. Before making any decision, dealing with any problem, 80:20 is a good checker, a reminder of the real and current position. Consider the situation of an organisation, for example, that directs its resources, time and focus equally across its organisation when 90 percent of its profits come from just 15 percent of its services. Before deciding or implementing any initiative, you need to understand your current position. What is your starting point? Thus avoiding unrealistic, unreasonable or disastrously wrong decisions or strategies.



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Time management activity

The objective of this activity is to assess your current level of time management skills. Continuing to further develop these skills by applying a strategic approach to creating an action plan which will begin to help you organise thoughts, actions and jobs.

Complete the questionnaire and use the score sheet to identify your own strengths and weaknesses.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1 You feel in control of your workload:

- a) rarely
- b) life can be unpredictable, but you usually cope
- c) your schedule is flexible enough to adapt quickly to unexpected events

2 Your attitude to deadlines is that:

- a) there's so much to do that sometimes deadlines just have to slip
- b) if you can't meet a deadline, you try to alert people in advance
- c) you usually deliver good quality work on, or ahead of, schedule

3 When you need to start on a difficult job:

- a) you have real problems getting going
- b) you do it at the last minute
- c) you know how to get going, and you start as soon as you can

4 You've just completed the day's 'to-do' list

- a) what's a to-do list?
- b) good – it's great when it happens
- c) you use more powerful time-management tools than to-do lists

5 You chose your career because:

- a) you needed the money
- b) it seemed interesting
- c) you're doing something that really matters to yourself and other people

6 Your approach to work can best be described as:

- a) you do work as it turns up
- b) you plan ahead, but events are unpredictable
- c) you have a clear view of what you want to achieve, and why you want to achieve it

7 How would you describe your 'work/life balance'?

- a) you often work late, and when you leave you worry about things you haven't done
- b) you cope, but only by juggling frantically
- c) you have time for the things that are important

8 Your boss asks you to finish an urgent job by lunchtime tomorrow:

- a) there's no way you can squeeze this in as well
- b) you'll do it somehow
- c) you just need to tweak your schedule a bit

9 When you need to find an important document:

- a) you have to shuffle through stacks of paper
- b) you can find it quite quickly – sometimes
- c) you know exactly where to find it

10 Frequent interruptions undermine your ability to do your job:

- a) you often end the day feeling you've achieved little
- b) you accept the need for interruptions, but minimize unnecessary ones
- c) not really – you make time in your schedule for the people who need you, and you meet regularly to deal with issues before they become urgent

11 When you are faced with an unusual and difficult task:

- a) you put off dealing with it until the last moment
- b) you're happiest keeping it under control
- c) you prefer to outsource it to an expert

12 How well do you think you do your work?

- a) you do everything to the very best of your ability
- b) you try to do everything well
- c) you do each task as well as it needs to be done

13 You are doing your next task because:

- a) you have to do it for an impending meeting
- b) it's one of the jobs in your job description
- c) it helps you to achieve a major goal

14 You get help from other people

- a) rarely – you usually have to do it yourself
- b) sometimes, but you're often disappointed by the poor quality of work you get back
- b) often, and you explain jobs carefully when you allocate them, so you're rarely disappointed

15 People often come to you with problems:

- a) you feel ground down by the number of people who need your help
- b) you coach people in solving their problems
- c) you insist people come to you only if they have a considered proposal for solving the problem



If this is the first time you have done this self-assessment make sure that you pay special attention to the areas of weakness you have identified, and that you incorporate the tips and techniques into your everyday working life

QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS**Mostly As**

Your answers suggest that you feel out of control of your workload and of the things being asked of you. However, they also show that you have a fantastic opportunity to improve the quality of your life, improve your outcomes and, ultimately, become more successful. Pay attention to the areas you feel most uncomfortable and take time to learn and apply lessons within it.

Mostly Bs

Your answers show an understanding of some of the ideas that lie behind time management, but they also show that this understanding does not necessarily translate into settled high-performance habits. Further work is still needed to develop and improve your time management skills.

Mostly Cs

You obviously take a focused and well-organised approach to your working life. You know where you are going, you're broadly in control of your workload, and you are rarely caught out by unexpected events. There are improvements to be made. Make sure that you are 'doing the right things' as well as just 'doing things right'. Pay particular attention to 'using what you have'. Learn how to take full advantage of the available resources, your own and other people's, to optimise your performance and get the most from your time.

CONCLUSION

If this is the first time you have done this self-assessment, then bear in mind what you have learned from it. Make sure that you pay special attention to the areas of weakness you have identified, and that you incorporate the tips and techniques into your everyday working life. After you have completed this module and had an opportunity to put these techniques into practice take this quiz again. You should find that you have greater control of your workload, and that you are more effective and much happier.



