



Activity Logs

Find Out How You Really Spend Your Time

How long do you spend each day on unimportant things; Things that don't really contribute to your success at work? Do you KNOW how much time you've spent reading junk mail, talking to colleagues, visiting the internet and making coffee? And how often have you thought, "I could achieve so much more if I just had another half hour each day."

And are you aware of when in the day you check your e-mail, write important articles or do your long-term planning?

Most people find they function at different levels of effectiveness at different times of day as their energy levels fluctuate. Your effectiveness may vary depending on the amount of sugar in your blood, the length of time since you last took a break, routine distractions, stress, discomfort, or a range of other factors.

Activity logs help you to analyze how you actually spend your time. The first time you use an activity log you may be shocked to see the amount of time that you waste! Memory is a very poor guide when it comes to this, as it can be too easy to forget time spent on non-core tasks.

How to Use the Tool

Keeping an Activity Log for several days helps you to understand how you spend your time, and when you perform at your best. Without modifying your behavior any further than you have to, note down the things you do as you do them on the template which is provided. Every time you change activities, whether opening mail, working, making coffee, gossiping with colleagues or whatever, note down the time of the change.

As well as recording activities, note how you feel, whether alert, flat, tired, energetic, etc. Do this periodically throughout the day.

Learning from Your Log

Once you have logged your time for a few days, analyze your daily activity log. You may be alarmed to see the amount of time you spend doing low value jobs!

You may also see that you are energetic in some parts of the day, and flat in other parts. A lot of this can depend on the rest breaks you take, the times and amounts you eat, and quality of your nutrition. The activity log gives you some basis for experimenting with these variables.

Your analysis should help you to free up extra time in your day by applying one of the following actions to most activities:

- Eliminate jobs that your employer shouldn't be paying you to do. These may include tasks that someone else in the organization should be doing, or personal activities such as sending non-work e-mails.
- Schedule your most challenging tasks for the times of day when your energy is highest. That way your work will be better and it should take you less time.
- Try to minimize the number of times a day you switch between types of task. For example, read and reply to e-mails in blocks once in the morning and once in the afternoon only.
- Reduce the amount of time spent on legitimate personal activities such as making coffee (take turns in your team to do this - it saves time and strengthens team spirit).

Key points:

Activity logs are useful tools for auditing the way that you use your time. They can also help you to track changes in your energy, alertness and effectiveness throughout the day.

By analyzing your activity log you will be able to identify and eliminate time-wasting or low-yield jobs. You will also know the times of day at which you are most effective, so that you can carry out your most important tasks during these times.

Review your activity logs with your supervisor and let it be a tool for planning your work and setting your priorities.

For more information on Activity Logs, please visit:

<http://www.mindtools.com/rs/ActivityLog>