Chapter 3
Time Management and Temporal Personalities

INTRODUCTION

Personal productivity is achieved through an effective time management practice. Due to the advancement of modern telecommunication and information technologies, today’s professionals are taxed with more and more tasks and given shorter time periods to complete them than before. Companies strive to push their new products to the market in order to gain as much profit as possible in the shortest period.

Time is regarded as a primary factor to measure both personal and organizational successes. First, time management tactics in practice and some suggested hints for improving time management are introduced. In the existing literature, time management research is scant in that time is a fairly complicated concept with many variables involved in different contexts. In order to provide some theoretical foundation in this area, some empirical time management research is reviewed and four key constructs are identified to measure the quality of individual time management: planning, meeting deadlines, sensing a lack of time control and engaging in procrastination behavior. To further understand how individuals perceive time, psychological aspects of time are also explored, particularly focusing on individuals’ time urgency and time perspective, which indicates individuals’ perceptions on the passage of time and future time. These perceptions support how individuals exhibit meeting their deadlines and engaging in procrastination behaviors, and therefore, can be used to identify whether time managers are effective or not.

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The main objective of this chapter is to provide theoretical foundations for later chapters in this book. It reviews and synthesizes time management and temporal personality literatures from the organizational behavior, experimental psychology and educational psychology fields along with some practical time management handbooks. It aims to provide support for key time management constructs identified and developed for this work.

BACKGROUND

Time management is the act of arranging the activities we plan to do in some form of structured order, usually in some clock-based representation of time with the purpose of accomplishing these activities as efficiently or effectively as possible. For example, the process of figuring out a priority list is a time management technique.

Time management has several perspectives. First, time management is a matter of working smarter. Most time management literature (Convey et al., 1994; Garret, 1985; Noon, 1972; Webber, 1980) takes the form of practice-oriented handbooks to give guidance on how to better manage one’s personal time. While very few of them are research-oriented books, they represent the common cultural beliefs about how time is best managed in the western world. Because time is a scarce and non-renewable resource, time management techniques teach individuals to make wiser choices in the use of their time, in order to work more efficiently, to better balance their family and work time, and thus, to be more likely to succeed in their careers and to have an enjoyable and balanced personal life.

In practice, two fundamentals should be considered in the time management process. The first is to know short-term and long-term goals, and the second is to prioritize tasks. Practical methods include making to-do lists, prioritizing scheduling, and blocking out unnecessary interruptions, etc. The visible outcome predicted from these activities is that more work is done in less time. All of the self-help books emphasize the use of paper or electronic calendars for external representations of their time organization. In essence, time management is actually self management. Self-regulated learning research has found that time management is related to self-monitoring, self-judgment, and alertness (Corno et al., 1983; McCombs, 1986; Zimmerman, 1990).

Paradoxically, while many people know well about the tactics to improve their time management, making efforts for better time management is much more difficult. Many people are stuck with their ineffective time management because of various time wasters and distractions either from their external environment, such as frequent, unexpected visitors, or from their own internal environment, such as procrastination. Brooks & Mullins (1989, p. 2) point out three tactics for performing high-impact time management: (1) An understanding of the value of time and where time goes; (2) An understanding of the specific tools and skills of time management; (3) Practice in using the tools and skills of time management. They suggest that the first step is to use a time analysis grid or a time-use log for identifying time use pattern with an intention to find out where time goes. The main purpose is to identify time problems, such as constant phone interruptions, drop-in visitors, doing low-priority things and so on. Instead of simply excusing yourself by saying, “Today is a bad day for me,” it is worthwhile to give yourself an honest assessment of what went wrong using a time analysis grid (Table 1) according to anticipated vs. unanticipated and important vs. unimportant activities (Brooks & Mullins, 1989). The analysis results are likely to give you an idea where you need to increase your time on important and anticipated tasks, such as