GETTING THINGS DONE:

- AN EXAMINATION OF DAVID ALLEN'S WORK-LIFE SYSTEM.

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Getting Things Done:
- An examination of David Allen's work-life system.

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Preface

Motivation for the study

David Allen released his book Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-free Productivity in 2001 (Viking) and in 2003 the paperback edition (Penguin books) was published. The book encouraged those who lived stressed lives to take control over the situation to retrieve harmony in life. Allen was a professional productivity manager who had worked with Lockheed Martin[1]. Allen is not alone in the field of personal productivity; there exists several other authors which present their theory on how to live your life better. It was probably the simplicity and system thinking which contributed to how people within the information technology industry embraced Allen's theory, or "system" which is Allen's preferred notation of his methodology. Within personal organisation digital devices such as Portable Digital Assistants (PDA) and calendars had been the normal way to get on track. The problem was that environment which they worked within had become harder and more volatile; the common way to live the day with calendars to organise the work was not longer enough. One problem was the plan for the day was constantly getting changed, and changes in the planning were not something which was the strength of normal. The solutions were continuously getting more advanced; GTD took the opposite direction and proposed simplicity. GTD is also heavily built upon *system thinking*[2] and this was something that people working in Information Technology (IT) was used to and embraced. The idea was to put all your actions into a defined flow diagram and work from that. GTD fastly became hype and still in 2006 Internet is crowded by web-sites dealing with GTD and personal productivity creating a subculture on the Internet. People in this subculture called themselves "life hackers" and many had David Allen as "the" icon. One of the most famous life-hacker sites is Merlin Manns[3] 43 Folders with over 100 000 unique visitors and 43000 readers by Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed each month (Mann, 2006). This study will describe GTD and make a critical analyse on the theory. GTD is often described as a time management theory; Allen himself rather uses the notation work-life system.

Background

Since the beginning of 1960 up till today there has been a major change in the work environment. Today work is influenced from globalisation with mergers and acquisitions as

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1 Lockheed Martin is a leading aerospace manufacturer and advanced technology company formed in 1995 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Martin).

2 An approach to analysis was that the components are believed to be separated from the environment (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems_Thinking).

3 Creator of 43 Folders and inventor of the HPDA (Hipster PDA, 2006).

result, IT with the use of computers. Businesses are competing on a worldwide basis and western production encounters cut-throat competition with Asian industries practising Toyotaism[4] (Cohen, 2003, Chapter 2 -Burnout). Privatisation and the growth of female participation from part-time to full-time have also made an impact on the work environment. Further the trend of sub-contracting and outsourcing has made the former secure workplace into an insecure environment with fierce competition (Sparks, Faragher & Cooper, 2001, pp. 489-492 & pp. 503-504). Sparks et al. also conclude that "there are fewer people at work, doing more and feeling less security and control over their jobs". Allen describes the situation for people who are working as crazy (Allen, 2003, p. 1). The harder business climate forces us to work harder and we risk to be excluded from the market if we do not meet the competition. Today we meet fierce competition in almost all sectors, to survive a business or organisation must perform better all the time to not be outmaneuvered.

The work has also fundamentally been transformed since early 20th century, when work was easy to see with your own eyes. In early 20th century even managers had quite few different work tasks and the work was easier to define than today. Today it is not uncommon that finding out what to do might require as much time as the time needed to perform the actual task. It might also be hard to identify responsibilities and to know when work is completed, and how can we know if the completed work was a success or not? The demands of being productive and the insecurity about work have created a stress situation and the result is often that parts of our lives are neglected. It has even gone so far that we as individuals define ourselves by our work, this because of the huge amount of effort we put into our work. These imponderables are contributing to stress and motivation fatigue. Allen (2001) concludes that work today no longer has the clear boundaries work used to have, and many people bring their work home. One change is originated in the fact that more people conduct knowledge-work; many positions involve some creative thinking and it is impossible to shout down your brain when ending the day (Allen, 2001, pp. 3-7); hence unfinished work has a tendency to haunt us on our spare time. Old way to manage yourself and your work has become obsolete. Work-life balance has been disturbed and time management advocates argue that time management might be a crucial tool to be able to handle the more complex work environment. Time management exists on many levels and in many contexts. In this thesis time management is referring to personal time management in the context of personal development. There exists a countless numbers of ideas on how to improve one's competencies in the field of personal development; all from short tips on small matters to larger time management systems which might include tips, methods and processes.

