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to main
qualifications!

Managing Time



Learning Made Simple

Corinne Leech



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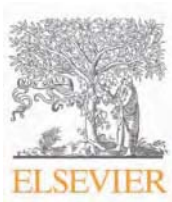
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Corinne Leech



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Introduction

'I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound that they make as they fly by.'

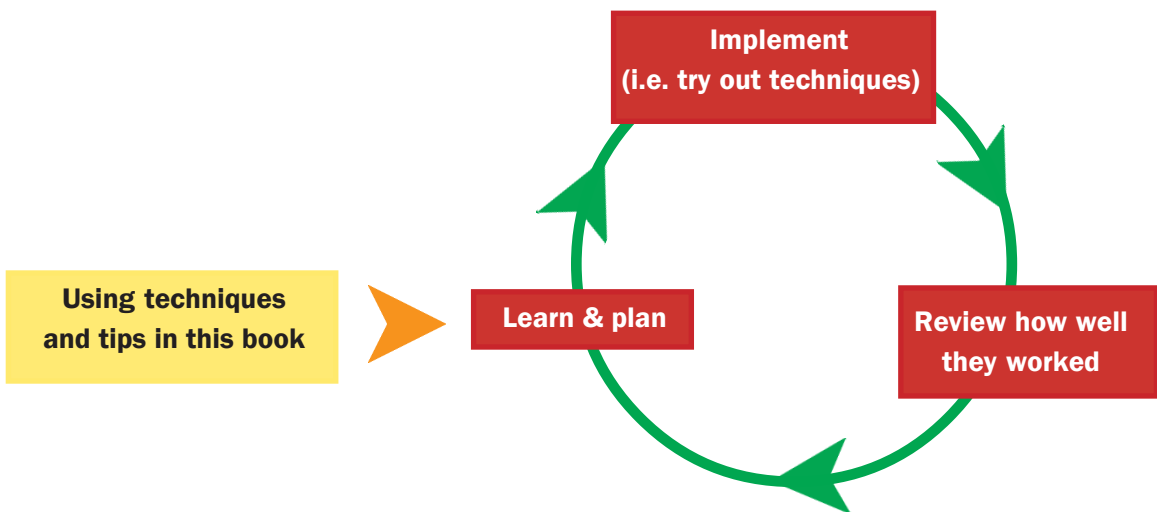
Douglas Adams

People who manage their time effectively achieve more. They are also likely to feel less stressed; more in control.

Improving the way you manage your time can significantly improve your sense of well-being. It gives you the potential to:

- ◆ Do what you already do, but better
- ◆ Free up some time to do other things.

In a nutshell, actively managing your time brings lots of benefits. But getting to be a good time manager takes effort. Just like any other skill you need to develop it.



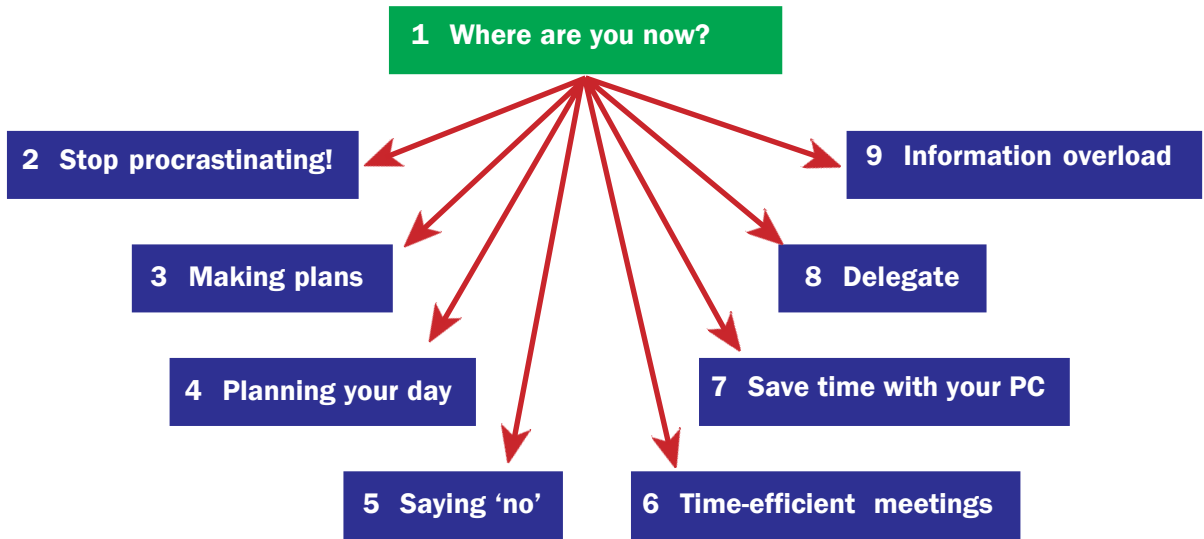
It's about planning changes, trying them out and then reviewing how effective they were at helping you manage your time. Everyone is unique and a technique that works wonders for one person will be a non-starter for someone else.

How to use the book

The book has nine chapters. The first, 'Where are you now?' gives you the opportunity to take stock by identifying:

- ◆ Where you should be spending your time
- ◆ How you are spending your time
- ◆ Your time management pitfalls.

The remaining chapters explore a variety of techniques for improving the way you manage your time.



There are a number of approaches you could take with this book.

- 1** Start at the beginning and systematically work through, identifying time management tips and techniques which will be helpful to you as you go along.
- 2** You may have a particular pitfall that you want to remedy immediately. If so, go straight to that chapter. However, we strongly recommend that you then complete Chapter 1.
- 3** Turn to the list of time management tips on pages 112–113. There may be some you immediately want to try to give yourself some 'quick wins'. Again, we strongly recommend that you then complete Chapter 1.



Take note

Whichever route you use, allow for the fact that it will need an initial investment of 'thinking time' to work out exactly what changes you are going to introduce.

Using a mentor

Telling someone else about something you intend to do often strengthens your commitment to doing it.

Therefore you may find it useful to identify a mentor to support you as you become more effective at managing your time. They don't have to be an expert at time management, just somebody who will:

- ◆ Listen to you and your plans for managing your time more effectively.
- ◆ Be interested in your progress, i.e. what did or didn't work.
- ◆ Encourage you to continue, or try different approaches.

Before you start

Spend a few minutes thinking through the benefits of becoming better at managing your time.

- ◆ What do you hope to achieve?
- ◆ By when?
- ◆ How much time are you willing to invest in reading and planning?

Reaping the benefits from changing your behaviour requires a commitment in terms of time and effort. This applies equally to time management as it does to any other sort of behaviour. There's no alternative.



Take note

Time invested in improving your time management can be one of the best investments you ever make.

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1 Where are you now?

Introduction	2
How should you spend your time?	3
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Introduction

Time management is about making best use of time. You can't expand the number of hours available; you can simply use them more effectively. Inevitably there comes a point when even the best time manager can't get through what has to be done. Think of it as 'saturation point'. The problem is that you can feel as if you've reached saturation point when in fact what's needed is better time management. It's very easy to miss underlying causes and habits which make you feel stressed and run out of time.

This chapter begins by taking you right back to analysing how you should be spending your time. It's about assessing how much time you should be allocating to achieving the key outcomes of your role. It sets the framework for how you should be spending your time. An analysis of how you are actually spending your time can then be used to:

- ◆ Check that you are spending your time doing the right things, i.e. what's important to your job role
- ◆ Identify your time wasters and management pitfalls.



Jenny is now taking touch-typing lessons for her left foot in the hope of reaching saturation.

How should you spend your time?

I go into the office and I work just about non-stop. There's always admin to do, emails to respond to and then my manager often gives me extra projects to be involved in, usually because I've got the experience from my previous job to contribute. To be honest, I know I'm here to _____ but I don't get much quality time to spend on it.

The gap could be filled by almost any type of employee from a administrative assistant to a chief executive. It's easy to get lost in day-to-day activity and forget why you're there, i.e. what the organisation is paying you to do and how you should be allocating your time.

It helps to have a clear focus of:

- ◆ The type of activities you should be doing, and
- ◆ The percentage of your time you spend on them.

It's about identifying your key results areas.

This chapter will take up to 20 minutes to complete. By the end you will have highlighted what you *should* be spending your time doing. The question you then need to answer is, 'Have I got my priorities right?'



Tip

If you have a role profile, rather than a job description, for your job you will find it useful to refer to it as you work through this chapter.

What is your role purpose?

Why was your job created? What does your organisation pay you to do?
For most jobs you should be able to capture your purpose in a sentence.



Tip

Always start a role purpose with a verb, e.g. to supervise, manage, lead, deliver. Follow the verb by an object, i.e. to: Supervise what? Manage what? And this should usually be followed by a purpose, i.e. in order to do what?

Some examples:

To provide professional recruitment advice and assistance to line managers and contribute to the development of the service.

Recruitment HR officer

To contact businesses and recruit volunteers to take part in fundraising events.

Fundraising events canvasser

To manage, review and deliver best-value environmental services.

Environmental officer

To lead on all aspects of the organisation's strategic, operational and financial management.

Chief executive



Tip

You may already have your job purpose defined in your job description. If so, check to see that it is still current.

Identifying your key results areas

Key results areas = main areas in which the organisation wants you to achieve results.

Your next step is to ask yourself what are the **main areas** in which the organisation wants you to achieve results.

Key results areas

The Recruitment HR Officer quoted above has these key results areas:

Purpose: 'To provide professional recruitment advice and assistance to line managers and contribute to the development of the service'

1 Advise and support line managers

Tasks include:

- ➔ Placing adverts with external agencies
- ➔ Providing telephone advice
- ➔ Giving feedback to candidates
- ➔ Shortlisting, interviewing.

2 Service development activities

Tasks include:

- ➔ Trial new selection materials
- ➔ Research poor response rates
- ➔ Analyse complaints and make recommendations.

3 Data generation and analysis

- ➔ Quarterly recruitment reports

4 Training

- ➔ Assisting with recruitment course
- ➔ Coaching new members of personnel team.

A Chief Executive's key areas of responsibility may look something like this:

Purpose: To lead on all aspects of the organisation's strategic, operational and financial management

1 Organisational strategy

2 Research and information analysis

3 Internal and external communication

4 Business development and funding

5 Operational management



Tip

Don't think in terms of tasks you carry out. Instead identify the main areas you have responsibility for. You will probably find that you spend most of your time in one or two key results areas.

Allocating time

Once you have listed the areas, then allocate the percentage of time over a typical week that you think you should be spending on each area. For example:

Purpose: To lead on all aspects of the organisation's strategic, operational and financial management

	Approximate percentage of time
1. Organisational strategy	30%
2. Research and information analysis	20%
3. Internal and external communication	15%
4. Business development and funding	30%
5. Operational management	5%

Percentage of time in a typical week or month

Activity

Identify:

- ◆ Your role purpose
- ◆ The key results areas within it
- ◆ The percentage of time which you feel should be allocated to each area.

At this stage it may be valuable to check with your line manager whether you share the perception of your role. It can provide a useful starting point for a discussion about what your priorities should be.

Activity

Do you think that you are balancing your time correctly against your key results areas?

You will probably be able to spot any major mismatches instantly.

I realised I'm spending huge amounts of time on day-to-day activities when part of my role is to develop the service. For example, 20% of my time should be spent on development whereas in reality it has dropped to more like 5%, if that.

NHS manager

I was getting frustrated that I was constantly having to respond to phone calls, new issues, etc. I'd go into the office with completing a report as number one priority and then get sidetracked. However, when I identified my

key results areas it became obvious that looking after operational issues was the key part of my role and justified about 70% of my time. Knowing that meant I felt more relaxed about it always taking priority and scheduled in predicted 'quiet times' in the week for report writing.

Shipping manager

If so, your two main options are:

- 1 Adjust the balance yourself or
- 1 Use your completed analysis to form the basis of a discussion with your line manager.

Your perception of your key results areas may be mismatched or some delegating and reallocating of responsibilities may be needed.

- ◆ If you need to re-adjust your balance of activities, Chapter 4 looks at planning and prioritising your day-to-day activities.
- ◆ You may need to negotiate what you take on, or even to say 'no' to some tasks. Chapter 5 explores how to structure these types of conversations.
- ◆ You will probably need to keep a time log to identify less obvious mismatches between how you are and how you should be spending your time. See the next section



Take note

Make sure your balance of activities is right. If how you spend your time is out of kilter with how you should be spending your time, you're likely to constantly feel under pressure.

How are you spending your time?

There's only one way to find out: keep a time log. It will give you:

An accurate picture of how you are spending your time

You can then



Identify your time management pitfalls

You can then



Take action

Keeping a time log can seem very tedious. However, if you are serious about developing your time management skills it's an essential first step.

What is a time log?

A time log is a record of how you are spending your time over a 'typical' few days. At regular intervals you have to record what you have been doing.

To keep a time log you will need to set up a form in advance.



Tip

You may find it quicker to print out your form and keep a paper copy on your desk rather than having to open up a computer document each time.

It can be helpful to categorise how you spend your time by your key results areas on your log. For example, the time log of the Recruitment HR Officer could look like the sample opposite.

By keeping a time log over a few days, preferably for a week, the HR Officer would be able to analyse it and identify:

- ◆ If she was balancing her time in the right proportions to achieve her key result areas.
- ◆ Whether she was doing things outside her key result areas.

		Key results areas				
		Advise and support line managers	Service development	Data generation and analysis	Training	Not a key result area
Time	Activity					
09.00 – 09.30	Report for Martin/answered query from Bristol	✓				
09.30 – 10.00	Training course packs/responded to email	✓			✓	
10.30 – 11.00	Return sheets for Peter					✓
11.00- 11.30	Continued with training packs/phone calls	✓			✓	
11.30 – 12.00	Continued with training packs/phone calls	✓			✓	
12.00 – 12.30	Chat to Sandy					✓

Time logs enable you to reflect on how you used your time and identify ‘time wasters’, for example:

- ◆ Spending 20 minutes looking for a file
- ◆ Attending a meeting where the time taken couldn’t be justified by its outputs
- ◆ Spending time on activities which should have had a lower priority.

Activity

Keep a time log, ideally for a working week or at least until you have established a clear pattern of your daily work routine. It can be either electronic or paper-based. However, you may find a paper version easier to keep updated throughout the day. Keep it on a clipboard, with a cover over it if you prefer to keep things confidential!


A sample time log is given on the next page. The columns on the right-hand side will help with analysis. This is explained in the next section.

Sample time log

Select appropriate interval,
e.g. half hour slots

Helps to analyse how much
of the day you can control

		Key results area					Analysis		
Time	What did you do?	1	2	3	4	5	Planned	Unplanned	Comments
	Notes recording how you spent time								
		Optional but it helps you to analyse if you are balancing your time against different outcomes appropriately							You need to comment critically on how you use your time throughout a day to be able to build a comprehensive picture of how well, or otherwise, you are spending your time.



Take note

Once you’ve compiled a time log, you need to analyse it. But don’t start analysing it until you’ve finished – aim for a typical week.

Analysing a time log

Set aside half an hour so you can give quality thinking time to this.

Step 1

Calculate the amount of time spent on each of your key result areas. Have you got the balance right? It's easy for one area to get overlooked, e.g. strategy development being 'lost' due to the demands of day-to-day activities.

It's essential that we evolve our consultancy services. However, the team tends to get so caught up in delivering on contracts that we don't have the time to sit back and plan on an on-going basis. At least 20% of my time should be on strategy but in practice it's about 5%. I had to readjust the balance.

Ben, service manager in voluntary sector

Every time I had to deliver a training course I felt out of control – basically because I hadn't put enough preparation time into it. I had to make more effective use of my time in other areas to free up more on the training side.

Clare, personnel officer, local government

Balancing your time so that you spend the right amount on each of your key results areas is essential

Step 2

Analyse your time log and highlight:

- ◆ Planned activities (i.e. those you knew you were going to do)
- ◆ Unplanned activities (i.e. things that cropped up, e.g. a telephone interruption, a chat, doing a job for someone).

This will give you an indication of the amount of time you can control. However, there may be scope to increase the amount of time you can directly control.



Tip

If all your time is planned and can be linked to the right balance of key result areas, then you may well have reached 'saturation point'. If not, there will be room to improve the way you manage your time.

