Chapter 11
Input from Users: Personal Time Management Hints, Current Electronic Calendar Tool Difficulties and Desired Features

INTRODUCTION

The main objectives of this chapter are to present useful and practical time management hints from users that were surveyed and to identify user difficulties with the current electronic time management or calendar tools and users’ desired calendar features. Consistent with the main findings from our large survey with students, faculty, and staff members in a U.S. public research university (see Chapter 10), additional data collected from open-ended questions with the same user population also reflect the reality that users are experiencing dynamic time management demands, and demonstrate how they respond to these demands and problems of meeting deadlines. Users’ input on time management hints indicate again that an effective time manager is also a good temporal structure manipulator. The key strategies offered by the users for effective time management are (1) plan in advance, (2) prioritize tasks, (3) control time, (4) stop procrastination, (5) understand temporal structure relationships, and (6) communicate and coordinate time with others. These strategies are interpreted from a temporal structure point of view respectively in this chapter.

This chapter also discloses users’ difficulties with current electronic time management tools. In essence, users’ complaints can be transferred to a whole set of desired calendar tool features, such as additional functions to better integrate current calendar tools with other existing tools (e.g., project management...
tools), to provide more flexibility for scheduling more complicated activities (e.g., editable event templates), to effectively synchronize calendar tools with various devices (e.g., unified operating systems for different type of devices), to behave more intelligently as a time management advisor, to offer more convenient collaborative calendaring features and so on.

This chapter therefore describes additional stories and evidence from individual users regarding their time management practices and their expectations on what ideal calendars or time management tools are needed.

**DY NAMIC TIME MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE**

At a workplace, either in a corporate or academic environment, people constantly juggle their due dates and prioritize their tasks to meet their deadlines. Many professionals’ work environments are dynamic, particularly when facing constant work requirement changes, unexpected interruptions, emergencies, and conflicting time demands. They need to effectively respond to increasingly more complex time demands and challenges for their work. They desire to be more capable of dealing with these dynamics and to get a better electronic calendar or time management tool for supporting their time management needs.

Evidently, everyone also has personal time demands to coordinate, for instance, parents coordinate kids’ school time. We cannot exclude this side of life, since personal life is also an important part of time that we need to manage. To effectively accommodate both work and life time demands, it is important to have a holistic understanding of time demands and requirements from both work and personal lives.

In the following section, some common practical time management hints are presented with rich personal stories. The personal time management strategies that users shared are consistent with the majority of time management techniques published in popular time management handbooks. The difference is that readers can learn useful techniques with rich stories from real users in this chapter.

**HINTS FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGER: A TEMPORAL STRUCTURE MANAGEMENT PROCESS**

Over seven hundred users responded to the time management survey. In addition to the main data set from survey question items (reported in Chapters 7-10), some data from open-ended questions were also collected in terms of users’ successful time management experiences. Although our sample pool was fairly large, the time management strategies or hints fall into a few categories, which are *plan in advance, prioritize tasks, control time, stop procrastination, understand temporal structure relationships*, and *communicate and coordinate time with others*.

In essence, these users’ time management hints from the additional data set are consistent with the major findings reported in Chapter 10, which indicate that an effective time manager is also a good temporal structure manipulator. We interpret the time management hints from a temporal structure perspective as follows. *Plan in advance* is regarded as a process of actively utilizing explicit and implicit temporal structures for managing users’ time. The majority of temporal structures used in planning are explicit temporal structures, for example, deadlines and appointments. *Prioritize tasks* is a process of ranking temporal structures based upon the task importance and urgency levels. Priorities vary dramati-