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Time and Project Management for Graduate Students
Time and Project Management

- Introduction (Who?)
- Motivation (Why?)
- Time Management Techniques (How?)
- Goals
- Planning
  - Planning cycle
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  - TO DO List
- Procrastination
- Distractions
- Creating more quality time
- Summary
Introduction (Who?)

- PhD. in Computer Science 1996, University of Calgary
- DoLittle: A Multi-strategy planningsystem
- Lecturer at University of Auckland (3 years)
- Research Artificial Intelligence and Robotics
- IntelligentIR on the WWW. Navigation in highly dynamic environments
- Coach of the All Botz
  - RoboCup: International competition
  - Robots playing soccer on a table tennis field
  - Toy cars, commercial video camera, PCs running Linux
  - Image processing, computer vision, low level OS, path planning, control theory, strategic planning, networking, multi-agent coordination
Why me?

- Time **Management**
- Lots of bad managers
  - ITSS Auckland
  - AMC in Calgary
- Large project, lots of work, 22 Students, late nights (bedsheets in the lab).
- Version control. Code sharing
- Recent graduate
A day in the life of a Grad Student (Why?)

7:00    Alarm rings
Went to sleep at 2:00. Turn off alarm

10:00   Wake up
No milk, no breakfast
Remembers meeting/demo of MEA with supervisor

11:00   Go to University
Thinks about implementation of CBR
Read email, Usenet, WWW
Have lunch

13:00   Meet Tony, hear about new Linux kernel
ftp, compile, debug, install
tell Tony

15:00   Almost miss meeting with supervisor
Demo doesn’t work
Supervisor talks about Jim's paper
Supervisor asks about similarity metric
17:00  Play soccer (MWF), Quake (TR)
19:00  Go home
       Cancel outing with girlfriend
       Turn TV and Radio on
       Try and fix program. The new kernel
21:00  Hungry. Start cooking dinner
21:01  Come up with one idea for a new test
21:02  Very excited, now he knows what the problem is
21:30  Smoke alarm goes off. No time to eat now anyways
00:30  Fixed the problem and added code (Similarity Metric)
00:35  Really hungry, order Pizza
       Watch Star Trek and read Jim’s paper
02:00  Goto sleep
Time Management

- Does s/he sound familiar?
- Not a bad student
- Tony thinks she is great
- Supervisor, girlfriend?
- Time Management is Commonsense!

- Use your time in the most effective/productive way
  - Which things are (not) important
  - Use your time effectively (80/20)
  - Increase the amount of time for work
  - Control distractions
  - Reduce stress
How do you spend your time?

- Memory is not a good guide
- Activitylog
  - Write down the things that you do each day
  - Write down how you feel (tired)
  - Extension of your design notebook
- Analyze the ActivityLog
  - How much time do you spent on email?
  - How much rest do you get?
  - At which times do you work best?
How should you spent your time?

- Planning (so that’s why me)
- Find out what you want
Who’s for dinner?

- You can invite five people for dinner
- Living, dead, fictional
- Who do you want to talk to?
- Write down the name of the person on the left

_________________________  __________________________
_________________________  __________________________
_________________________  __________________________
_________________________  __________________________
_________________________  __________________________

- Write down why you want to talk to them on the right
- What do you find important?
- Look at the reasons to find out your **values** (artistic, attitude, career, education, family, financial, physical, pleasure, public service)
- Does your activitylog reflect your values?
- How can you improve it?
Goals

- Goal setting. Sharp, clearly defined, positive goals
  - Be more productive by knowing what is important
  - Increase motivation
  - Increase satisfaction and self confidence

- Set Performance not Outcome goals

- Goals must be at the right level (not too hard, not too easy)
  - Fear of failure
  - Insufficient information
  - Always expect your best performance
  - Lack of respect for self (sleep, rest), burn out

- Think through your goals: required skills, information, assistance, resources. Possible problems. Problematic assumptions

- Quantum leap approach sometimes works
Planning Cycle

1. Analysis of Current Position
2. Identify goal
3. Explore options
4. Detailed Planning
5. Plan Evaluation
6. Plan Implementation
7. Closure of plan
8. Feedback
Planning Cycle

- What needs to be done?
- Annoyances list
- Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
- Define the aim of your plan
- Exploring options:
  - Logical thinking, critical reasoning (thesis)
  - Mindmap
  - Brain storming
  - Research, literature review
- Pick the best option
- Detailed planning
  - Identify key actions
  - Prioritize actions, mock deadlines
  - Control mechanisms (measure progress)
Planning

- Plan from the longest to the shortest timespan (1 year, 6 month, 1 month, 1 week, tomorrow). Avoid clashes in the future.

- Weekly schedule:
  - Do the same things at the same time
  - Allow for flexibility (1 hour/day)
  - Know your energy zones. Difficult tasks in the morning
  - Make time for reviewing your notes
  - Break big tasks into smaller ones
  - Make time to take care of sleep, breaks, food, laundry, relax.
TO DO list

- Daily list of activities
- The night before
- Copy over from previous day (or delete)
- Cross off items that you have finished
- Prioritize the list using the 80/20 rule. Pareto Principle
- Pick the 20% that yield the biggest gain
- Urgent ≠ important
Procrastination

- Think positive about outcome
- Too complex, break it down into small steps (CBR)
- Create an incentive, reward.
  - List what you like to do (play games, read, ...)
  - Do not watch TV until the first chapter is written
- No fear of failure. Writers block. First draft doesn’t have to be perfect
- Delegate
- Avoid distractions
- Don’t over-plan! Top-down design
- Don’t try and make everything perfect
- Emotional blocks: boredom, anger, guilt. Discipline
- Procrastination High: Adrenaline rush for meeting deadlines. Use intermediate deadlines.
Distractions

- Physically block out distractions. Visitors.
- Quiet study area, lock door, turn off TV
- Email:
  - Handle each piece of email only once
  - Discard, forward, reply, edit, save
- Switching and floundering (Lack of concentration or focus)
- Get rid of unwanted jobs
Creating more quality time

- Be aware of your energy zones. Look at your activity log to find out when you are most effective.

- Eating patterns, rest, and energy.

- Good breakfast with carbohydrates. Mid-morning snack. Protein (Egg).

- Big lunch and alcohol diverts blood, oxygen.

- Take small breaks often (50 minutes).

- Try and experiment with different patterns.

- Get up earlier. 1 hour = 10 weeks/year. Get into the rhythm.

- Meetings with your supervisor: Send abstracts etc. prior to meeting. 15 minutes early, review your notes, prepare questions, write summary into your design book.
Summary

- Time management is commonsense
- But it requires a change of attitudes
- Change of attitudes is a slow process
- Positive reinforcement
- Concentrate on results, not on being busy
- Use an activity log to check your time and energy
- Setting goals and plans