Step 3

Now take a critical look at how you spent your time. In the comments column highlight instances when, on reflection, you didn't make the most effective use of your time. For example, did you:

- ☐ Put things off that you don't like doing?
- ☐ Get distracted?
- ☐ Do jobs yourself that you could delegate?
- ☐ Spend time doing things which didn't contribute to your key results areas/wasted time?
- ☐ Spend too much time on some tasks (e.g. laboured over writing a report because you're not sure what's expected of you)?
- ☐ Allow yourself to be interrupted, e.g. breaking off to check emails?
- ☐ Spend too long in meetings?
- ☐ Waste time looking for things?

Activity

What are your main time management pitfalls? What do you want to get better at doing or not do at all? Try to be as precise as possible.

As a result of identifying your time management pitfalls, you may immediately be able to identify changes that you want to make. If so, start an Action Plan. A sample layout is given opposite.

Alternatively your analysis may highlight a need to move straight to a particular chapter.




Take note

Don't assume you know where your time management problems are. Keeping a time log is the best starting point to begin dealing with these problems.

Summary

- ◆ Identify the key results areas of your job. These should be the focus of your activity.
- ◆ Work out how your time should be balanced between your key results areas.
- ◆ Make sure the way that you spend your time reflects your key results areas.
- ◆ Keep a time log. It's the most effective way to understand the way you manage your time and to identify the pitfalls.

Action plan

What am I going to do differently?	When am I going to start?	When will I review how successful it has been?
<div><div><p>Identify precise actions. For example:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Keep a master to-do list in an A4 book.✓ Only turn on email alerts at the start and end of the day (8.30–9.00 and after 4.30).✓ Delegate responsibility for organising event to Aaron.<p>DON'T put things like:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Must get better at planning✗ Try to do things as they come in rather than letting them build up.<p>They are too vague and just won't get done!</p></div></div>		

2 Stop procrastinating!

Understanding why you do it 15

Is it all down to motivation? 19

Identifying what's in it for you 22

Check your attitude 25

Understanding why you do it

‘What is it that creates an overwhelming urge to sort out the stationery cupboard instead of getting on with the monthly reports?’

Jamie, planning officer, local government

Procrastination, i.e. putting off doing things, is probably the most common pitfall. It can cause a range of problems. For example:

- 1 It wastes time. The time you should have spent doing the task you’re putting off is usually spent unproductively. It’s not as though you are merely postponing in preference to doing something equally productive.
- 2 It means you don’t leave enough time to do a job. Therefore it’s rushed and likely to be below standard.
- 3 It makes us feel annoyed, cross, guilty, frustrated. Procrastinating can result in a whole range of negative emotions.

So, why do we put things off? What can we do about it?

This chapter looks at:

- ◆ Some theories about what motivates us to do, or not do, things.
- ◆ Techniques to overcome putting things off.

Why we do it

The reasons why we put off doing things and leave them to the last minute are complicated. A lot is down to the complex mix of personality, life experiences and habit. If it’s causing you a problem, your first step is to try and work out why you do it.

Most people will put off tasks that they don’t like doing.

Activity

What tasks do you tend to put off? Why?

Procrastination is more enjoyable than revision.

Ed Cohen

However, it's worth digging under the surface to try and identify why you don't like doing them. For example, is it because:

- ◆ You don't know how to do the task?
- ◆ You aren't confident in your ability to do it?
- ◆ You don't know where to start?
- ◆ You're not convinced it's worth doing?
- ◆ You resent having to do it?

If any of these reasons underpin why you procrastinate, then you need to deal with the root cause.



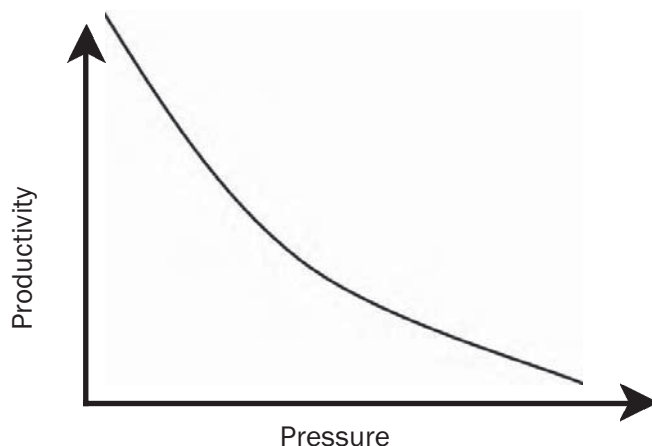
Take note

Fear of failure is a common reason for putting off doing things.

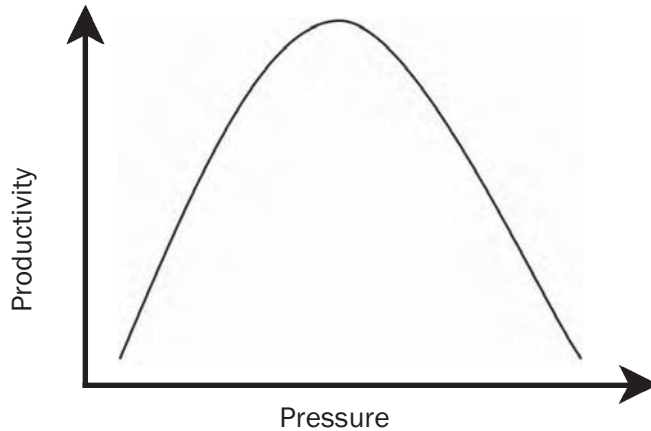
Pressure and productivity

Another common reason for putting things off until the last minute is because some people feel they work better, and faster, under pressure.

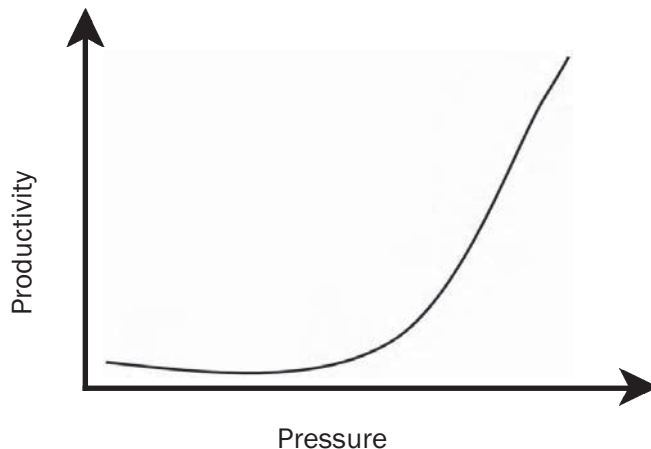
Different people react in different ways to increasing pressure. For example, the graph below shows someone who works best when there is little pressure. Once the pressure increases, productivity declines; panic sets in.



The second graph represents the 'norm'. If pressure is too low productivity is low. Productivity is at its greatest when the pressure is neither too little nor too much. Too much pressure and productivity rapidly declines.



This final graph represents people who increase the quality and quantity of their outputs by putting themselves under a great deal of pressure. Some people thrive on this; for others it's an uncomfortable place to be but they just happen to operate at their optimum capacity under those conditions.



Activity

How is your productivity affected by pressure? Do any of the graphs accurately represent it?

Time is like money, the less we have of it to spare the further we make it go.

Josh Billings

Where people's behaviour is concerned, things are rarely straightforward. You may decide that on some occasions you react to pressure in one way but when other factors come into play, you behave differently.



Key point

If you work best under pressure then it's unlikely that you'll feel a need to change your behaviour. However, colleagues may need you to consider their preferred ways of working if they differ from yours.

Activity

Before you move on to the next section, identify a specific instance when you put off doing something to such an extent that it caused you a problem (other than just a degree of discomfort as you hurried to meet a deadline).

You will be asked to consider this example as you read the next section.

Is it all down to motivation?

Generally we do things because we are motivated. Motivation is the inner drive that makes us want to do things. If you are motivated it make doing things a lot easier. You become more focused and 'want' to get through your job list rather than finding it a burden. You work faster, get more satisfaction, achieve more.

So, what motivates you? And can you motivate yourself to do the things you put off doing?

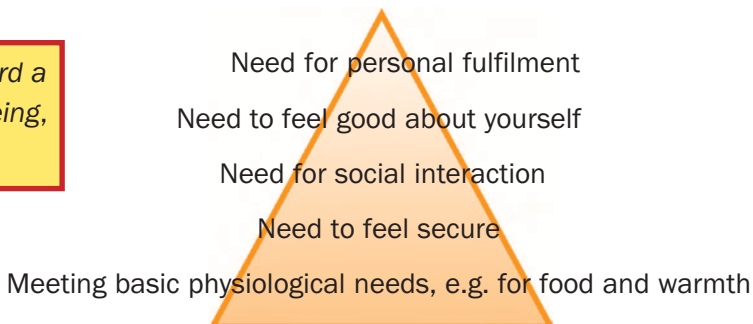
Maslow's theory of motivation

One theory of motivation has been put forward by Abraham Maslow. He identified that human beings have the following needs:

- ◆ Physiological needs (i.e. the need to maintain our bodies, for example, through food and water)
- ◆ The need to feel secure and safe from danger
- ◆ Social needs i.e. the need to feel we belong and are liked (e.g. by colleagues) and loved (e.g. by family)
- ◆ The need to feel good about yourself (i.e. positive self-esteem)
- ◆ The need to feel satisfaction and fulfilment from personal achievements.

Maslow saw these different needs as a hierarchy.

A. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Wiley, 1998



As human beings we are motivated to take action to meet these various needs, generally starting at the bottom of the hierarchy and moving upwards.

Maslow in practice

Most important is making sure that you have enough resources, usually in the form of earnings, to eat and drink, and keep warm and dry. After that you focus on meeting your need to feel secure. You can then turn to your social needs, and a sense of belonging with the people around you. Self-esteem (i.e. feeling good about yourself), the next level of the hierarchy, can be boosted by people's reactions to you, e.g. receiving praise or recognition. Finally, in Maslow's terminology, your need for self-actualisation can be met by achieving a personal goal, e.g. climbing a mountain, gaining a qualification, developing a new skill.

Activity

What tasks do you do willingly, never looking for excuses not to do them? In terms of Maslow's hierarchy, why? Now review the example of when you have put off doing something that you identified at the end of the last section. Would completing the activity have led to any of Maslow's needs being met?

Usually we do things because of one or more of these reasons:

- ◆ We enjoy them (meets need for personal fulfilment).
- ◆ They bring praise, reward or recognition (helps build positive self-esteem).
- ◆ It results in enjoyable interactions with other people (meeting our social needs).
- ◆ We have to, it's part of the job and why we're paid.

Putting things off is often due to:

- ◆ Not being able to see the link between doing the task and meeting one or more of the needs identified by Maslow, or
- ◆ A barrier, creating a fear factor about getting started.

Identifying the link

It can sometimes help to identify the benefits of completing a task. For example:

- ◆ If I get the figures done by the end of the week, I will feel great and it will help the finance department

- ◆ If I carry out a in-depth analysis for the proposal, I will write a much stronger proposal and will be rewarded, e.g. receive praise or recognition, if we get the job.

Overcoming barriers

People often convince themselves that it's better to fail because they didn't or couldn't put the time in, rather than fail because we couldn't do it. Fear of failure can be a huge barrier to getting things done.



Tip

If there are barriers which are preventing you from feeling motivated, you have to address them.

I hated making presentations, so I'd put off any preparation until the last minute. With no time to prepare my presentations were always poor and my confidence just about zero. In the end I decided to take action. I went on a two-day presentation skills course. It helped a little. However, when I got back I asked a colleague for help who I thought was particularly good at making presentations. It turned out she hated doing them but managed to put a lot of effort into preparation. We met a week before to go through the planning. I got the outline and then worked on it. We met again for a practice run-through. Her feedback was really helpful and boosted my confidence no end. However the fact that I had prepared made such a difference when it came to the presentation. I felt in control and it went really well. In a way I'm looking forward to the next one. I know I can do it.

Hannah, marketing manager

Activity

Are there any times when you procrastinate because you do not have confidence in your abilities? If so, what steps could you take to remedy the situation?

Enlisting the support of a mentor can be extremely helpful. An alternative is simply to acknowledge why you are procrastinating and take some steps to boost your abilities. Ask for help or develop your skills, anything that begins to deal with the underlying cause.

Identifying what's in it for you

Tried and tested techniques to combat procrastination include:

- ◆ Breaking jobs down into achievable tasks
- ◆ Rewarding yourself for achieving goals.

Another theory of motivation, called 'expectancy theory', is helpful to explain why they work.

Expectancy theory

At the heart of expectancy theory is the concept that we do things because we expect the results of our actions to be beneficial. In the 1960s, Victor Vroom used this basic principle to develop a model to explain how people are motivated at work.

He introduced two terms:

- ◆ Valence = How much satisfaction you'll get from a particular outcome
- ◆ Expectancy = how likely it is that you'll get the results.

Motivation to do something is a product of expectancy and valence.

Expectancy	×	Valence	=	Motivation
I can produce a really good report		It will be good to get recognition for this		Motivated to write the report
E = 1	×	V = 1		

In this example:

$$E \times V = M$$

$$1 \times 1 = 1$$

However, suppose you felt that you didn't have the skills to write a good report. Your expectancy that you'd produce a decent report would be in doubt and therefore the strength of the driving force to get down to writing it could disappear totally.

$$E \times V = M$$

$$0 \times 1 = 0$$



Take note

Vroom's theory is that motivation results from recognising the potential benefits of doing something and knowing you have a good chance of realising them.

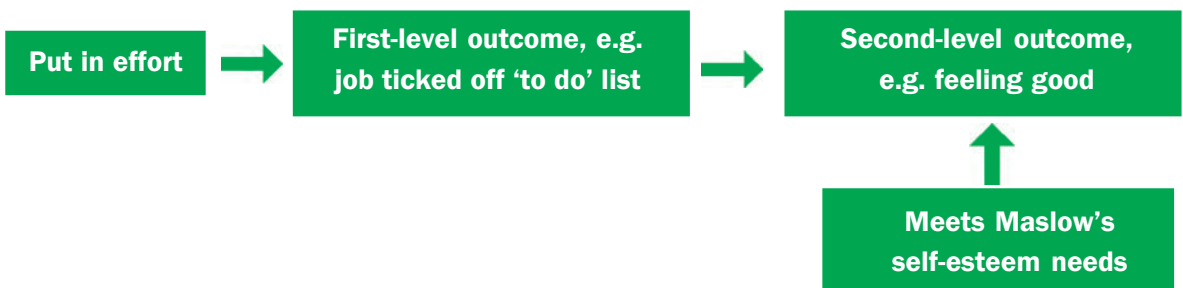
Using expectancy theory to overcome procrastination

Vroom recognised that there could be two levels of outcome when doing a task:

- ◆ First-level outcomes which are the direct result of effort put in (i.e. job ticked off job list).
- ◆ Second-level outcomes which link to satisfaction.

Although the first-level outcome may not itself provide personal benefits, knowledge that there is a high likelihood of it leading to a second-level outcome should provide the necessary motivation.

So the process would look like this:



Expectancy theory highlights why it's good to:

- ◆ Break down jobs into smaller tasks. It makes the job more manageable and you can get satisfaction from making progress
- ◆ Make a list so that you can cross off each job as it is completed.
- ◆ Build in rewards for having completed tasks e.g. a break, doing something you really want to do.

Activity

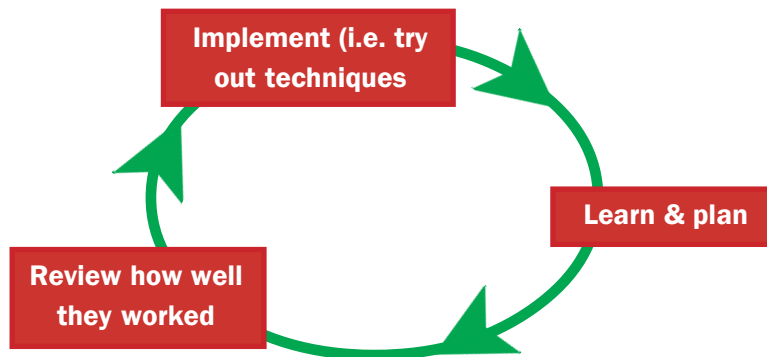
Identify an occasion when you put off doing something.

Why did you procrastinate?

Do you think it would have been helpful to have:

- ◆ Identified the benefits of completing the task before you started it?
- ◆ Broken it down into smaller tasks?
- ◆ Given yourself rewards for making progress through the tasks?

Remember that being a good time-manager takes effort. Just like any other skill you need to:



An important stage in the process is reflecting on what you've done in the past and identifying ways to improve in the future.

