Chapter 6
Individual Time Management Profiles: Electronic Calendar Tool Selection, Use and Issues

INTRODUCTION

Today’s users have many options in choosing electronic calendar tools. They can adopt free online calendar tools for personal use, such as Google™, Yahoo™, or MSN™ online calendars, which can be synchronized with their mobile devices (e.g., iPhone, Blackberry, PDA, etc.). At work, electronic calendars tools, such as Outlook™ and GroupWise, are often mandated by employers. Individual users can readily record meetings, appointments, or tasks with their electronic calendar tools, which usually provide easy recording, editing, repeating, and archiving functions. Despite the many advanced features and benefits provided by current electronic calendar tools, some people still keep traditional paper-based calendars. This chapter presents selected personal profiles regarding personal time management and describes the reasons why each individual chose her or his current calendar tools. These profiles were selected from a set of field interviews conducted with professionals in the United States. Four identified basic needs for choosing different calendar tools are (1) portability, (2) ability to gain an overview, (3) ability to better coordinate between multiple tools via convenient synchronization features, and (4) collaborative scheduling. Users’ comments about their calendar tool experiences give valuable insights for enhancing the current electronic calendar tool design.

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PERSONAL PROFILES: TIME MANAGEMENT STORIES AND CALENDAR TOOL SELECTION

This section describes some personal time management stories and calendar tool selection and use experiences selected from time management interviews. The interviewees’ roles were varied and included secretary, business unit head, university administrators, IT practitioners, and so on.

Jesse

Jesse is a young Information Technology technician whose job requires him to be in the field for most of his work time. He is in and out of his office frequently when he receives task requests from his clients, and thus his job mobility is fairly high. It is not practical for him to schedule anything in advance, since his job is typically client-driven. It is time consuming to keep track of his time usage every day, and he is not interested in retrieving and recording his time, as his work performance is not based upon how much time he has spent on specific tasks but whether the client requested tasks have been taken care in a timely and professional manner. Depending on how many requests he receives from his clients, he could be overwhelmed one day and very relaxed another day. Jesse described his job as follows:

At my particular job, it’s more of a support environment, meaning that we have software applications here that we support, so if something goes wrong, we have to fix it, or if a request comes to modify the software, we do the modifications. But it’s more of a reactive environment, meaning that something happens and you react to it. So, it’s more of a, not necessarily a problem, but just the nature of the work that you don’t know when these requests are going to come, and a lot of times one comes when something else is going on and a lot of times we have several of these requests queued up. So, you can’t be as efficient at completing any one thing because of the nature of the interruptions. But I’m not sure that a tool could really help that much, unless you switched to a more proactive management approach where you planned things out ahead more, you could probably get things done more efficiently. But, just due to the nature of the work, it’s a reactive environment, and a lot of projects get interrupted because of the requests we get here. So, I wouldn’t blame it on the tools that we’re using; it’s just part of the job we do here.

He is using a Blackberry cell phone to manage his time because of his high mobility. His employer has integrated his Novell GroupWise™ desktop calendar system and task request system with his Blackberry phone, so Jesse seems to have no problem keeping track of his tasks and requests even when he is in the field assisting a client, since he can respond to his task requests via his cell phone instantly. He is very satisfied with the integrated tools for supporting his job because of the real-time synchronization ability with different time management tools.

Cindy

Cindy is a full professor who teaches information technology courses, conducts information technology research and serves on many different committees at a public research university in the United States. She works approximately 75 to 80 hours a week, and therefore her schedule is very tight. Cindy described a week at work in her interview as follows:
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