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[4] Industry working by the Toyota's Production System (Lean manufacturing)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toyota_Production_System.

Burnout have become a common disease and the reason behind this most certainty has its roots in the new work environment. Two important factors for burnout are cynicism and emotional exhaustion (Burnout, 2006). Emotional and exhaustion, both these two inverse elements are related factors when discussing the new reality. Emotional exhaustion can be connected to a variety of components such as information overload, harder work, and efficiency demands. Cynicism can be pared with insecurity in work, and the feeling of not being able enough for the task at hand. The new reality creates a demand of new tools and techniques. Time management advocates are saying that time management is the cure for the new reality and therefore practice time management might prevent burnout. Pickering (2001, Chapter 1 - Self balance, key to balance) gives two good advices which sums up and motivates the importance of time management: *To control your life you have to control your time* and *you cannot save time - you can only invest in it*. The key message is that time is crucial for everybody in some way, and it is an area we often neglect when we intend to develop ourselves.

Productivity training on an organisational level has been practised and is seen as a normal activity; productivity training on the individual level is yet pretty exclusive to top-managers and is not widely spread. Since the organisation will never become more productive than its members, it is a natural evolution to bring in individual productivity and both work on organisational and individual level.

Scope of research

The research starts with providing a body of knowledge on work-life balance, personal productivity and Getting Things Done. With an exploratory spirit data is collected from individuals using the GTD, writing about personal productivity and other connected articles which can be found in the data gathering process. The data gathering is conducted through the use of weblogs (blogs) where individuals share their thoughts.

Blogs provide an excellent forum for collecting data in an exploratory study; this because of the fact that blogs are established in order to share ideas in the sub-culture which have embraced GTD the most. The result is that there exist countless of web-sites and personal comments about GTD on the Internet.

There are only a few studies on GTD and no previous study uses blogs as data source. Blogs are becoming a vital part of the information flow in our society; in fact corporations start blogging from a company (http://www-03.ibm.com/developerworks/blogs/) perspective and even governmental organisations, as the American Air Force (http://www.blackanthem.com/scitech/military_2006062803.html) and United states departments of defence (http://www.defenselink.mil/transformation/articles/2006-06/ta062906b.html), are starting to pay blogs serious attention.

Purpose of study

The purpose of the study is to conduct a critical analysis of GTD with data from GTD users and by doing so the purpose is to identify strong and week parts of GTD. The study is exploratory and will use the data to analyse information and draw conclusions. The study is in some point intended to provide suggestions on further more theoretical and empirical research.

Research goals

There are three research goals:

1. To provide best practices from GTD users and to present them in a short and focused form.

2. To provide a better understanding of time management tools and techniques in general.

3. To provide suggestions on further research.

Dissertation structure

At first a theoretical framework is presented in three parts. First general work-life balance theory is provided. The second part dives deeper in personal productivity. The third part provides a description of GTD. The following two chapters on purpose and method is meta-information and provide information on how the research is performed and also a perspective on the research is given. Purpose and method is then followed by the three chapters: Result, Discussion and Conclusion. The last chapter "further research" gives some proposals on questions this research has raised.

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Abbreviations and terminology

Blog	A contraction on the word weblog, a type of web-sites found on Internet.
GTD	Getting Things Done
RAM dump	When your clear your brain on information and puts it in the GTD system.
Stuff	Used within GTD as a notation of information which steals your attention before it is put in the GTD system.

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GETTING THINGS DONE:

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Abstract. The thesis investigates David Allen's work-life system "Getting Things Done" in an exploratory manner with the help of blogs. The research indicated that Allen's system can be a help to become more productive by providing tools for parts of the productivity concept. The study did however reveal that Allen's "Getting Things Done" system not by it self is a solution to work-life balance related problems, but can be a part in a bigger approach. The study showed that individual problems concerning work-life balance can alter the balance, and how effective small and well aimed changes for better productivity can be for restoring work-life balance. The study did also present the importance of personal development in today's work environment.