Check your attitude

Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right.

The power of positive thinking has long been acknowledged as a major force in how successful you are in life. If you believe you will procrastinate then you will. If you make up your mind that you won't, then the chances are you won't.

Activity

Consider these two mind sets towards putting together a business case to develop a service.

- 1 There's no point. There's no money in the budgets. Any way it's too difficult to try and predict what the market will be like in 12–18 months' time. We'll have a meeting and see what we can put together. Sandy can you try to set up a meeting by the end of the month?
- 2 We might just be able to do it if we present a strong enough case. First we need to find out exactly what they're looking for in a business case. Ralph, can you do that by the end of the week? George, can you start digging through our figures for the last couple of years. Sandy, can you set up a meeting by the end of the week? Clear diaries if necessary.

Which one is more likely to achieve funding?

The first mind set will lead nowhere; the second may not get the funding but:

- ◆ It certainly has a greater chance than the first.
- ◆ It injects excitement and enthusiasm into the team.
- ◆ It provides a learning experience. If they don't succeed this time, the team will be better equipped to succeed next time.

People who have a can-do approach to life tend to be better at seeing the bigger picture. In turn this means that they don't get bogged down in making decisions as to whether or not to do something; they just get on with it. Observing and talking to people who exude a positive attitude is a good way of picking up tips about time management.

Activity

How would you describe your attitude? Is your glass half empty or half full?

Identify someone you know who has a positive attitude. Ask them how they:

- ◆ Rate their time management skills
- ◆ Deal with jobs they don't like doing or don't want to do.



Tip

Make sure any discussions don't descend into sharing how 'good' you are at leaving things until the last minute. It may be comforting in the short term but won't actually help.

It's easy to get into the habit of being negative and believing everything is an uphill struggle, particularly if you're surrounded by people who are generally downbeat. Approaching a day with a positive attitude makes everything seem easier. It saves spending lots of time and energy struggling to summon up the will to get something done.

Summary

- ◆ Work out why you put things off. Identifying the root cause means you can try to eliminate it or at least lessen its impact.
- ◆ Some people work better under pressure; for others increasing pressure causes too much stress and productivity declines – or stops.
- ◆ Get to know how your productivity reacts to pressure.
- ◆ Motivation is the inner drive that makes us want to do things. Understanding what motivates you can be helpful to stop you putting things off.
- ◆ Strategies for reducing the times you procrastinate include:
 - ❖ Reminding yourself of the benefits of getting the job done
 - ❖ Identifying and addressing any barrier
 - ❖ Breaking a job down into manageable tasks
 - ❖ Adopting a can-do/want-to-do/will-do type of attitude.

3 Making plans

Planning and time management 28

The case for planning 30

Finding out the facts 35

Writing a plan 38

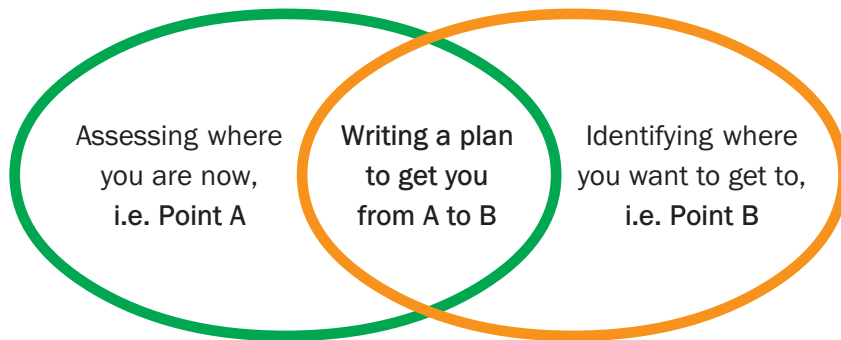
Planning and time management

Fail to plan, plan to fail.

This old military adage gives a stark warning. But a similar sentiment can be applied to organisations and to your personal life.

What does planning involve?

Planning involves:



Assessing where you are now and identifying where you want to get to can be tackled in any order or simultaneously.

In this organisation we're given very specific targets; we're told where we have to get to and it's non-negotiable. What we have to focus on is how we're going to get there using the resources we've got.

Call centre manager

Our team delivers a service to older people in the community. We have to take careful stock of all our resources, including volunteer capacity, and then decide what we can offer in the next year. Our business plan has got to be realistic. If we can't deliver what we promise, we can end up letting a lot of people down.

Charity services officer

My manager and I agree an objective. For example, it may be around running a road show or an event. I then have to plan how I'm going to do it. It boils down to a list of actions – what I've got to do and when. Then I've got to stick to it. The problem is that I'm implementing lots of different plans at the same time, and then there's the day-to-day routine work on top of that

Personnel officer

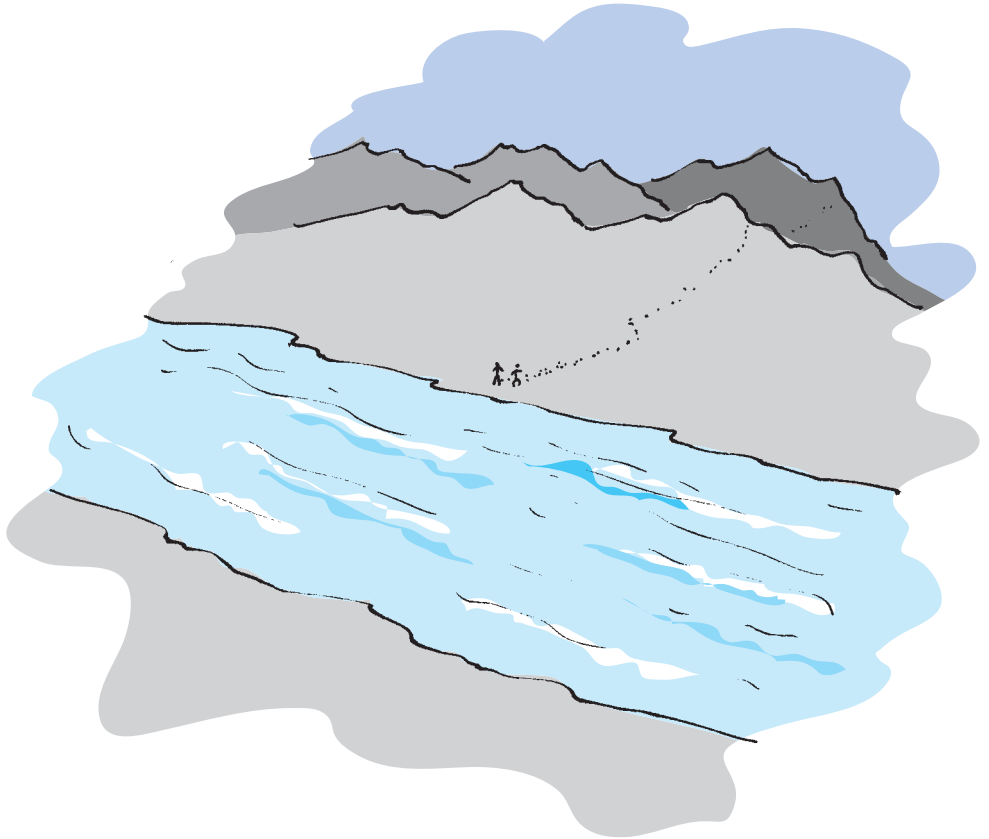
Planning and control

What's important is that:

- ◆ Any part of an organisation has a realistic operational plan to get them from A to B
- ◆ You have plans to achieve your work objectives.

Planning gives you a blueprint for being in control. Of course, circumstances often dictate that plans have to change. That's no problem. But not having a plan means you will be buffeted by whatever comes your way. In other words, you lose control.

Planning is the prerequisite of effectively organising your time. There's little value in managing your time on a day-to-day basis if you haven't got a clear idea of where you're heading. You'd be in danger of expending a lot of effort for little return.



'In fairness to the cartographer, there is a footnote which mentions difficult crossings after rain'

The case for planning

Planning with no action is futile; action without a plan is a nightmare.

Japanese proverb

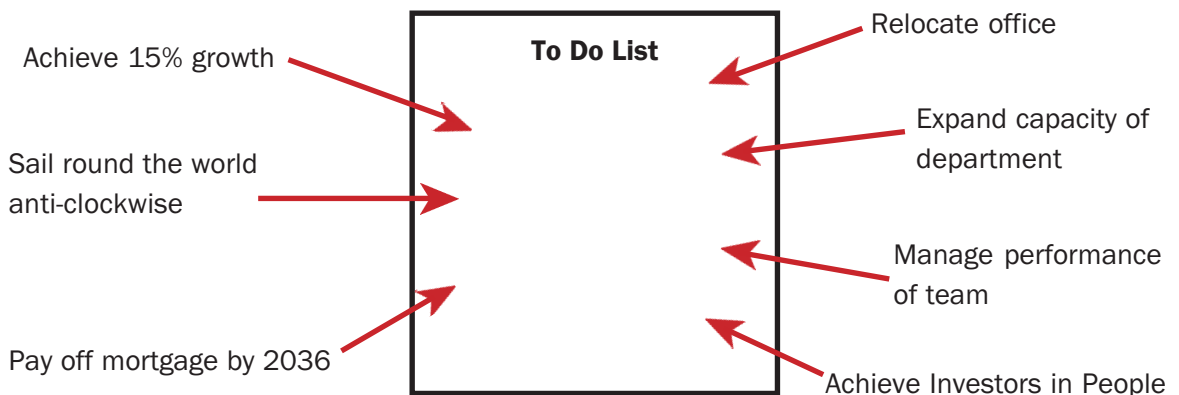
The main reason people give for not planning is that they don't need to. At times that can be fine. We can sort out in our heads what needs to be done and when. At other times it's anything but fine. There are too many things to juggle or time deadlines to meet. It means that whatever you're doing has to be paced to make sure you fit it in. Sometimes you'll be faced with both - lots of things to juggle, and with deadlines.

Planning and time management

Planning allows you to:

- ◆ Set goals or objectives
- ◆ Establish clear milestones - what need to be done by when
- ◆ Identify and maximise the use of resources
- ◆ Identify potential risks
- ◆ Monitor progress, and take corrective action if need be
- ◆ Evaluate and learn for the future.

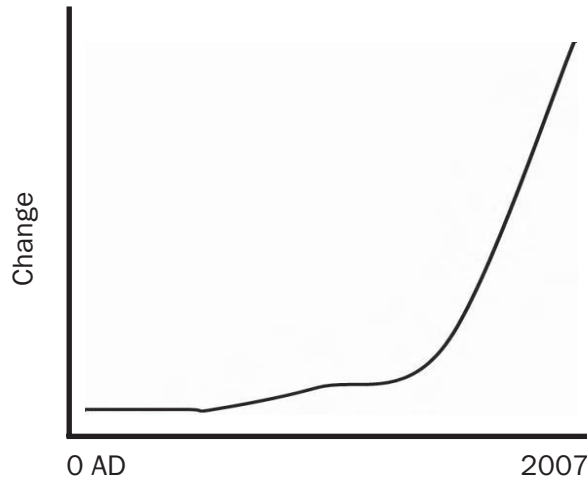
The effect of all these benefits is to enable you to achieve a successful outcome. In terms of managing your time, planning ensures that you do the right task at the right time.



These benefits apply to planning in your personal life as well as at work. For example, planning how to achieve a qualification, an extension to your house or your next career move should follow the same principles as planning an organisational re-structure or the development of a new service.

Why organisations need to plan

We live in an age in which things are changing at an ever-increasing rate.



The exponential rate of change

Activity

What changes have affected your organisation over the last 2–3 years?

Growing markets, shrinking markets, new competitors, takeovers, mergers, competition, technology, labour supply, and environmental issues have had a huge impact on organisations in recent years.

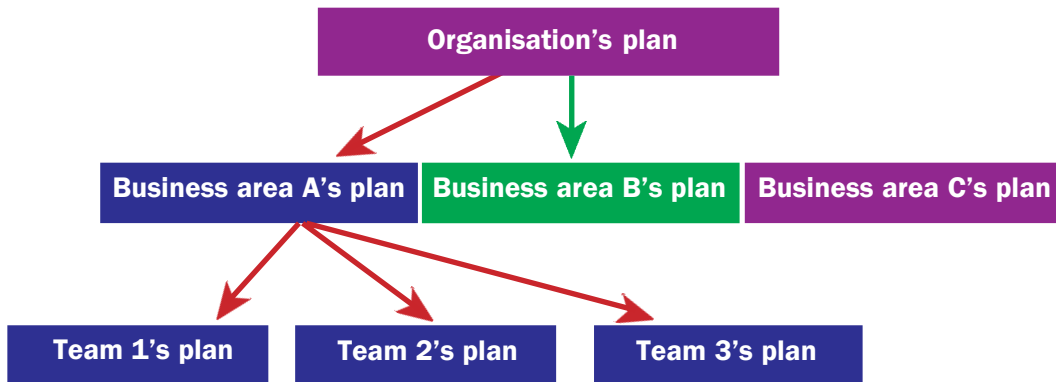
It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

Charles Darwin

Organisations have to continually plan to meet fresh challenges. If they don't they won't survive. Some organisations have to go as far as completely reinventing themselves if the demand for their original product or service declines or disappears. For example, the company Kodak has to respond to their core business, i.e. the production of film, being superseded by digital cameras.

Levels of planning

Planning has to take place at all levels of the organisation. For example, all organisations will have a strategic plan which sets out what they aim to achieve over the next few years. Further plans are then made for each area of the business to make sure individual divisions of the organisation contribute towards the strategic plan. The bigger the organisation the more levels there are and the greater the challenge it is to get all parts working in unison.



Activity

Find out the process for planning in your organisation.

- ◆ Who makes the overall business or strategic plan for the organisation?
- ◆ How are plans made for your service/department?
- ◆ How do the plans for your area connect to the overall business or strategic plan?

If you don't know, ask your manager. In most organisations it is the responsibility of managers to ensure that all employees understand:

- ◆ Where the organisation wants to get to.
- ◆ How they contribute.

Changes affecting you

Over the past five years you will have been affected by changes around you; either changes in the workplace or changes in your personal circumstances.

How you adapt to those changes is a matter of personal choice.

When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills

Chinese proverb

Your response will depend on your approach to life. If you tend to build walls then the chances are that you won't feel the need to plan. After all if you're going to put all your energies into trying to maintain the status quo, you won't see any need to plan for changing circumstances. However, if you accept the inevitability of change then you have a choice. Either you:

- ◆ Take control and plan how you will respond to the changes, or
- ◆ Get buffeted along, hoping you'll end up in a place that's right for you.

New Zealand at last!

I wanted to ride the length of New Zealand on an off-road motorbike. I was planning to do it by the time I was 30 but circumstances changed and I had commitments which made it impossible. The plan was shelved but not forgotten. I actually managed to do it last year. Things changed again and it became a possibility. I dusted off my plan and away I went, this time with my husband who wasn't factored into the original plan. I've always believed that, just because plans have to be changed, it doesn't mean it's not worth planning. You just have to be flexible and, if it's important to you, you'll get there in the end. Not having a plan is a bit like finding your way round without knowing where you want to end up. You might not like where you end up

Your attitude to planning

Some people hate planning. The idea of putting time aside to plan seems either:

- ◆ Like a waste of time, or
- ◆ A frightening prospect because they don't know how to do it.

Others love planning but then don't use the plan to guide their actions.

I couldn't believe it. I'd spent time planning how I was going to write up a report at the outset of the project. I then got to the report writing stage and started off on a completely different structure. It was only when I realised it wasn't working that I dug out my original plan. The time I could have saved if only I'd done that in the first place.

Then there is the pitfall of spending so much time and energy planning that you reach the point of 'paralysis through analysis'.

Activity

Do you have a pitfall when it comes to planning? If so, what is it?

- ☐ I make good plans but then tend to ignore them.
- ☐ I make plans but they're not very good – so I tend to ignore them.
- ☐ I don't bother making plans because it seems a waste of time.
- ☐ I don't bother making plans because I don't know the best approach to take to planning.

The most common pitfall is viewing planning as a waste of time. To recap, a plan gives you a blueprint for being in control. It gives you direction and a clear objective to achieve. Having a plan gives the framework for deciding what you should be doing when, on a daily basis.



Take note

Planning is an essential prerequisite of managing your time effectively on a daily basis.

The other pitfalls are minor in comparison. They can all be remedied by developing your planning skills.