Begin to create your own personal action programme by listing all the things that you need to do

Creating your own personal action programme**STEP 1 – COLLECT ACTIONS**

Begin by listing all the things that you need to do. These can be personal or professional, big or small, urgent or non-urgent. But they need to be things/jobs that need to be actioned. They may be partially complete.

The easiest way to do this is to write them all down in no order.

STEP 2 – PRIORITISE ACTIONS

Go through each one and decide whether or not you need to take an action.

1 For each job decide if action needs to be taken now or later

2 If no action is needed, delete the item

Before moving onto step 3, refer to Pareto's principle above.

Tip: To rise above this rule, you must not only focus your efforts on high-return tasks but also ensure that you do not waste valuable time on low-priority, low pay-off tasks.

STEP 3 – ORGANISE ACTIONS

Organise your actions into three categories

List one: actions/jobs that are similar. For example, jobs to do on the house/garden will naturally form one list. Jobs/actions in the office, such as tidying desk, filing and reorganising shelves would form another list. Head up each list with a generic name then bullet point the specific actions underneath.

List two: actions/jobs today/this week. This list contains actions/jobs that you want work on today or this week. For each item, write down what you need to get it started. Such as writing a report, break this down into research, planning, writing, proofing and editing. Don't put too many actions onto your now list and if you do, prioritise them in order. Rank them by importance, value, urgency and relevance to you. Remove the least important actions or move them to list three.

List three: actions/jobs to be worked on at a later date. These are actions that are not urgent, but need to be done at some date in the future, such as painting your house.

List four: actions/jobs that can be a combination of the above and that are to be delegated to other people. Include details of whom you may delegate to, the date you are going to do it and how you are going to review progress.



STEP 4 – ALLOCATE ACTIONS TO YOUR LISTS

Take each action in turn and allocate them to one of your four lists. When you have completed this process, review all the action lists to make sure you are being realistic about what you can achieve in the times that you have allotted.

Revise the action lists on a regular basis (maybe daily for list two and weekly for the other lists) to ensure that actions are not stagnating and to decide whether actions need to be cancelled, put on hold or given greater priority.

Tip: if the next action is going to take less than a couple of minutes, do it straight away

STEP 5 – CHOOSE YOUR FORMAT

Finally you need to choose how you are going to manage your plan by deciding what format suits you best. This could be a calendar, spreadsheet, planner or other computer/printed organiser. Whatever you choose, make sure you can access it easily and that it is clear and uncomplicated.

Tip: Don't forget to build in emergency time in case anything unexpected comes up

STEP 6 – REPEAT THE EXERCISE

After four weeks, return to the original questionnaire and repeat the exercise. You should see a difference between the results from the first and second one, hopefully showing that you are more in control of your time and energy.

Revise your action lists on a regular basis to ensure that actions are not stagnating, whether actions need to be cancelled, put on hold or to raise the priority

Strategies for procrastinators

Procrastination is putting off the inevitable; tasks you know you have to do, but doing something else instead (often something you find more enjoyable!).

According to psychologist Professor Clarry Lay, a prominent writer on the subject, procrastination occurs when there's 'a temporal gap between intended behaviour and enacted behaviour.' That is, when there's a significant time period between when people intend to do a job, and when they actually do it (Mind Tools, 2015).

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO RECOGNISE YOU ARE A PROCRASTINATOR:

- 1 Reading emails several times without starting work on them or deciding what you're going to do with them
- 2 Sitting down to start a high-priority task, and almost immediately going off to make a cup of coffee.
- 3 Leaving an item on your 'to do' list for a long time, even though you know it's important.
- 4 Regularly saying 'Yes' to unimportant tasks that others ask you to do, and filling your time with these instead of getting on with the important tasks already on your list.



- 5 Waiting for the 'right mood' or the 'right time' to tackle the important task at hand.

THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE

- 1 Protect your time – turn off the telephone, emails etc.
- 2 Set a kitchen timer to 25 minutes.
- 3 Work out how many times you need to re-set the timer to complete a specific task (how many 25 minutes you need).
- 4 Set a timetable to organise your work.

For more information see www.pomodortechnique.com

References

Lay, C and Schouwenburg, H (1993) Trait procrastination, time management, and academic behavior in Journal of Social Behavior & Personality, Vol 8(4), 1993, 647-662

Mind Tool www.mindtools.com

Pomodoro Technique www.pomodortechnique.com

Project Smart www.projectsart.co.uk

Think Productive www.thinkproductive.co.uk



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