

Time Management in Information Overload

Expectations around information and response times have grown exponentially. We used to have a few days or weeks to respond to a particular piece of information. Now we're expected to respond in minutes or hours. We take our work home with us and due to smartphones or social networks, we are constantly flooded with information.

Besides all this being strenuous, it can also be risky: When our brain is in overload, it defaults to shortcuts which often come along in the shape of routines or biases. Although both of those shortcuts have the advantage of using less energy, the risk of overlooking new aspects or making a snap judgement is significantly higher.



Overload in Numbers - Did you Know?

The unconscious processing abilities of the human brain are roughly 11 million pieces of information per second

The conscious processing abilities of our brains are about 40 pieces per second

In 2011, Americans took in five times as much information every day as they did in 1986

YouTube uploads 6,000 hours of video every hour

In 1976, the average grocery store offered 9,000 products; now it's ballooned to 40,000 products

25% of employees experience stress and poor health due to the volume of information they are exposed to

During our leisure time, each of us processes 100,000 words every day – the equivalent of 174 newspapers

5 Quintillion bytes of data is created every day

Every two days we create as much information from the dawn of civilization up until 2003

By 2020, 1.7 megabytes of new information will be created every second, for every human being on the earth

Only 0.5% of all data is ever analyzed or used

We lose up to 75% of processed information from our memories and brains

So what can we do?

Time is a currency we need to exchange for anything we do. We all have the same amount of time to spend, but there are methods to increase our time affluence through the ways we control our perceptions of it. While technology plays a crucial role in information management, the primary solution will come down to our choices, habits and responses. Below three ways to manage your time.

One option is to trick your brain to perceive time differently:

Help Others

This might seem counter intuitive, but people who have more time often give it away through volunteering and helping others. A study that compared the opportunities to waste time, spend time on oneself, or spend a gift of time found that giving time selflessly actually

Another option is to help your brain perform well:

Don't Multitask

Multitasking "costs" you by forcing you to decide whether you should stick with what you're working on or attend to the interruption. All those little decisions "spend" oxygenated glucose, the very fuel you need to focus on a task. Sticking to one task uses less energy than

increased people's perception of time.

Do Things Differently

When we do the same things every day, our brains tend to take shortcuts, and our efforts don't require as much conscious thought. This makes time seem to go more quickly. In contrast, when we do things in new or unexpected ways, our brains engage more consciously. We experience time as slowing down because we're more present and putting more work into the thinking that goes into the task.

Do Things you Love

When we have a passion for a task or topic, we find time to pursue it. The way we live our lives is through making choices about how we spend each moment. We can find more time by pursuing activities that we enjoy because those are the kinds of things that we'd happily set aside time for.

Take Control

Nothing contributes to time poverty more than feeling out of control. It's a problem when we have too much to do in too little time. We can take back a sense of having enough time by incorporating as much control as possible, and by redesigning our days. Even the simple act of pausing for 10 minutes to think about how you want to spend your time—which project to start on or which email to prioritize—can reassert a greater sense of time abundance.

multitasking and actually reduces the brain's need for glucose.

Limit Distractions

Research found that just having the opportunity to multitask is detrimental to cognitive performance: Having an unread email in your inbox while you're trying to complete a task can chop 10 points off your effective IQ. If possible, set aside two or three times of day for email and turn notifications off.

Daydream

The brain operates in different modes: One is when you're directing the thoughts, and the other is when the thoughts take over and run themselves. Directing mode is the one that allows us to get our work done, but our minds can't stay in one gear all day long. In daydreaming mode, one thought melts into another and they're not particularly related. This daydreaming mode acts as a neural reset button by replenishing some of the glucose you use up in staying on a task and fosters creativity.

Take breaks

People who take a 15-minute break every couple of hours are much more efficient in the long run. It gives the brain a chance to hit the reset button in a part of the brain called the insula. Taking a break or a walk around the block, although most would think that they're a waste of time, will boost productivity and creativity. On average, a 15-minute nap can increase your effective IQ by 10 points.

For those who are more hands-on, there are specific things you can change:

Do a Brain Dump

Get things out of your head. Create a big list of everything floating around your head. Also, immediately write down any thought that interrupts your work flow. Once on paper, prioritize the items into these buckets: Do it, delegate it, defer it, drop it.