Finding out the facts

Any plan has to be grounded in reality. You have to:

- ◆ Have an accurate picture of the current situation
- ◆ Know what external influences are likely to have a bearing on the plan.

Suppose you wanted to plan a holiday. Included in building an accurate picture of the current situation would be knowledge of:

- ◆ Your budget
- ◆ The holiday preferences of people in the party
- ◆ Any time constraints.

External influences which might have a bearing could include:

- ◆ Areas of unrest that the Foreign Office recommends avoiding.
- ◆ Climate, e.g. it would be useful to be aware that camping in parts of Australia during July means that nightfall is around 6pm and daybreak 7am.

Standard techniques for structuring research include a:

- ◆ PESTLE analysis
- ◆ SWOT analysis.

They simply give you a framework for identifying the factors which will influence your plan.

PESTLE analysis

Research involves identifying the external influences which will have an impact on your plan. PESTLE is an acronym to remind you of the types of factors which might be relevant. It stands for:

- P** Political. This can mean policies brought in by the government, e.g. minimum wage or 'politics' regarding relationships, e.g. attitudes of customers.
- E** Economic, e.g. pricing of competitors' products, impact of taxes, level of inflation, trends in disposable income.

- S** Social, e.g. consequences of people working and living longer.
- T** Technological, e.g. capabilities of computers and software, new equipment generally.
- L** Legal, e.g. EU laws and regulations.
- E** Environmental, e.g. requirements around disposal of rubbish, recognition of carbon footprints.



Take note

It doesn't matter which letter a factor falls under – many could arguably sit under more than one. What's important is that you think about their impact.

The major pitfall of a PESTLE analysis is that it's often done as a quick flipchart exercise and then disregarded. In many situations identification of the PESTLE factors is only the start. Detailed research should then be carried out to identify the exact nature and likelihood of the impact.

Using the PESTLE principle

The acronym PESTLE aims to give a structure to your thinking. However it might be more useful, especially when planning in your personal life, to simply ask the question, 'what external influences might affect my plan?' List them and then research the details of the ones you think are particularly relevant.

Activity

Identify a plan that you need to write. Then think through the external factors which might have a bearing on your plan. List them and highlight the ones you feel need further research.



Tip

Don't be constrained by the PESTLE acronym. Use it if it's useful; make your own framework if it's not.

SWOT analysis

SWOT stands for: S – Strengths, W – Weaknesses, O – Opportunities, T – Threats.

Focus on:

- ◆ Internal factors for strengths and weaknesses (i.e. those which either the organisation, or in the case of personal planning, you, have control over). For example: budget, or lack of it; skilled people, or lack of them; culture.
- ◆ External factors for Opportunities and Threats (This is about categorising the PESTLE factors you have already identified into those which present opportunities and those which pose threats).

Activity

Choose something you need to plan. It may be in your personal life or at work.

What do you see as the SWOT factors which will impact on the plan you are writing?

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats



Take note

By identifying the SWOT factors you will have highlighted the factors which could potentially affect your plan.

Writing a plan

A plan has two major components:

- ◆ What you want to achieve
- ◆ How you will achieve it.

What do you want to achieve?

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care where.

Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll

If it doesn't matter what you achieve then it really doesn't matter what's in your plan. However, if there are things you want to achieve it makes sense to identify them upfront – before you start planning.

Ask yourself, 'What does success look like?'

Make sure your response is SMART:

- ◆ **Specific**, e.g. something that defines clearly what the outcome will be.
- ◆ **Measurable**, i.e. you can measure or tell when you have achieved it.
- ◆ **Agreed**. This is important when other people are involved. Other people may need ownership of the outcome.
- ◆ **Realistic** – after consideration of your SWOT factors.
- ◆ **Timebound** – you have a target date for completion.



Tip

Use the acronym SMART to shape the definition of what you want to achieve, i.e. your objective.

Activity

Which of the following objectives meet the S. M. T. criteria of the SMART acronym?

- ☐ To raise £10,000 by the end of March.
- ☐ To improve the monthly operations report.

The first objective is Specific, Measurable and Timebound. We can't make a judgement on whether it has been agreed or if it is realistic.

The second objective is vague. It provides a general aim. The following examples illustrates how it could be translated into terms which would be far more likely to be achieved.

SMARTening objectives

Emma is an operations manager with the monthly task of preparing the company's operations report for the board meeting. The task involves collating and summarising all the department reports and providing some analysis and comment. It always seems to be a rush job the day before the meeting and as it is read out, Emma always notices where it could be better. Therefore she sets the following objectives:

- ◆ Complete draft report 2 days prior to meeting
- ◆ Allocate 3 hours to hone and edit report before presenting it at meeting.

Activity

Building on from your SWOT analysis in the previous section, think about what you want to achieve.



Tip

Always start planning by setting yourself outcomes which meet the SMART criteria.

How will you get there?

To answer this you have to know **what** has to be done by **when** to achieve your objectives. But there are often other factors to consider, such as resources and risks, before you can get to that detail.

Resources

Resources can include equipment, people, overheads, anything you need for your objectives to be achieved. It usually boils down to 'costs' and therefore any plan should be costed accurately. For example:

Planning to achieve

Emma, the operations manager in the previous scenario, has 12 managers sending her reports. The company has merged with several others during the last 6 years and the reports are all different in structure and content. Some are sent by email and others arrive as hard copy. She recognises the need for a standard report form, some new software and training. She costs out the improvements to the reports as follows:

Costs	Method (Estimate/Actual)	Unit cost	Number	Value (£)
Activity:				
Design standard report form and spreadsheet	Estimate	Day rate at cost	Half day	88
4 managers require updated PCs and email link	Aactual	£690	4	2,760
One-on-one training session (assume 2 hrs per manager)	Estimate	Hour rate at cost	24	888
Subtotal				3,736



Tip

Always cost your plans. You may sometimes have to estimate. Make sure your estimates are based on the best information available and clearly explained.

Risks

If anything can go wrong, it will – Murphy's Law

Things can go wrong. The better prepared you are if they do, the better your ability to achieve the objectives. Carrying out a simple risk analysis can help you think through whether you need to consider contingencies. You need to:

- 1 List the potential risks.
- 2 Decide the probability of each using a scoring system.
- 3 Decide the scale of the negative impact it would have if it did happen, again using a scoring system.
- 4 Multiply the probability by the impact.
- 5 Decide if you need to take action to mitigate the risk.

Identifying risks

Using this scoring system, Emma explores the risks attached to the changes.

Risk	Probability 1 to 5	Impact 1 to 5	Risk factor
Department managers reject system	2	4	8
Will not get funding for IT equipment	1	5	5
Will not get training completed satisfactorily	2	3	6

Probability scale: 1 = will definitely not occur, 5 = will definitely occur

Impact scale: 1= very low impact, 5 = very high impact

Mitigating risks

When you've assessed the probability and impact of risks you then need to decide if you should take any action. It may be appropriate to:

- ◆ Change the way you do something to remove or lower the risk
- ◆ Accept that the risk is unavoidable
- ◆ Transfer the risk (e.g. take out insurance).

Thinking through the possibilities can ensure that your plan is much more robust and likely to succeed.

Managing risks

Emma used this guidance to help her decide if she needed to take action to mitigate risk. On that basis she decided to set up a meeting to consult the managers at an early stage to make sure she had their support and ownership.

1 to 5	green	OK
6 to 14	yellow	Warning – consider contingency plan
15 to 25	red	Alert – engage contingency or alternative plan

Working out the ‘what’ and ‘when’

This is the detail of the plan. The ‘what’ specifies the actions needed; the ‘when’ sets the timeframe. For example, the operations manager’s plan could be as follows:

Monthly Report Alignment Plan

Plan updated: 2/5

Task	Week ending					
	4 May	11 May	18 May	25 May	1 June	8 June
Obtain MD approval and Capex authorisation to commence project	Emma 2 nd					
Order IT equipment – 2-week delivery	Emma					
Design report format and spreadsheet using existing report as template	Jon 3 rd					
Consult with IT Manager to organise Department Heads have network connection and Microsoft Office	Emma 2 nd					
Chase up IT equipment with IT Manager and supplier		Emma				
Commence one-to-one training: Site A						
Commence one-to-one training: Site B						
Commence one-to-one training: Site C						
Check delivery and installation of new PCs			16 May			
Complete one-to-one training for 4 new PC owners						
Remind managers their first ‘new’ report due 5th June for my draft						
Complete report on 7 th ready for 8th						

The process of thinking through exactly what has to be done, and when, will highlight actions which need to be incorporated into your diary and 'job list'.



Tip

Move key dates from individual plans into your diary and onto your master job list.

Using software for planning

This is planning at its simplest. You may be involved in planning where many of the tasks are interdependent, e.g. one task can't start before another one has been completed.

There is a range of software available to help with complex planning including Critical Path Analysis and PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) programs. A similar technique is also sometimes referred to as 'network analysis'.

They all result in diagrams that you can use to show the sequence of activities (or tasks) and the relationship between them.

Activity

Spend some time reviewing how you plan. Ask yourself:

- ◆ When do I plan?
- ◆ How do I plan? Is it effective for my needs?
- ◆ Could I make improvements to the way I plan?
- ◆ How do I make sure that the actions which result from planning are used in managing my time on a daily basis?

Make sure you transfer any actions that you decide to make to an action plan.



Take note

There is a sample action plan on page 13.

Summary

- ◆ Planning is an essential prerequisite of managing your time effectively. It gives you a blueprint for being in control. You need to plan so that you identify what needs to be done. You can then manage your time to do it.
- ◆ Planning ensures that organisations and individuals can adapt to meet changing circumstances and goals.
- ◆ Any plan has to be grounded in reality. Find out about all the factors which will have a bearing on what you plan.
- ◆ Standard techniques for structuring research include carrying out a PESTLE and SWOT analysis.
- ◆ Set yourself SMART objectives. They will help you to achieve.
- ◆ When planning consider resource implications and potential risks.
- ◆ The end result of any planning exercise should be to identify what and when things need to happen.

4 Planning your day

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Three essential tools

In 1957, in his book *Parkinson's Law*, Cyril Parkinson commented that:

Work expands to fill the available time.

It's become referred to as Parkinson's Law and highlights the need for planning each day to include:

- ◆ What you want to achieve
- ◆ How long to spend on it.

For example, if you allocate two hours to write a report or do some filing, then the likelihood is that you will do it in that time frame. If you have no concept of how long you can allocate to it then you are likely to take it at a much slower pace and run the risk of being distracted on the way.

Of course, the best laid plans can sometimes go astray because unforeseen things happen. Therefore you have to remain flexible and be prepared to accommodate the unexpected whilst staying focused on what you wanted to achieve.



Take note

Good time management involves being focused and flexible.

You will have to develop a system that suits you. Some people like to be electronic, for example, using Microsoft Outlook to help them manage everything. But it doesn't suit everyone and a paper-based system using wall planners, job lists and diaries can be equally effective.

Three essential tools for managing your time are:

- ◆ A master job list
- ◆ A diary
- ◆ A plan for each day.



Tip

Develop a system to plan your time that suits you – then stick to it.

A master job list

This is a list of the tasks you need to complete. Make sure you:

- 1 Only ever have one job list (a common pitfall is to have bits of paper reminding you to do things in a variety of places, often combined with an electronic version).
- 2 Keep it updated by crossing off things you've done and adding to it as things crop up. Don't start a new list for each day but have a periodic review, e.g. at the end of each week, and bring forward anything that you have missed.
- 3 Break major tasks down into manageable tasks.
- 4 Transfer information to your diary, e.g. block out time for certain jobs. It's no use having a list but no realistic hope of getting jobs done to meet their deadlines.
- 4 Don't rely on your memory. When you have a new task, add it to your list.

A diary

Paper-based or electronic diaries are equally effective; it just depends on your preference. Make sure that when you make a commitment to do something on or by a particular day, it is recorded in your diary.

A plan for the day

At the start of each day, or at the close of the previous day, plan the outline for the day ahead. Planned events, such as meetings, may immediately take up some or most of your day. You have to decide how you can most productively use the rest of the day. Make sure that you have clear objectives. For example:

Tuesday 8th May:

Complete the end of month report

One-to-one meeting with Jon

Contact Matthew re costing plan

Complete timesheet and catch up on admin.

Then it's a matter of allocating when you will do each task and how long you intend to spend on it.

Your plan for the day doesn't have to be written. You may prefer to keep commitments which involve other people in a diary and work through a master list of jobs in the time that is under your complete control.



Key point

Always know what you want to achieve by the end of each day. Allocate timings but be prepared to be flexible. It's difficult to judge exactly how long something will take you to do. And don't plan activities for every minute of the day. It's a recipe for failure. Allocate some 'unplanned' time. You can then decide the best use of that time when it arrives.

Being realistic

For most people it can be rare to have a day where you get done exactly what you intended. It's mainly because it's hard to judge:

- ◆ How long things will take
- ◆ Whether you'll get any tasks emerging that need your attention immediately.

One way round is to try to be realistic but earmark tasks which you could do if time permits.

How you deal with the unknown is often a matter of personality. Some people over-estimate what they can get done and are happy to let outstanding tasks carry over. Others can get frustrated by a sense of under-achievement. If you're in the latter group then try to be realistic. Use the benefit of experience and don't set yourself unrealistic targets.



Tip

Beware of over-promising what you can deliver to people. For tasks which result in an output to customers, be realistic.

What should I do when?

Deciding what to do when involves prioritising. If you are unsure of which things to do first, or whether to do them at all, try using the following tools.

Urgency and importance matrix

Some things are urgent; there's a time limit of when they should be done by and the deadline is looming.

Then there are things that are important. They need 'quality time' for you to think things through.

Some jobs can be urgent and important at the same time. Usually, most important jobs will become urgent if they are not dealt with.

In order to prioritise what to do when, it can be useful to think of urgency and importance in terms of a matrix.

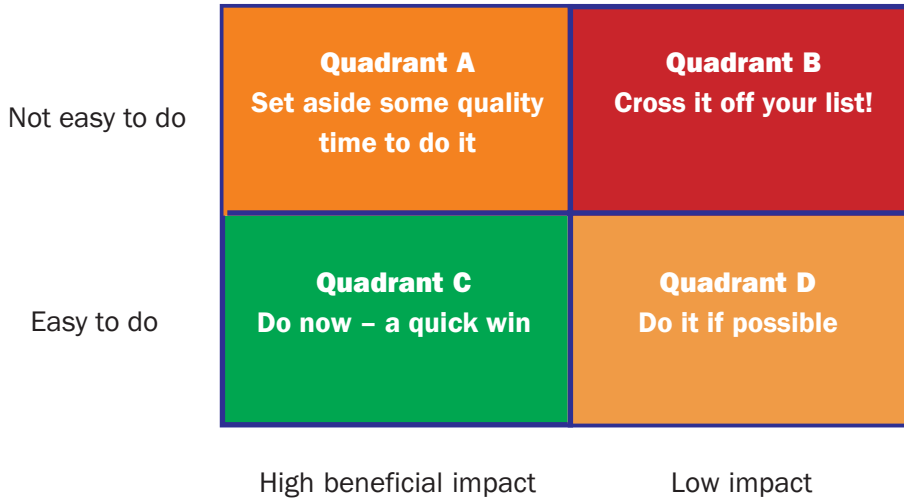
Important	Quadrant A Set aside some quality time to do it	Quadrant B Do it now – reschedule other things
	Quadrant C Do later – if needed	Quadrant D Do it quickly
Not important		
		Not urgent Urgent

Sometimes you may need to block out time in your diary to deal with important tasks before they become urgent. If an important task has become urgent then it moves to the top of your priority list for the day.

Impact vs ease matrix

Another useful tool is the impact vs. ease matrix. Assess tasks for their:

- ◆ Ease
- ◆ The beneficial impact they will have once you've done them.



It's a common pitfall to spend time on low impact/easy to do jobs in preference to those in Quadrant A.



Tip

Regularly review your workload so that you keep in control.

Regular reviews

When pressure mounts it's easy to lose sight of the 'bigger picture' and just concentrate on getting through the jobs that seem most urgent. Everything else has to wait and you no longer have an accurate overview of your commitments. It's a recipe for feeling stressed.

At regular intervals, e.g. at least once a fortnight, take stock of your commitments. Ask yourself:

- ◆ What have got to do?
- ◆ What are the timescales?
- ◆ Am I on track for getting it done?

If you can't get through your commitments, then you have decisions to make. For example, do you:

- ◆ Do it
- ◆ Delegate it
- ◆ Dump it
- ◆ Delay it.

