

Spotlight Topic

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Cultivating Effective Time Management

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It is not uncommon to hear about people having problems with managing their time and procrastination. Sometimes they find themselves having so many tasks that they do not know where to start. Other times, they make a plan and have a difficult time following it through. What time management boils down to is the management of oneself and how effectively and efficiently one can make decisions regarding their own time.



When employees and organizations are having problems with their time management, it can lead to multiple negative outcomes. For example, delaying the start of important tasks or projects means that employees have the minimum amount of time to complete the task. Working under the minimum amount of time to complete a task does not reflect the true potential of the organization and employees. In addition, if employees are consistently in a game of catch-up, this can lead to chronic stress and eventually burnout.

Executive functions is an element of PQ that clearly relates to time management. However, mental activity and professional self all have an impact on the ability to manage time effectively.



When thinking about the words “time management,” it does not directly translate to “managing time.” It is impossible to manage time by adding or subtracting more hours to a day. Time management is really about the way in which we manage our decisions regarding how we spend our time. Luckily, the prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that helps us to make decisions and in turn manage our executive functions.

Mental activity comes into play when managing competing deadlines, which for most people, is often. Sometimes the amount of work that needs to be done is out of our hands. When it is out of our control, we feel the need to focus on the best and fastest way to get things done. These moments are when it is most important to demonstrate mental activity to keep stress levels down rather than letting stress get the best of us.

Finally, being able to effectively manage one's time is a useful skill to have in any type of job. Most importantly, it contributes to a professional self. Good time management can become part of one's identity at work. This is because, time management skills portrays an image to colleagues and supervisors about what kind of professional a person is. Time management can be transferable to different jobs in many types of industries. Thus, cultivating good time management can help uphold a professional self throughout a person's career.

As an employee, one way to manage time is by goal setting. It is important to create specific and tangible goals so that it is easier to plan time around them. Goal setting is also helpful when an employee has many tasks to complete in a short amount of time. Long term goals can sometimes be daunting and almost feel impossible to reach. However, with the creation of short and medium term goals needed to reach long term goals, those long term goals become more realistic to reach.



Goal setting can also be used when working in a team. A strategy specifically for teams would be to establish a regular time when the group is to communicate, such as check in times. Check in times will allow team members to stay up to date with one another while also focusing on their tasks in between check in times.

A dynamic example of cultivating time management from an interactional perspective can be demonstrated at Boston Consulting Group (BCG), a consulting firm. BCG is well known for being a part of an industry that has a 24/7 work culture. Employees are expected to be available at all hours to get their projects done. One team at BCG implemented a rule where each team member had to pick one day a week where they would completely disconnect. On their designated day, the team member had to leave the office after regular working hours and they were not allowed to answer emails or stay connected to their team. Although taking time off seems like the worst idea when a team is busy, the outcomes of this project were worth it. The team had higher job satisfaction, work/life balance, and the team felt like they were learning more at work¹. This method has now been used in BCG offices all over the world.

Time management is also related to organizational culture. In fact, some time management issues can stem from culture². A helpful strategy is when beginning large projects, organizations should make a leadership time budget, just like they would make a financial budget. A leadership budget allows the organization to accurately assess the amount of time and effort needed by their leaders to complete the project. If there are not any leaders available, the organization can take steps to lighten a leader's other responsibilities so that they can join the project.

There are straightforward and dynamic ways that you can cultivate your time management. Do not be afraid to test them out to see what works best for you. In the end, it could lead to a happier and more successful professional life.

References

1. Perlow, L. A. (2014). Manage your team's collective time. *Harvard Business Review*.
2. Bevens, F. & De Smet, A. (2013). Making time management the organization's priority. *McKinsey Quarterly*.