Follow the Two-Minute Rule

If you have a lot of little tasks, designate 45-60 minutes every day to plow through any items that will take you two minutes or less, like emails, phone calls, tidying up, etc.

Eat the Frog

Important decisions and tasks should be completed at the beginning of the day, when gumption and glucose is highest. Eat a frog first thing in the morning and the rest of the day will go better, Mark Twain suggests. Set aside that time with all distractions turned off and adopt the mindset that that task is the most important thing you could be doing at that time.

Delegate

Delegating tasks to the right/relevant teammate or co-worker, rather than taking it on ourselves.

Escape

Make yourself unavailable at a set time or for specific tasks every day. If you're writing a proposal for example, turn email client and phone off. This focuses your attention on the piece of information that matters most: What you're working on right now.

Satisfice (yes, this is a word)

You've probably heard the saying "Perfect is the enemy of good." To some, that sounds like a terrible idea. Conscientious workers strive for perfection, but perfection induces overload. So strive for perfection in stages and iterate wherever and whenever you can.

Prioritize

Spend only as much time on decisions, tasks and activities as they are worth. At the end of the day, it is all about relevance.

Want to Learn More?

We have a 3-hour class for you:
Organized, On Time, And Productive
June 12 | 08:30 pm - 11:30 pm
VTTC Training Room 114A
[LMS Link](#)



Institute Spotlights

In this section we are introducing a member or each cohort. Thank you, Kim and Beth, for sharing your thoughts!

We asked them the following questions:

1. What do you think about information overload, do you feel it on a daily basis?
2. Any tips you'd like to share on how you manage incoming, overwhelming information?
3. What part of your job do you like the most?
4. If you had three additional hours each week, what would you do?
5. Share a memorable fun fact about yourself!

Kim Fedele, Financial Administrator II

1. Every day! Working in F&A has allowed me to learn a tremendous amount about the life of a project, but trying to take it all in can be overwhelming.

2. Try to pick out the pieces that really pertain to your work and the goal you're trying to achieve. It's great to have that broad knowledge, but save some valuable mental space for the information that is going to benefit you most.

3. I've been exposed to so many parts of the Agency and work with a huge variety of "customers". It has allowed me to see the big picture and understand why my work is so important.

Beth Meyer-Ehrich, Civil Rights Program Manager

1. Luckily, I do not experience information overload on a daily basis, but this is the time of year when it can creep in. Construction season can be nutty and I can easily miss an email message or forget to do something if I do not give myself time to organize and prioritize tasks.

2. I think the big thing for me is giving myself the time to organize my tasks and thoughts, because I am much more efficient if I allow that time. Each of us are going to have different ways of organizing information that works best for us. My guess is that we all have established some kind of system that works!

4. Organize my desk, it's kind of a hot mess.

5. I met John Mulaney after the last show he performed at the Flynn! (If you don't know who that is, I would strongly encourage you to look him up).



3. Even though it can be nutty, I really like construction season. It is fun (and challenging sometimes) to work with contractors on labor compliance issues and to provide opportunities for people who are underrepresented in the industry to try out highway construction work.

4. I would definitely spend it with my family in the woods or on the lake. If I had the power, I would ensure that those three extra hours are in the day time and are at least 75 degrees and sunny!

5. I have a twin sister. If you are ever in Portland, OR and you think you see me, it might not be me.

Additional Development Opportunities

AOT Lunch & Learn Series

Stay tuned for upcoming Lunch & Learns throughout 2019 in-person and through Skype.

Continuous Improvement Tools

July 11 | 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
AOT Davis 5th Floor Board Room

[Skype Link](#)

PE License & Credits

June 26 | 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
Dill Building Conference Room

Be on the lookout for a Skype link!

Personal Development

August 22 | 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
VTTC 114 A&B

[Skype Link](#)

Mentoring

Become a mentor! During your year at the Transportation Leadership Institute as an emerging leader, you learned a lot about yourself, the organization, and networks. Pay it forward and consider becoming a mentor; invest in others in our workforce! You are the perfect mentor to support others stretch and grow!



[Please click here and fill out the mentor application so we can reach out when mentees approach us.](#)

Sources

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<http://unsettle.org/information-overload/>