Making conscious decisions keeps you in control and prevents pressure mounting to a stage when your productivity decreases.

Dumping or delaying are likely to have consequences for other people. You need to deal with these consequences assertively (see Chapter 5).

Activity

Consider the three tools introduced in this section.

- ◆ Which, if any, do you think could be useful to use?
- ◆ If you think you can use one, make a note of how and when you will try it out on an action plan. (A sample action plan was given on page 13.)

Keeping on track

The best laid plans can go awry for a variety of reasons. This section highlights a range of strategies which can help to overcome the most common pitfalls.

1 Know your most productive times

Most people find it easier to be more productive at certain times of the day than others. For example, you may find you are at your best in the mornings whilst others prefer a slow start and to work into the evening. You won't always have the luxury of following your natural body rhythms. However, it's worth trying to plan your day to make the best possible of your body clock.

Activity

What is your optimum working time? At certain times of the day:

- ◆ Do you find it easier to make decisions?
- ◆ Are you more prone to making mistakes?
- ◆ Do you find it harder to concentrate?
- ◆ Does your motivation to get through your job list decrease?

You may find it easier to pick up trends when you are analysing a time log (see page 10).



Tip

If you do pick up patterns then try and accommodate them when you are planning your day.

2 Take a break

Taking breaks are essential, but make sure that they don't cause you to lose your momentum. You may find that focusing on trying to fit in 'personal-life' tasks makes it difficult to switch back into work mode.



Tip

Short breaks, e.g. 10 minutes maximum, involving exercise or a change of scenery are often the best form of break.

3 Get organised

It can be common to spend up to three hours per week looking for things we've lost or mislaid. The best intentions are hard to implement if you can't find the paperwork you need to do the tasks.

- ◆ Clear your desk, at least at the end of each working day.
- ◆ Deal with paperwork as it appears. Don't just heap it into an in-tray. Aim to handle each piece of paper only once.
- ◆ File documents, either electronically or paper-based, into a system so that you can find them.



Tip

Create a paper-based filing system which mirrors the system on your PC. You'll then have a maximum of two places to look to retrieve documents.

4 Do one task at once

Multi-tasking is generally revered as being a good thing to do. It is, as long as you understand what it means.

Multi-tasking is the ability to take an overview of all the tasks that need to be done and do the most time-efficient one at any particular time.

It shouldn't mean having a range of half completed tasks on the go at once. That's a recipe for feeling stressed. It's also a time waster as you often have to spend time mentally 'picking up' a partially finished job.

Note the reference to 'tasks' not 'jobs'. You may have a number of jobs underway at a particular time, each broken down into tasks.

Do one task at a time so you can tick it off as complete.

5 Avoid being interrupted

The danger with interruptions is that they are often preferable to getting on with the job. It's also easy to justify breaking off, for example, if someone needs your help or advice. The more focused you become on achieving your targets, the fewer interruptions you will probably get. You will send out the message that you want to get on and do not appreciate being interrupted. Additional techniques to try are:

- ◆ Find somewhere to work where you are less likely to be interrupted; put a 'do not disturb' sign on the door or just close it.
- ◆ Don't interrupt others; they will be less likely to interrupt you.
- ◆ Let people know the times they can contact you; it can give a more positive message than stating when they can't.
- ◆ Switch off email alerts. Control when you read email.
- ◆ Put your phone to voice mail. It's often more time-efficient to respond to phone calls when it suits you rather than letting them interrupt what you are doing.

Summary

- ◆ Identify what you want to achieve each day and plan your time.
- ◆ Be focused but also be flexible and realistic.
- ◆ Develop a system that suits you – then stick to it.
- ◆ Try to allocate some 'unplanned time'. You can then decide the best use of that time when it arrives.
- ◆ Rate jobs by their urgency and importance before deciding when to do them.
- ◆ Question whether you should be doing jobs if they will have a low impact.
- ◆ Keep in control by regularly reviewing your workload.
- ◆ Get to know your most productive times.
- ◆ Take breaks – but keep them short.
- ◆ Get organised – it saves spending time looking for things.
- ◆ Do one task at a time – try not to leave tasks half-finished.
- ◆ Avoid being interrupted.

5 Saying 'no'

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What is assertive behaviour?

What do you say when someone asks you to do something? Your response probably depends on a combination of factors including:

- ◆ Who's asking
- ◆ Whether or not you want to readjust your priorities and do it
- ◆ Your current workload.

If there are occasions when you'd like to say 'no', but instead say 'yes', then you will find this chapter particularly useful. Suddenly being unwillingly landed with a task can play havoc with your plans and cause stress, often resentment.

What's important is that you have the skills to respond to requests in the most appropriate way, taking into account:

- ◆ Your needs
- ◆ The needs of the other person.

It's called being assertive and may result in you:

- ◆ Saying 'no', politely
- ◆ Negotiating a different way forward so that you are both happy with the outcome
- ◆ Doing it, as requested.



Take note

Saying 'yes' or 'no' are not the only options. Being assertive puts you in control.

Defining assertive behaviour

Assertive behaviour is about having the confidence to express your needs, feelings and opinions openly and, at the same time, respect other people's needs.

Assertive behaviour looks for win-win outcomes.

Your rights

Underpinning assertive behaviour is a belief that as a human being, you and everyone else, have certain rights.

Activity

Do you agree you have the following rights?

The right to:	Yes	No
Your own feelings, beliefs, opinions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change your mind	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make requests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Express how you would like to be treated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about matters that affect you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be treated with respect and consideration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When you accept the list of rights, or an amended version, for yourself you have to accept other people also have these rights. This lays the basis for assertive behaviour.

If you can't accept that you have rights in a situation, then it becomes difficult to behave assertively. Someone else's needs will take precedent over your own. It's sometimes referred to as passive behaviour or 'I lose - you win'. Equally if you don't accept that other people have the same rights, you will tend to behave aggressively, ignoring their needs at the expense of your own.

Thomas Harris, in his book *I'm OK, You're OK* (Arrow Books, 1995), identified the following four main life positions:

I'm OK – You're OK. This involves feeling positive about yourself and individuals around you.

I'm OK – You're not OK This is when a person feels positive about themselves at the expense of people around them.

I'm not OK – You're OK This involves feeling inferior to the people around you.

I'm not OK – You're not OK – Positives are hard to find with this outlook.

Activity

Which of Harris's four main positions would you equate with:

- ◆ Assertive behaviour?
- ◆ Aggressive behaviour?
- ◆ Passive behaviour?

Assertive behaviour equates with the *I'm OK - You're OK* life position. Aggressive behaviour results from an *I'm OK - You're not OK* outlook and passive behaviour is the reverse.



Take note

You need to respond assertively to requests which make demands on your time. Otherwise it will cause problems for you and/or the other person.

Activity

Consider the following responses to the request. What sort of behaviour(s) may be being shown by each one?

Request by line manager Hannah: Guy, please could you stay and get the report finished so it's ready tomorrow morning?

	Passive	Aggressive	Assertive
Guy: Yes, I'll do it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guy: I'm going to have a problem getting the end of month accounts done for finance if I do the report. What's the most urgent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guy: No, I can't possibly do it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Much depends on Guy's tone but on the surface the first response may be either passive or he may be able to complete the report without any problem.

The second response sounds assertive. It's the start of a negotiation to try to ensure that both parties end up happy with the outcome.

The third response makes no attempt to explore any other options or look for a way in which Hannah's request could be accommodated. It's likely to come across as quite aggressive.

Common characteristics of the different behaviours

Aggressive behaviour	Assertive behaviour	Passive behaviour
<p>Forces opinions and ideas on others</p> <p>Often resorts to raising voice or shouting</p> <p>Glare, stare and may use finger pointing</p> <p>Typical phrases include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Come on... - You'd better... - That's stupid. 	<p>Negotiates and searches for compromises</p> <p>Keeps true to principles</p> <p>Keeps calm</p> <p>Comfortable eye contact</p> <p>Open body language</p> <p>Typical phrases include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel... - We could try... - What do you think? 	<p>Is overruled by other people's opinions and ideas</p> <p>Mumbles</p> <p>Little eye contact</p> <p>Closed posture – often crossing arms and legs</p> <p>Typical phrases include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sorry - I wonder if ... - Do you mind if...

Aggressive behaviour is obviously difficult to deal with. However, passive behaviour can be equally challenging. A person who never expresses their needs or opinions can make it very hard for other people to engage with them.



Key point

Assertive behaviour = better relationships with people (both in your personal and professional life).

Should you always be assertive?

There will be times when you want to put other people's needs or wants before your own. That's fine. What's important is you make the choice and don't feel obliged to fit in with them.

Activity

I'm usually pretty clear about making sure people know what would suit me. However there are times when I go along with requests. Take for example last week, Kevin asked me for a lift home. It meant postponing my trip into town but I didn't say anything. He'd been having a hard time recently and I was glad to do him a favour. I suppose the 'feel-good' factor of giving him a lift overrode the minor irritation of having to change my plans.

Ben, project worker

Do you consider Ben acted passively or assertively?

It was a conscious decision of Ben's to put Kevin's needs first. As it happened, the feel-good factor probably turned it into a win-win situation, although from a time management perspective Ben would probably have to re-prioritise his trip into town.

Prioritising another person's needs is, on the surface, passive behaviour. However that doesn't mean it's a 'bad thing to do' as long as you have made the choice.



Take note

Being in control and making conscious decisions is key to effective time management. It's a recurring theme throughout the book.

Can you say 'no'?

In a work situation the answer is often no, you can't refuse. If your manager asks you to do something, then it's either likely to be part of

your responsibilities or covered by wording in your job description such as:

‘Any other tasks which support the organisation’s objectives’.

If a colleague asks you do something it is often because team working is required. Saying ‘no’ will come across as, at best, unhelpful.

However, there will be times when you can’t absorb additional workload. Even someone asking for ‘a quick chat’ or ‘can you spare a minute?’ will cause you stress and problems. Responding assertively is the only answer.



Tip

Develop the attitude and skills to respond assertively. It puts you in control. You can then choose to use them when you want to.

It’s not easy to suddenly change the way in which you respond to people. The next section looks at some of the influences on our behaviour before moving on to look at some of techniques of behaving assertively.

Why do we behave like we do?

The ability to be assertive is related to your self-esteem, i.e. the way you feel about yourself. As with many aspects of personality, self-esteem is a result of a complex interaction between your life experiences and your inherited characteristics.

Nature (i.e. your genetic characteristics) + **Nurture** (i.e. the effect of your life experiences) = **What you are like as a person.**

Generally, people who receive clear and strong signals throughout their lives that they are valued, liked and loved, feel good about themselves. They don't feel threatened by other people. Note the addition of the words 'generally'. Few, if any, people feel good about themselves all of the time. Life tends to be a roller-coaster with ups and downs. Inevitably the 'downs' can dent the most positive person's self-esteem, if only temporarily.

Scientists are still debating how much we are affected by 'nature' and 'nurture'. For example:

The finding that we have far fewer genes than expected suggests that environmental influences play a greater role in our development than previously thought.

Source: 'Nature or nurture?' Science/Nature, 11 February 2004, www.bbc.co.uk

How assertively you behave can often be traced back to early life experiences. If you were brought up to believe that other people's needs were more important than your own, you are likely to slip easily into behaving passively. Alternatively, if you were brought up in an environment where aggressive behaviour tended to win, then you're more likely to respond aggressively to situations.

Activity

Who and what do you think were the major influences on how you behave? Do you think any of the influences have particularly:

- ◆ Helped you to feel good about yourself?
- ◆ Hindered you feeling good about yourself?



Take note

Understanding yourself and what makes you tick is important when you try to alter the way you respond to situations.

Different responses in different situations

People are complex. Our behaviour can often be very different depending on who we're with. A classic example is 'road rage' which sets in when some people are behind the wheel of a car; in other situations they may be perfectly calm and reasonable people.

We're also likely to respond differently to demands on our time in different situations.

Activity

Try to identify situations when you have responded to an additional demand on your time:

- 1 Aggressively
- 2 Passively.

Why do you think that was?

Becoming more aware of occasions when you have responded either aggressively or passively is another important step in planning a change in behaviour.

In the next section we focus specifically on how you can plan to respond to extra pressures being put on your time.

Managing demands assertively

Behaving assertively is about looking for a win-win outcome. Finding a win-win outcome usually involves discussion.

What tends to happen is that people jump to solutions. For example:

- ◆ I need that report for tomorrow.
Solution = ask Rashid to finish it tonight
- ◆ I can't go to the meeting but someone has to represent us.
Solution = Frank will have to go in my place.

Both Rashid and Frank will be presented with a solution which could cause them to be faced with added workload and an issue over time.

Responding assertively

When you are faced with demands on your time try these approaches.

Clarify the other person's needs

This gives you thinking time, as well as making sure you understand what the other person is asking you to do. For example, in the case of Rashid it could involve asking:

- ◆ Details about the report
- ◆ Why the report is needed for tomorrow
- ◆ What would be the consequences of the report not being ready.

Frank may want to explore the purpose of attending the meeting, whether it's necessary to attend for the whole meeting, what would be the consequences of not attending.

State your position

This is probably the hardest bit, especially if you're in a situation when you'd really prefer to go into 'passive mode'. Try to explain the situation. For example:

'I would find that difficult to do because of my commitments to ...'

'I have deadlines to meet for so it would cause me difficulties.'

Make it clear that you are looking for a win-win situation

Simply acknowledging the situation (e.g. 'I can see that's a problem') and flagging that you would like to help (e.g. 'I think we should be able to find way round it') can cause the other person to relax. You've sent out a clear signal that you are supportive of their predicament.

Look for an alternative

This is time to explore other solutions. You know the other person's needs and they are aware of your situation. You've flagged up that you want to be supportive. Of course, there may not be an alternative. But the fact you have responded assertively will signal that:

- ◆ You won't passively accept any request
- ◆ You have the skills to build positive working relationships.



Take note

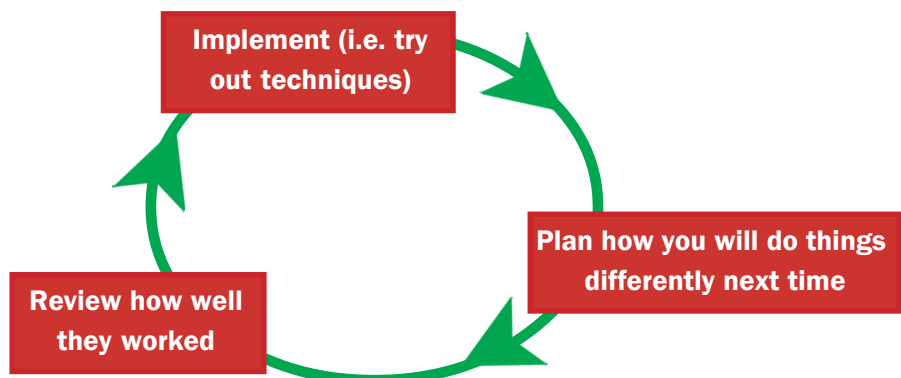
Assertive behaviour is about focusing on meeting needs; not jumping straight to solutions.

Putting it into practice

There are two approaches you can take to changing your behaviour.

- 1 Plan what you will say or the approach that you will take in advance.
- 2 Reflect on how you behaved, identifying where you could have behaved differently.

Becoming more assertive in situations where people are putting additional demands on your time will take practice.





Tip

Having a mentor to help you review how things went can be very helpful and motivating. Make sure your mentor doesn't encourage you to look for solutions before exploring needs!

Activity

Identify an occasion when you want to behave more assertively.

- 1 Identify exactly what you want to achieve. Write an objective on your Action Plan.
- 2 Plan your approach.
- 3 Review how things went.

It's not what you say but the way you say it

Responding assertively is not just about the words you use. How you say things is often more important than what you say.

Most people focus on selecting the words to convey a message. In fact it's even more important to be aware of the messages your body language and tone are sending. Psychologists claim that over half the message you convey comes from non-verbal clues. Albert Mehrabian, in *Tactics of Social Influence* (Prentice Hall, 1970) deduced that:

- ◆ 55% is based on your body language
- ◆ 38% on the way you say something
- ◆ 7% on the words you use.

The term 'body language' covers all the ways in which we send messages to people when interacting with them that does not involve the use of words. For example:

- ◆ **Facial expressions** reflect what a person is feeling, such as interest, surprise, fear. They can often override the message sent in words. A person may say 'Yes I'll do that with pleasure', but a momentary frown might have sent a clear message that they weren't happy about doing it at all. Most expressions are the same across all cultures; they are innate and shared by

all human beings. For example, the spontaneous facial expressions which denote fear, joy, sadness or excitement.

Eyebrows are important in the expressing of emotions. Perhaps most important is the 'eyebrow flash', a rapid up and down flick that conveys recognition and approval. The ability to telegraph friendly intentions from a safe distance would have had obvious survival value for our ancestors.

'The last word', *New Scientist* 7 August 2004

- ◆ **Eye contact** plays an important part in verbal communication. Generally people who like each other have more eye contact than people who don't; you search for more when you listen than when you speak. The amount of eye contact varies between cultures. People from 'contact cultures', e.g. South Americans or the Mediterranean area, tend to engage in more eye contact than people from non-contact cultures, e.g. North Europeans, Asians.
- ◆ **Posture and gestures** include the way we stand, sit and move. It can give strong messages about what a person is feeling. For example, arms crossed can mean a person is feeling defensive or unsure; covering your mouth can indicate lack of confidence, drumming fingers indicates impatience. People who are deeply engrossed in discussion will mirror each other body language, e.g. if someone leans forward the other person will also lean forward. Mirroring body can help to create rapport.
- ◆ **Use of space and touch** is influenced by cultural rules. Some cultures readily integrate the use of touch whereas others are less tactile. People from contact cultures stand or sit closer to each other than non-contact cultures.

S. M. Jourard studied couples in cafes in different parts of the world, noting how often they touched each other.

- ◆ Puerto Rico: 180 times per hour
- ◆ Paris: 110 times per hour
- ◆ London: 0 times per hour

Jourard, S. M., 'An exploratory study of body accessibility', *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 5 (1996)

Body language is very difficult to control. Some experts believe it's impossible to fake it whereas others argue that you can control up to 15%. Whatever it is, in practice it's useful to be aware that your body language will be sending messages every time you interact with other people. Therefore if you are genuinely looking for a win-win situation your behaviour (i.e. everything you do and say) will follow on naturally.

Your body language naturally reflects how you are feeling. It's far easier to challenge your underlying attitude than to try and change your body language.



Take note

Being assertive needs a mindset that recognises that your needs and other people's needs are equally important.

Summary

- ◆ Assertive behaviour is about taking into account your own needs and the other person's needs and looking for a solution. (i.e. win-win outcomes)
- ◆ Assertive behaviour needs:
 - ❖ Positive self-esteem, and
 - ❖ A belief that both you and other people have rights when it comes to making relationships work.
- ◆ You may sometimes choose to give another person's needs a higher priority than your own. This is still behaving assertively as long as you have made the choice to do it.
- ◆ Manage demands on your time assertively by:
 - ❖ Clarifying the other person's needs
 - ❖ Stating your position
 - ❖ Making clear you are looking for a win-win outcome
 - ❖ Looking for alternatives.

6 Time-efficient meetings

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Is a meeting necessary?

Organisations work by people interacting, communicating, solving problems and making decisions. What better place to do all that than in a meeting?

In practice, meetings can be a drain on time and cause inertia – too many people involved and no decisions reached.

To meet or not to meet

Face-to-face meetings are costly; not only in terms of time but also in terms of other resources such as travelling expenses, lost time spent travelling, and lost work opportunities, i.e. the things you could have done if you weren't in a meeting.

There's usually a cost-benefit judgement to be made before you call a meeting. It involves:

- 1 Identifying the outcomes
- 2 Estimating the cost
- 3 Making the judgement.



Tip

Consider condensing all meetings into one day during the week. It sets time constraints on each meeting and saves interruptions to other work.

1 Identify the outcomes

What do you want the outcomes of the meeting to be? Is it:

- ◆ To pass on information?
- ◆ To gather feedback?
- ◆ To solve a problems?
- ◆ To make decisions?
- ◆ To plan a way forward?
- ◆ To gain commitment?

- ◆ To encourage team/cross departmental working (discourage people operating in 'silos') ?
- ◆ Other reasons.....

Often it's for a combination of reasons. What's important is to know, from the outset, why you want the meeting and what you want the outcomes to be.

2 Estimate the cost

Working out the cost

Three middle managers, each earning around £40,000, meet for two hours in the regional office in Birmingham. One is based in the office; the other two have each spent two hours travelling to and from the meeting. In total, assuming the managers had travelled in work time, the meeting would have taken a total of 14 hours of managers' time.

The on-costs (e.g. National Insurance, pensions, overheads, etc.) for each manager would be in the region of 40 per cent bringing the cost of employing each manager to £56,000 per annum.

There are approximately 47 working weeks x 5 days x 7 hours working hours in a year = 1645 working hours per year.

Based on £56,000, one working hour costs approximately £34.

Therefore the cost of the meeting for the three managers would be around £476. This does not include the lost productivity (i.e. what they would have accomplished had they not attended the meeting).

It may be £476 well spent or £476 wasted. You have to balance the value of the outcomes that you identified in step 1 with the costs.

Cost it out

What is the cost of your time per hour?

Salary + 40 per cent on-costs = £_____

Divide by your working hours in a year (use 1645 if you're in full time employment)
= £_____ per hour.

Using your calculation you can very roughly put a figure on the cost of any meeting.

3 Make the judgement

This isn't at exact science. Instead it's about asking yourself:

- ◆ Do the outcomes justify the costs?
- ◆ Is there an alternative way of achieving the same outcome?
- ◆ What would be the consequences of not achieving the outcome(s)?

There will be a tipping point when the benefits outweigh the costs. That's the point at which you need a meeting.



'I could ring my dad and see if he'll drive out with my puncture repair kit...'



Tip

If you're invited to a meeting, be prepared to challenge why you need to be there for all/part of it. Attending meetings in which you don't have an input is often a waste of your time.

Managing a meeting

Once you've established that the meeting benefits outweigh the costs, your focus must be to get the maximum value out of the meeting.

Stand up meetings are the norm in some organisations. People meet in rooms which have no chairs. Meetings stay more focused and are shorter.

Before the meeting

Planning is the key. Set an agenda, showing rough time allocations where appropriate.

SpiroTek International
AGENDA
Cologne Trade Show Organisational Meeting
19th March 2007


(Preliminary Planning Meeting)
Boardroom 1030

Chair – John Rainford – Director Marketing

Attendees:

- All sales managers
- Production Department Heads
- HR Manager

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. Apologies | |
| 2. Report on last year's show | Mike |
| 3. Discussion – comments and observations
(20 minutes maximum) | All |
| 4. Proposed layout and content for this year's show | Jack |
| 5. Comments and observations | All |
| 6. Summary and action points | John |
| 7. Time and date next meeting (Finalising meeting) | |



Tip

Arranging a meeting to start mid-afternoon will ensure that the end of the day will provide a natural finishing point.

It involves thinking through how to:

- ◆ Achieve the outcomes
- ◆ Keep within the time available
- ◆ Maximise the contributions from attendees.

Be prepared to add notes to the agenda to indicate who you expect to do what. If you want people to come prepared then tell them exactly what's expected and what you want their input to achieve.



Tip

Maximise the outputs of meetings by:

1. Circulating an agenda beforehand. This gives people the opportunity to add to the agenda if appropriate.
2. Making it clear what you want attendees to prepare beforehand.

A formal agenda includes:

- ☐ Apologies for absence
- ☐ Minutes of last meeting
- ☐ Matters arising
- ☐ Main agenda:
 - ☐ Item 1:
 - ☐ Item 2: etc.
- ☐ Any other business (AOB)
- ☐ Date of next meeting

During the meeting

In a nutshell, it's about keeping to the agenda and making sure you achieve your outcomes. It's worth remembering that people have short attention spans so:

- ◆ Set ground rules, e.g. mobile phones switched off, no interruption, finish time

- ◆ Avoid inputs lasting any longer than 8-10 minutes
- ◆ Encourage participation. Breaking out into groups is a good way to ensure everyone participates
- ◆ 'Car park' any issues which arise which deviate from the agenda. Be prepared to be assertive.

A 'car park' is a flipchart sheet to capture issues which are outside the scope of the meeting. Have a flipchart ready and explain at the start that any issues will be 'parked' and dealt with at a later stage. People are usually satisfied that their gripe has been recorded and will be dealt with later.

- ◆ If emotions are running high, allow space for them to be voiced. Say something along the lines of, 'I know feelings are running high so let's spend 10 minutes expressing what we all feel'. Then allow people to voice their feelings without interruption. This can clear the air. You can then ask people to move on. Usually they will do.
- ◆ Record key outcomes and actions.



Tip

Get a reputation for starting meetings on time and keeping to time. It will encourage others to arrive promptly.

Keeping a record

Write-up and circulate a record of the meeting promptly. Outcomes and actions are important rather than any attempt to report what was said. There are example minutes on the next page.

And afterwards

At the end of every meeting ask yourself, 'Can I justify the time I spent?' If not, look for ways of making them more time-efficient.

Minutes

Cologne Trade Show Organisational Meeting -19th March 2007 (Preliminary Planning Meeting) Boardroom 1030

Chair – John Rainford – Director Marketing

Attendees: All sales managers – George, Sandy, Chris P, Chris J, Production Department Heads – Simon, Raol, Bob, HR Manager – Alison

1. Apologies

Alison – had to leave at 1115 to hold disciplinary.

2. Report on last year's show

Presentation of PowerPoint slides with pictures, list of contacts and summary of follow-ups and business gained. (Appendix 1)

3. Discussion – comments and observations

Key points raised:

Show stand was in an ideal location, all efforts to get same location this year

ACTION 1: George – contact organisers again, visit if necessary – go to any lengths to get the same stand.

Brochure shortfall – all brochures had been distributed by the end of the second day with none left for the 3rd day.

ACTION 2: Chris J – increase numbers by 50% on last year. Have back up on pdf and blank printed discs to burn on demand from laptop just in case.

Taxis between venue and hotel/airport seemed expensive – is it more economical to hire a car for the duration of the show?

ACTION 3: Alison – examine expense claims for last year to find the actual cost and then investigate car hire

Hand outs – sweets and paper hats were popular and low cost. Same again.

ACTION 4: Sandy – check records for last year's volumes and contact supplier and two alternatives to get best price to repeat for this year

4. Proposed layout and content for this year's show

Presentation of PowerPoint slides including touched up pictures of last year's stand.

5. Comments and observations

Key points raised:

All agreed an excellent display of new product range complementing existing goods.

Contingency plans in case same location not available and less space offered.

ACTION 5: Chris P & George come up with a couple of alternative layouts

6. Summary and action points

Action points 1, 2 and 4 to be commenced by the end of this week and report back in 2 weeks. Action point 3 to be completed 2 weeks before the show.

Note to all, especially Simon, Raol and Bob – last year we ran out of some items of stock 2 months after the show when orders peaked. Organise a separate meeting with Alison to work out overtime and possibly extra staff to raise stock levels in preparation.

7. Time and date next meeting

1030 Boardroom 28th March

Meeting closed at 1150.

Make it clear when the meeting took place and who attended

Use appendices to stop the minutes becoming unwieldy

Highlight agreed actions

Record key outcomes/discussion points

Managing remote meetings

Face-to-face meetings are costly. A lot can be achieved at a distance.

Options include:

- 1 Phone
- 2 Tele-conferencing.

Maximising phone calls

For maximum effect phone calls need managing in a similar way to meetings. By ringing someone on spec it is unlike that:

- ◆ That you will get their undivided attention
- ◆ That they will be fully prepared.

What tends to happen is that phone calls are used to arrange face-to-face meetings. Instead, consider agreeing a time for a phone call and preparing an agenda for it, just as you would for a face-to-face meeting.

Then apply all the rules as you would for a face-to-face meetings:

- ◆ Keep to the agenda.
- ◆ Don't get sidetracked.
- ◆ Keep a record of what is agreed during the phone call.
- ◆ Write up the minutes afterwards.

Tele-conferencing

Tele-conferencing offers the most cost-effective form of remote meeting, especially when there are people dotted around lots of locations. Tele-conferencing effectively is a skill. It has to be learnt.



Tip

Don't expect your first tele-conference to be as good as it can get. It takes a bit of practice.

To make a tele-conference work:

- ◆ The Chair needs to control the meeting
- ◆ There needs to be an agenda
- ◆ Someone needs to record outcomes and circulate them later.

There are no visual cues, so there will be pauses and instances where more than one person talks at once. It's inevitable, so accept it. It means that the Chair has to work twice as hard, and needs to:

- ◆ Acknowledge immediately if more than one person starts talking at once. Contributions should then be requested in a set order, e.g. 'Can we have Jack, then Jane, then Hassan'.
- ◆ Be aware of people who aren't contributing and make sure they are given an opportunity if appropriate. On occasions it may be appropriate for the Chair to introduce a 'round Robin' when everybody makes an input in turn.
- ◆ Sum up at regular intervals and check everyone is happy with progress. There's no body language to pick up so a more formal check is necessary.

There are also a couple of ground rules which are harder to police but require a commitment from all. For example, a commitment to:

- 1 Prepare. The temptation is that people think they can read through materials to prepare during the tele-conference as no one will see them
- 2 Not be distracted for example, by reading emails during the tele-conference.

We were due to attend a trade show where we would be sharing a stand with four other companies in our division. I was delegated to set up a telephone conference involving all interested parties but I had no idea what to do. I typed 'telephone conference' into Google and found lots of organisations offering the facility. I clicked on one at random and was pleasantly surprised to find how easy it was to fill in the on-line instructions. The only information I needed was the email address of each of the participants and the time of the conference. Notification of phone numbers and protocol were automatically sent to all members including me. It couldn't be easier and it worked a treat.

Software development manager

Videoconferencing

Videoconferences need a heavy outlay in terms of resources. If you have people spread over a lot of locations the cost is going to rise. However, it's worth exploring the costs, especially if long-distance travel is involved.

Summary

- ◆ Ask yourself if a meeting is really needed before deciding to call one. This involves identifying its outcomes.
- ◆ Make a quick cost-benefit analysis to check the meeting is worthwhile.
- ◆ Always have an agenda, whether it's a face-to-face meeting or conducted over the telephone.
- ◆ During the meeting:
 - ❖ Set ground rules
 - ❖ Avoid lengthy inputs
 - ❖ Encourage participation
 - ❖ 'Car park' issues likely to deviate from the agenda
 - ❖ Record key outcomes and actions.
- ◆ Treat meetings or conversations conducted via telephone in the same way as face-to-face meetings.

7 Save time with your PC

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Filing and finding

Many people using PCs have had either a basic training or none at all. If this applies to you then it's likely that you are not making the most of what programs such as Word or Excel can offer. This chapter looks at some of simple techniques you can use to avoid wasting your time.



Tip

Increasing your computer literacy is the best way to save time with your PC. The learning time will be a sound investment in terms of time management

Filing

You only need to forget where you filed a document once to recognise that it can waste a lot of time. The answer is to organise your document filing. Exactly how you do it is down to personal preference. However, once you've got a system working, stick to it, and you'll find you rarely lose a document again.

Designing a system






It's all a question of levels. In  **My Documents** set up a number of high level folders such as:

-  My Documents —  Administration
-  Projects
-  Personal

Keep this level to a *minimum* then in each folder set up subfolders, e.g.

-  Administration —  Timesheets
-  Blank Forms
-  Appointments

And then further levels:

-  Timesheets —  2004
-  2005
-  2006
-  2007

Keep to the same logical pattern in each of the folders.

If you need to know how to set up folders, or how to move existing folders into a new position, see *Basic Computing* in the Learning Made Simple series.

Saving documents

Whenever you start a new document, the first thing you must do is give it an obvious filename, and then save it to the appropriate folder. Do this before you invest time in the document rather than when you've finished. This way, if you break off for any reason, your system shuts down or you open another document for reference, you can always find your way back to it.



Tip

Never save anything without thinking where it is going. A couple of minutes now can save you many in the future.

Choosing a name

Filenames are important. Resist the temptation to over-abbreviate filenames. Carefully naming documents will save you time as you won't have to open a number of them before you find the right one. It also helps if someone else has to access the file if you are away.

Activity

Which of the following file names would you be likely to use for a Word document that resulted from a meeting to discuss rules for car parking? Or would you use something else?

Car Park Rules Meeting

CPR Meeting

Cpk Mtg

CPRM Jan 02

Abbreviations are fine if you regularly use them. The danger is that what seems an obvious abbreviation when you are busy compiling a document becomes a complete mystery some time in the future.

Finding lost files

If you do lose a file, don't panic and start hunting at random, but use the Windows Search routine. This looks different in Windows XP and Windows Vista, but it works in almost the same way.

To find a file, you do not need to know its full name – though that would help. You can search on the basis of one or several of these:

- ◆ Part of the filename
- ◆ Words or phrases in the text of the document
- ◆ When it was last changed
- ◆ Its size
- ◆ The type of file.

In Windows Vista you can also search on its 'tags' (words that you have linked to the file to classify it).

The search may offer several possibilities if more than one document matches your search criteria, but looking at 5 documents beats looking through 5,000!



Tip

It's worth trying this out before you need it for real and the pressure is on to find something quickly.

Time-efficient e-mail

'Distracted by e-mail', 'sheer volume of e-mail' are common complaints. In the 'good old days', daily routines could be scheduled around when the post came, when outgoing mail had to be ready for the deadline, queues for the fax machine and photocopier.

Now people break off phone calls, drop out of conversations and in fact drop anything when the new mail warning pops up. After all it could be very important. But actually is it?

As well as being invaluable, e-mail can also be an intrusion and time waster if you don't take control.



Take note

Whether e-mail has horns or a halo is your choice.



'Hey – that was fun – forward it to everyone'

'Oh no, you'll tie up the system for the whole afternoon'

Taking control

- 1 Set aside several times during the day as e-mail slots, either 'on the hour' or fixed periods such as 10.00-10.30. Set a time limit.
- 2 Make sure the e-mail alert facility is turned off. If your response is time-sensitive then let the relevant people know that's what you do. You can always be contacted by phone.
- 3 Deal with, or sort e-mails when you read. Don't just read them and close them. Either: respond/deal with it, delete or save into a file, e.g. into the folders for the relevant projects or into a folder called 'Pending'. If action is needed it should go onto your 'to do' list.
- 4 Delete any e-mails you do not know or expect. It is not worth risking a virus.
- 5 'Spam' will get through the best filters - use the junk e-mail function to stop it bothering you again.
- 6 If available use the **out of office** function from the **Tools** menu to ensure that when you are away for a period (can be a couple of hours to a couple of months) senders do not expect replies. If appropriate give them someone else to contact. When you get back to the office, leave it on until you are ready to deal with new incoming mail.
- 7 Don't try and multi-task when you are dealing with e-mails. Give them your full attention.
- 8 Put the purpose of the e-mail in the 'Subject' line. This will catch the reader's attention and not waste their time, or risk it remaining unread.



Tip

E-mail can become a constant interruption. You must control it rather than let it control you.

Backups and regular saving

This can not only save you time but save your life. System crash, coffee spill, virus attack – you can bet these only occur just as you are putting the finishing touches to a long and important document. Or just before you need to pull up a document you did last month. You may work in an office where all work is done to a central server, automatically backed up, data kept in fireproof safe and independent copies kept off-site with the added insurance of a full disaster recovery plan and a department of helpful IT personnel just queuing up to help you out.

If not:

- ◆ Within Word there are a range of automatic saving functions which will help you in the event of a power cut or accidental shutdown, etc. Click on the **Tools** menu, select **Options** and click on the **Save** tab. Check the boxes which suit your needs.
- ◆ Windows Vista has a built-in shadowing feature, that automatically backs up files regularly.

But what if your computer blows up or is stolen, especially if you work from a laptop or notebook which is vulnerable because of its portability? At best invest in a portable hard drive. These are very cheap. Simply plug in to a USB port and can be configured to automatically back up your work. If this is too clumsy to transport around with you, get a memory stick and copy work to it regularly. Make a habit of keeping it in a different location to your laptop. When a project is completed or periodically – weekly or even monthly – burn your files to CD-ROM or DVD depending on your equipment and file sizes. Blanks can be bought very cheaply and take up little space to store loads of data.

Anti-virus

Worms, viruses, spyware or other unwanted intrusions can all slow your PC down or corrupt files and at worst completely stop you using it. Adequate and updated anti-virus software is essential if you have any link with the outside world via email, Internet or even importing files on CD-ROM, memory sticks or other media. Nothing can slow you down as much as losing the use of your computer.

Word time-savers

Word offers many small and large time-saving facilities. The small time-savers include the keyboard shortcuts to commands – learn those that you use most often. (The shortcuts are displayed on the menus.) Among the larger time-savers are templates and styles.

Templates

If you use standard forms, letters or other documents, you can save a lot of time setting up and formatting them by using a template.

Produce your base document, containing all the standard information, e.g. addresses and other header material, then save it using the **Save as Type** option *Document Template*.

To create a new document based on the template, start by selecting **New** from the **File** menu and take the **From Template** option.

Styles

Using styles brings a consistent design to your documents as well as saving you time formatting each heading or piece of the text. When you create a Word document you have an almost infinite choice over font type and size, colour of text and position on the page. Instead of continually making these types of changes you can set up styles. It means that with one click of the mouse your chosen font style, size, colour and position on the page will immediately be applied.

When you open a new Microsoft Word document it will already have a range of styles for you to use, and you can easily create your own.



Take note

The use of styles is essential if you are to ensure that documents are accessible to people with sight problems who read them using speech technology. This alerts the reader to each change in style, making it far easier to navigate the document.

If you need to know more about templates and styles, read *Word Processing with Word* in the Learning Made Simple series.

Summary

- ◆ Increasing your computer literacy is the best way to save time with your PC.
- ◆ Design a filing system that works for you.
- ◆ Always save a document before you start typing; then save at regular intervals.
- ◆ Make filenames meaningful so you can find them easily.
- ◆ Make sure you know how to use the Search facility so you can use it whenever needed.
- ◆ Explore the use of templates and styles – they will save you time.
- ◆ Take control of your email – don't let it control you.

8 Delegate

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What is delegation?

For many people, delegation has a bad name.

You may have been on the receiving end when someone else's time management problem has become yours. It's often something you have to endure because of the all-encompassing phrase tagged on the end of many job descriptions:

'Undertake other tasks that contribute to the performance and development of the organisation generally.'

Alternatively, you may have the habit of heaping jobs onto someone else under the guise of 'delegation'. This is not effective management.

Then there are people who just won't delegate. Common excuses include:

'No one else can do the job like I want it done.'

'By the time I've delegated I could have done it myself.'

Delegation certainly isn't a panacea for work overload, but it can be extremely helpful used at the right time with the right person. It is about giving the responsibility for getting something done to another person. It can be a one-off task, e.g. setting up a room for a meeting, or it can be a long-term project aimed at developing someone.

Activity

Think of two or three occasions when you have delegated. It may be in work or outside. Where would you place each occasion on a continuum.

One-off task to
save you time

Designed to develop skills
of other person rather
than save you time



The one-off tasks tend to be simply a matter of getting someone else to do something so you can cross a task off your job list. At the other extreme, delegation for development can, in the long run, save you time. Their primary aim is develop the other person.

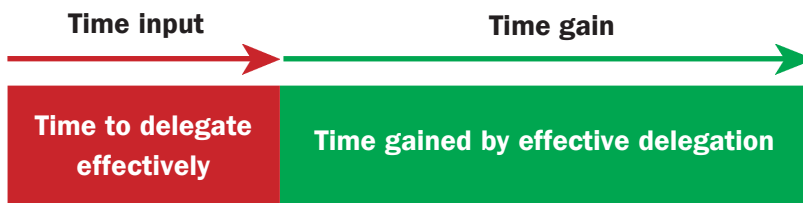
Whatever the purpose, successful delegation depends on effective communication; and effective communication takes time.

Will delegation save time?

It depends. Often there's a judgement to be made. Is it more time-efficient to delegate or do the job myself? It can be difficult to decide. Time invested at the start may save you a considerable amount of time in the long run.

However, there may be occasions when time invested was actually time wasted as you'd have been quicker doing it yourself.

Freeing up time through delegation



Key point



Accept that delegation requires you to invest some of your time to reap the benefits.

Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) an Italian academic, was the first to notice that 80 % of outputs resulted from 20% of inputs. This 80/20 rule can be applied to delegation. Expect to have to input 20% of your time to reap 80% in benefits.



Tip

If you haven't got time to delegate effectively, beware. You could waste more time dealing with the consequences than you would have done by doing it yourself.

Effective delegation

Communication is the key. Most problems around delegation can be traced back to a failure to communicate.

Communication basics

Consider the following scenario.

Activity

Ali needed to set up a meeting room. She was running late so she asked a colleague if he would do it for her. She got to the meeting room and found it hadn't been done to her liking. People were already sitting in places and she didn't feel she could ask them to move the seating arrangements. Also, there was no flipchart; something she were banking on using. Assuming that she couldn't change the fact that she was running late and couldn't set it up herself, what could she have done to try to avoid the problems at the meeting?

It's so easy to assume that another person can read our minds and knows how we want something doing. We forget the basic principles of communication.

The process of communication

1 Sender has something to communicate



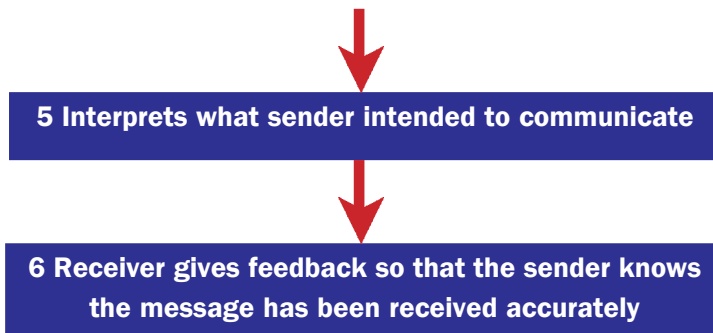
2 Translates into words



3 Sends message



4 Receiver hears/reads words



In the scenario above Ali had something to communicate: the desired layout of the room and her need for a flipchart. If she didn't communicate it then anyone setting up the room would have had to have taken a 'best guess' – a recipe for disaster.

To delegate you have to clearly communicate:

- 1** What needs to be done
- 2** The standard/criteria to be met
- 3** The timescale.

In the case of the preparation of Ali's room it could mean:

- 1** Please could you set up Room 2 for a meeting this afternoon
- 2** There will be 12 people in total. I'd like the chairs in a U-shape, tables put against the walls and please could you make sure there's a flipchart with plenty of paper and pens.
- 3** The meeting starts at 2pm so it needs preparing by 1.30.

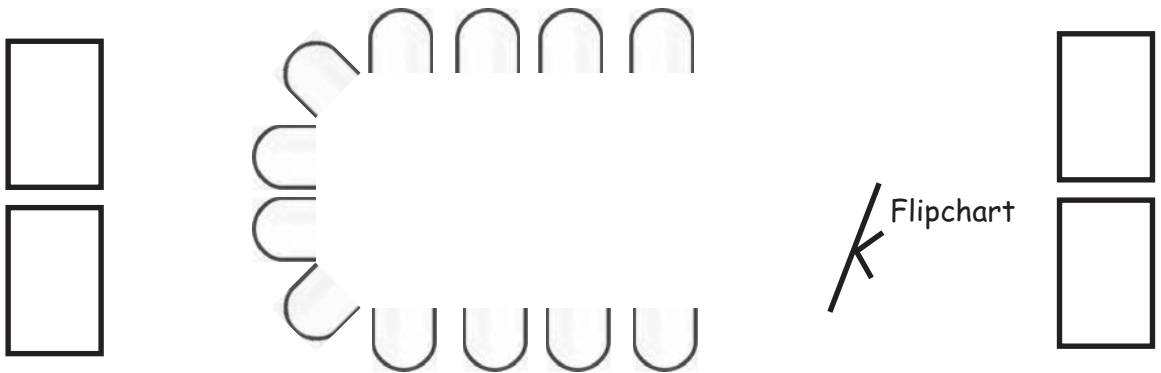
Activity

Refer back to the model of communication. What else should Ali have done to make sure the room was prepared properly?

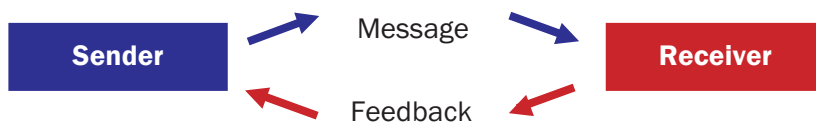
She needed feedback to check that her instructions had been understood. The level of feedback would depend on the prior knowledge of the person she was delegating to.

If it was someone who had been in meetings with Ali and knew what was required, minimal checking would be needed.

If there was no prior knowledge then Ali would have to make sure her instructions had been understood. Drawing a sketch of the desk and chair layout may have been useful.



Communication is a two-way process. It involves the sender sending a message to the receiver. The receiver then gives feedback to show that the message has been received.



Tip

The skills, knowledge or experience of the person you delegate to will determine:

- ◆ The detail of briefing needed
- ◆ The degree to which you seek feedback to check you have been understood.

Authority vs. accountability

If you ask someone to do something for you, and they agree, you are giving them the responsibility to get the job done. They need the authority to do it. For example, it may be the authority to:

- ◆ Use resources
- ◆ Source resources
- ◆ Involve other people
- ◆ Make decisions.



Take note

Authority to do a job has to be transferred when you delegate. What is not transferable is the accountability. In other words, if it goes wrong then you have to deal with the consequences. Whenever you delegate, the accountability for getting it done remains with you.

Delegation needs feedback

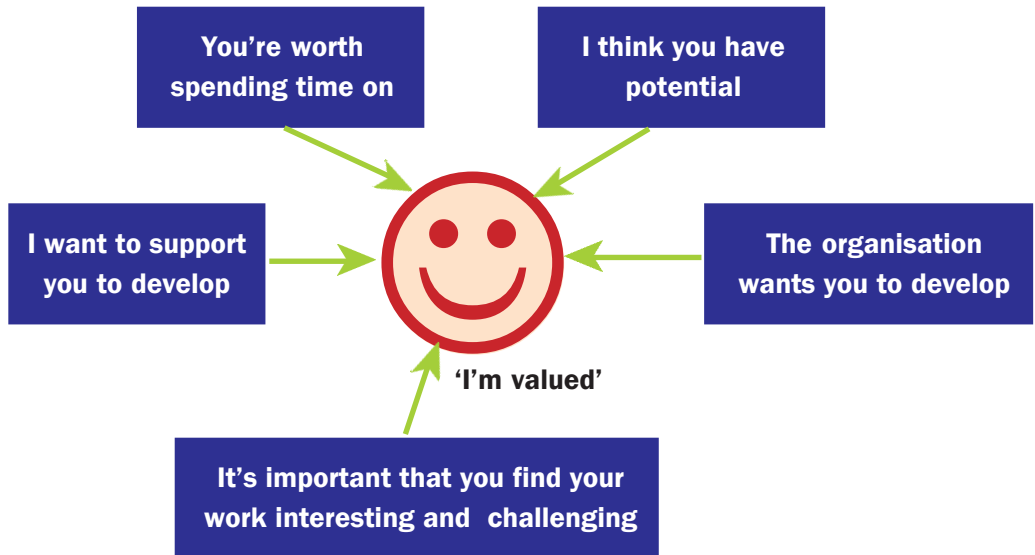
Always give feedback to the person when they've completed the task. A 'thank you' for a job well done is all that is often needed. But more is needed when the delegation is about developing the skills of another person. We look at this in the next section.



Delegation for development

If you manage a team then delegation is not usually about saving you time. It offers the opportunity to develop your team members.

Delegation shows:



If done properly it will increase the motivation of people in your team. Not only do they feel valued but new responsibilities give a new dimension and interest to their job.



Take note

Delegation should be about developing people; reducing your job list is a welcome by-product. It involves delegating responsibility for achieving an objective or target; not just piecemeal tasks.

Lack of time is a key reason that managers cite for not delegating. It recognises that delegation often involves time to train and develop a person to take on the task. However, the fact that time spent can be investment to make time-efficiencies in the future is often overlooked.

Deciding what to delegate

You may be able to make more cost-effective use of your time by delegating jobs to members of your team.



Take note

If the delegation is going to be sustained, don't forget to review job descriptions. They may need amending to reflect new responsibilities.

You may choose to delegate a job:

- ◆ That will enable someone to stand in for you
- ◆ To develop skills in someone else so they can use them elsewhere in the organisation
- ◆ To develop skills in someone for their own benefit.



Tip

You may find that reviewing your time will help to identify jobs which you can delegate. Look again at your time log (page 10).

Deciding who to delegate to

Delegating for development means that there is a skills gap to be closed. As a general rule, the bigger the skills gap, the more time you will have to invest. You'll also need to consider the suitability of people in your team to take on new responsibilities. Remember, you can't delegate accountability; that remains with you.

However, the process of delegation can increase someone's motivation and interest in their work. Overall, it involves making a risk assessment i.e. asking yourself:

- ◆ How likely will it be that team member X won't do the job properly?
- ◆ What will be the impact if team member X doesn't do the job properly?

Then balance your response against the potential benefits.

Activity

Managers give a range of excuses for not delegating. How would you respond to each of the following?

Excuse	Your response
'They won't be able to do it as I want it done'	
'My boss will be wondering what he's paying me for'	
'I haven't got the time'	

There is the potential for mistakes; you've lost the control over the exact nature of the output. However, by putting in the required level of coaching or training and supervision you will be able to monitor performance and rectify any errors as and when they creep in.

The ability to develop staff is a much-valued skill within any organisation. Instead of devaluing your worth it opens up the potential for you to move on to bigger and better things. Finally, time can be an issue. But the benefits of delegating can outweigh the need to make time within an already busy schedule. It's about recognising its importance, and planning accordingly.

How to delegate

Remember, communication is the key. Set time aside to communicate:

- ◆ The nature of the job
- ◆ Exactly what needs to be achieved. Set a SMART objective (see below)
- ◆ Why it's important
- ◆ The standard it has to be done to
- ◆ Timeframe for completion
- ◆ Schedule for receiving updates (if appropriate)
- ◆ Resources - what they are and how to access them.

A SMART objective is:

Specific – explains precisely what has to be achieved

Measurable – you can tell the point at which it has been achieved

Agreed – between you and the person you are delegating to

Realistic – the resources available and the capabilities of the person you are delegating to mean that the objectives can be achieved

Timebound – an end date is set for completion.



Take note

Remember communication is a two-way process. Don't just 'tell'. Make sure your message has been understood and allow plenty of opportunity for questions.

Then – let go. You've given responsibility to someone else. Let them get on with it.

Delegation checklist

Use the following checklist to either review how well you have delegated or to plan how to delegate.

Beforehand

Have I:

- ☐ Identified what I want to delegate and made it into a SMART objective?
- ☐ Identified who I am going to delegate to and why?
- ☐ Set time aside to talk through delegating the job?

During the meeting

Have I:

- ☐ Explained the objective and checked understanding?
- ☐ Talked through the resources required and made sure the person has the authority to access them?
- ☐ Identified and planned any necessary training or coaching?

- ☐ Made clear I am available to give support, if necessary?
- ☐ Set timescales for receiving updates on progress?
- ☐ Given plenty of opportunity for questions/ideas?

After the job is complete

Have I:

- ☐ Given feedback?
- ☐ Said 'thank you'?

Summary

- ◆ Delegation is about giving responsibility for getting something done to another person.
- ◆ Delegation involves a time investment.
- ◆ Communication is the key to successful delegation. You must communicate:
 - ❖ What needs to be done
 - ❖ The standard/criteria to be met
 - ❖ The timescale.
- ◆ Authority to do a job has to be transferred when you delegate. Accountability is not transferred.
- ◆ Delegation is a powerful tool to help develop people – as a general rule, the bigger the skills gap, the more time you will have to invest.

9 Information overload

Understanding information 102

Assessing the quality of information . . . 105

Storing information 108

Understanding information

The creation of electronic information has caused an explosion in the quantity to which we have access.

Reading and digesting more than a fraction is likely to be impossible. Therefore the answer has to lie in the ability to stay focused on the information you need rather than trying to absorb the information you're bombarded with. Relevant information is a good thing. You need it to do your job and will probably feel aggrieved if you consider communication to be poor.

With so much information now online, it is exceptionally easy to simply dive in and drown.

Alfred Glossbrenner

Information overload can give you the feeling that you might be missing something that's really relevant to you but is lost in the mass of material.

Understanding what information is, and why most of it can be ignored, is a key stage in controlling information overload.

Data and information

The terms 'data' and 'information' are often used interchangeably. In fact they mean different things.

Data = raw facts and figures that has been collected

Information = data that has been interpreted to serve a purpose.

A straightforward example would be that absence figures collected by an HR department. This is data. The analysis and interpretation resulting from working on the data would be information; something the HR department would use.



Activity

Supposing an HR department's report on absence in your organisation was emailed to you. Would it serve any purpose?

If your response is 'Yes' then it would be information, i.e. something useful to you. If your answer was 'No', then you should class it as irrelevant data and not spend time on it; even though it would be classed as information by the HR department.



Karen's idea for dealing with junk mail saves 15 minutes every day

Information into knowledge

Information often has to be interpreted or applied to a particular situation. To interpret the information, the HR department would bring to it their experience of dealing with absence along with what they know of the current situation and general HR expertise. This is referred to as 'tacit knowledge'. A combination of the information and tacit knowledge would give the full picture and a basis for action.



The management of knowledge is a challenge for organisations as it requires the capture of relevant information with the human factor offering the tacit knowledge (i.e. what people have in their heads).

But it's also likely to be the basis of the challenge for you.



Take note

Information often only becomes valuable when you process it by adding your own existing knowledge and insights.

Processing information takes 'thinking time'. Therefore:

- ◆ Select the information that you spend time on carefully
- ◆ When you have spent time processing the information, capture the results of your efforts so it's not lost
- ◆ If you want to store information which might become useful at a later time, then store it so it can be retrieved.

Activity

Identify an occasion when you:

- ◆ Accessed information, added your tacit knowledge and used the knowledge
- ◆ Accessed information and stored it for future use
- ◆ Ignored documents because they did not serve any purpose.

Understanding information and taking a structured approach to dealing with it will help you stay in control.



Tip

Written material is only information if it serves a purpose for you. Unless it does, it's data.

Assessing the quality of information

Information is the basis for decision-making, taking actions and even developing attitudes. But do you really need to read it?

The New York Times contains as much distinctive information every day as the average 17th century person encountered in a lifetime.

The Independent, 15 October 1996

As well as being relevant it should also be:

- ◆ Current
- ◆ Reliable
- ◆ Easy to access.

Is it relevant?

Relevant information will serve a purpose. Therefore before you search or read information ask yourself, 'why'. What do I want to get out of it? For example:

- ◆ To find out ...
- ◆ To understand ...
- ◆ To get a quick overview of ...
- ◆ To see if it is worth reading in depth.

It will take a bit of 'thinking time' but can often save a lot of time spent ploughing through potential information in an unfocused manner.

If you realise you haven't got a purpose, or the document is unlikely to meet the purpose, then ignore it. It's wasting your time.

I find that there are occasions when I can justify browsing. Simply scanning through information to see if anything attracts my interest. But that's a licence for wasting time. A bit like aimlessly wandering, not knowing where you'll end up. I have to put strict time limits on it.

Quality manager, public sector

Reading strategies

Having a purpose will help you select the most appropriate reading strategies. For example:

Purpose	Reading strategy
To understand the document fully	Read thoroughly
To find out if there is any relevant information within the document or to get the gist of the content	Read introduction and conclusion. Use contents page. Skim or browse whole document to get a feel of what's covered.
To find particular information from within the document, e.g. facts or figures	Scan

Active reading

Active reading involves processing the information in your mind as you read it. It takes extra energy but involves techniques such as:

- ◆ Setting questions that you want answered from reading the text
- ◆ Highlighting important points
- ◆ Adding comments
- ◆ Making notes of key points in another document.

Is it current?

This is about asking:

- ◆ If the information you are accessing is the most up-to-date source and, if it's not
- ◆ Is it worth spending time seeking out more recent material.

Most information soon becomes dated. However, sometimes an older version is acceptable. It all depends on the purpose.

Is it reliable?

Is the source of the information reliable? You need to be able to trust the information; otherwise it loses its value.

Is it well-written?

Responsibility for communication lies with the writer. If it's long-winded and unstructured it will take up an unnecessary amount of your time.

You have to judge if it's worth spending that extra time. If not, either:

- ◆ Ignore it, or
- ◆ Go back to the writer and ask for a more effective method of communication.

Before you spend time reading a document check:

- ☐ You have a clear purpose
- ☐ The information is current (or current enough)
- ☐ The information is from a reliable source
- ☐ It's written in a way that will make effective use of your time.



Tip

Set up a reading file for anything that is not directly relevant to current work but may be useful instead of leaving it in your in-tray. If and when you have time browse through it. If not, clear it at appropriate intervals.

Storing information

Once you've spent time on information you have a decision to make. Do you keep it or not?

Some people find it is quite easy to press the Delete key or bin print copies. Others like to keep nearly everything on the grounds that it might come in useful.

What's even more important is that, if you do decide to keep it, you store it so that can access it.

To keep or not to keep?

It's a judgement based on answering questions such as:

- ◆ When might I need it?
- ◆ Why might I need it?
- ◆ Will it be useful to anyone else?
- ◆ Will it soon be out-dated?/superseded?
- ◆ How easy is it to get the information again?
- ◆ What are the costs of keeping it?
- ◆ What will be the consequences of getting rid of it prematurely? (e.g. in terms of time and cost)?

Fortunately the era of the computer has meant that storage of electronic information is easy. You often have to be more ruthless in decisions around printed information.



Tip

If you send information to people make sure it's clear why you want them to read it. If appropriate, highlight the relevant parts of the document. It's good practice and people may reciprocate. If they don't, suggest it's a helpful approach to use!

Before you store

You need to be able to retrieve the information you store. With a lot of information, it's easy to lose track of what you've actually got. One way round the problem is to create lists, e.g. a contents page to each folder.

Using mind maps

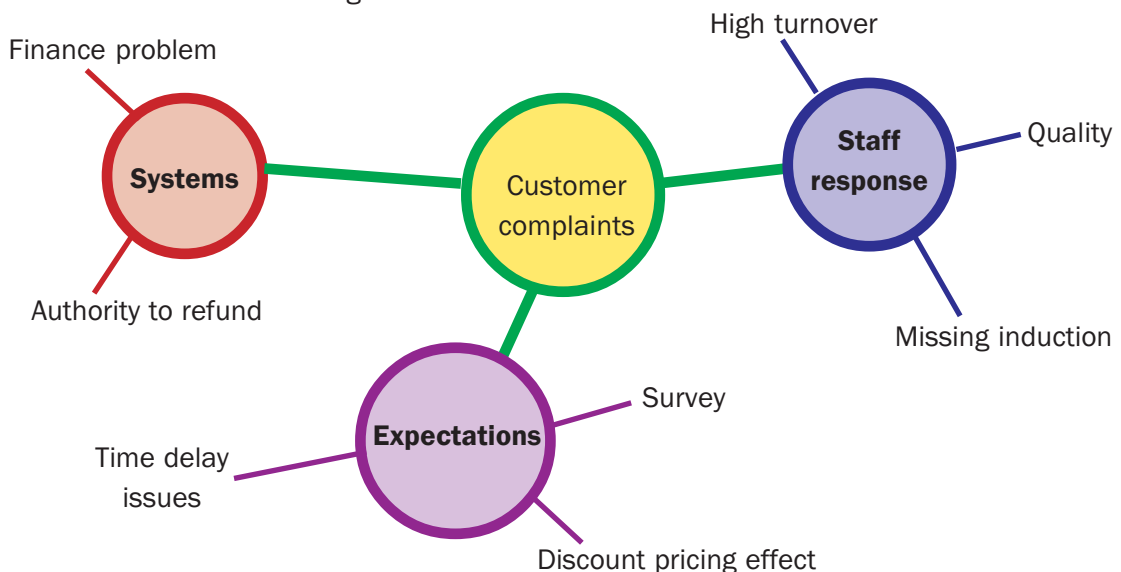
Mind maps can provide a useful tool in keeping an overview of the information you store.

Rather than starting out from the top and working down in sentence or lists, one should start from the centre with the main idea and branch out as dictated by the individual ideas and general form of the central theme.

Tony Buzan, Use Your Head

Tony Buzan argues that a 'mind map' better represents the way our brains make connections than the traditional linear format. Reading a mind map can provide a structure for summarising links between documents. For example:

A call centre manager had a folder dedicated to a project exploring the causes of customer complaints. He drew a mind map to represent the subfolders and files he was accumulating.



If you develop a mind map you need to:

- 1 Identify the issue and write it in the centre
- 2 Draw branches radiating out of the centre
- 3 Attach relevant ideas to each of the branches.

Activity

There is a range of mind-mapping software packages on the market. If you think it would be helpful to you:

- ◆ First practise the art by hand drawing a mind map for a particular area of information storage
- ◆ If you like the concept, explore the availability of software packages. Some are available free, others have a charge.

Accessing stored information

This is often the main challenge. You have to have a system. Tempting as it may be to earmark every useful document as a 'favourite,' it's of little help when you have so many favourites that you forget what they are.

Keeping print documents without a system for remembering what you've got is a recipe for:

- ◆ Taking up space, and feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of paper
- ◆ Losing them
- ◆ Wasting time trying to find something, if you remember it is there in the first place.



Take note

You need a system for storing information.

Storing printed information

Filing cabinets, files, storage boxes all have their place. What's essential is that you:

- ◆ Record what's where
- ◆ Have regular clearing out sessions, including an update of your records.

As well as clear labels, an index of what's been stored is often helpful.

Summary

- ◆ Understanding what information is, and why most of it can be ignored, is a key stage in controlling information overload.
- ◆ Only class written material as information if it serves a purpose for you. Unless it does, it's data.
- ◆ Information often only becomes valuable when you process it by adding your own existing knowledge and insights.
- ◆ Before you spend time reading a document check:
 - ❖ You have a clear purpose
 - ❖ The information is current (or current enough)
 - ❖ The information is from a reliable source
 - ❖ It's written in a way that will make effective use of your time.
- ◆ Set up a system for storing information.

Time management tips

Below is a list of tried and tested time management tips. Consider each one. If you decide that it might help you, transfer it to an action plan.

	I do/have done this	This won't help me	I want to try this
Have one A4 notebook to record everything in: meeting notes, phone messages, actions, etc. You then have everything in one place rather than relying on scraps of papers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify your key results areas, and check that the work you do is matched to them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep a time log to identify your time wasters. Don't assume you know what your time management problems are.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify why you put off doing some jobs. Deal with any barriers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work out the 'what's-in-it-for-me' if there's a task you want to put off doing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Break down jobs into manageable tasks – reward yourself as each stage is completed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make a list so that you can cross each task off as you finish it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get up earlier. An average of 10 minutes a day will give over an hour extra a week; 52 hours, or over 7 working days in a year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend time planning, i.e. set yourself clear objectives, work out how and when to achieve them, make contingency plans to mitigate risks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create a master job list, either paper-based or electronically.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use a diary and/or wall planner to keep track of commitments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have a plan for each day – know what you want to achieve by the end of the day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Categorise jobs as being important and/or urgent to help you decide when, or if, you do them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Categorise jobs in relation to how easy they are to do and their likely impact. Use it as a basis to decide when, or if, to do jobs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regular review all your commitments. Always keep an overview of what you've got on. Choose to Do, Delegate, Dump or Delay.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Know your most productive times of the day – and use them to maximum advantage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	I do/have done this	This won't help me	I want to try this
Take short breaks to revitalise your productivity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get organised, especially your desk and filing systems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do one task at once – finish it and tick it off your job list.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A place to work where you won't be interrupted – close the door if possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't interrupt other people; they will be less likely to interrupt you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Let people know the times they can contact you; it can give a more positive message than stating when they can't.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control when you read and respond to email.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Put your phone on voice mail – unless you want to be interrupted!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learn to behaviour assertively so people don't keep adding to your job list. It puts you in control.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check meetings are necessary – make a cost-benefit judgement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider condensing all meetings into one day during the week.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always have an agenda for a meeting – and stick to it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get a reputation for starting meetings on time and keeping to time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider using tele-conferencing to save travelling time and expense.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase your computer literacy by attending training.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Design a system for filing your documents – so you can find them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give files meaningful names so you don't waste time looking for them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always, always back up your computer files. There's always the potential to lose everything.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use templates and styles to format your documents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delegate tasks – remembering delegation needs an upfront investment of your time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get into the office early – before others get in or the phones start ringing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do nasty or tedious jobs early in the day – get them out of the way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At the end of each day – plan your next day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep your desk clear – file as you go along.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adopt a can-do/want-to-do/will-do attitude. It can increase your productivity hugely.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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