Innumerable sources provide information about how the work environment of today is becoming more complex and more stressful. Time management theory has evolved to focus not only on organisations but on the individual. This has occurred since work has become more complex even for the individual; precise as time management on an organisational level was born from when organisational tasks became more complex and effectively demands increased, so is personal time management a result on higher demands on individuals. This study will analyse David Allen's Getting Things Done (GTD) time management theory which he presents in the book *Getting Thing Done - The Art of Stress Free Productivity* (2001, 2003). GTD became popular in both business world and but maybe even more in the IT industry. The study takes an exploratory approach and focus is placed on users´ spontaneous reactions on the GTD system.

Theoretical framework

A body of research is presented which includes theory about work-life balance, productivity and Allen's theory Getting Things Done. The theoretical framework is divided into three parts: Theory part 1 - work-life balance, part 2 - productivity and part 3 - Getting Things Done.

The first chapter "work-life balance" focuses on problems in today's work environment and on how work has changed and how productivity is connected to work-life balance. In part 2 focus on which building blocks productivity is built upon and other factors concerning productivity. The last part, 3 - an overview of Allen's theory is presented.

Previous research

There are many research studies on the impact of time management, for instance concerning the need for time management, employee satisfaction and other aspects on why use time management. In the field of time management theory not much scientific research articles could be found. This might be a result of that time management theory is almost exclusive presented by experienced productivity coaches who believe they have found the Holy Grail to become productive and they present their theory in a book. This kind of books often has a practical approach and might therefore be quite hard and not even properly justified under a scientific research study. The productivity books are however read by a large crowd and it would not be hard to defend that these books have a big influence on employees' work patterns in business organisations.

Theory part 1 - Work-life balance theory

In this chapter, work-life balance theory is presented. Changes in work environment as the introduction of knowledge work, information overload and increase of stress from work is discussed.

What is work-life balance

Work-life balance refers to how an individual masters the environment at his or her workplace. Good work-life balance is considered to be a vital part in employee satisfaction and is believed to benefit both employee and employer (Wikipedia, 2006, Work-life balance). Work-life balance theory is a reaction to the unbalance which has become so common in business. For the employer the gain with work-life balance is in a less stressed and more productive worker. Good work-life balance tends to decrease absenteeism which is important for an organisation.

A new reality

Since the beginning of 1960 until today there has been a major change in the work environment. Today's work environment is influenced by globalisation with mergers and acquisition, and IT has made many markets global instead of local. Factories are competing on a worldwide basis and western production encounters cut-throat competition with Asian industries practising Toyotaism[5] (Cohen, 2003, Chapter 2 -Burnout). Privatisation and the growth of female participation from part-time to full-time have made impact on the total workforce and the work environment. Further the trend of sub-contracting and outsourcing has made the former secure workplace into an insecure environment with fierce competition (Sparks et al., 2001, pp. 489-492 & pp. 503-504). Sparks et al. also conclude that "there are fewer

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people at work, doing more and feeling less security and control over their jobs" (p. 490). Allen defines the situation for people working as "crazy" (Allen, 2003, p.1). Today we meet fierce competition in almost all sectors, and to survive a business or organisation must constantly become better to not be outmaneuvered by competition.

Knowledge work

The work itself has also fundamentally changed since early 20th century, when work was easy to see with your own eyes and even managers did not have an abundance of different work tasks but had quite few different things to manage. Today it is not uncommon that finding out what to do might take as much time as perform the work it self. It might also be hard to identify responsibilities and knowing when work is completed. A further question is how can we know if the completed work was a success or not (Allen, 2001, pp. 5-7)? Knowledge work tends to not be standardised and require an interaction with implied symbols instead of the physical materials and/or people (Pyöriä, 2005, pp. 8-9). Allen (2001) concludes that work today no longer has the clear boundaries work used to have, and many people bring their work home. One change is originated in the fact that more people conduct knowledge-work, and many work positions involve some creative thinking and it is impossible to shout down your brain when ending the day (Allen, 2001, pp. 3-7); hence unfinished work has a tendency to haunt us on our spare time. May (2005, pp. 33-34) describes the situation as "We don't really make anything; we simply create information from data and reconfigure it to yield knowledge that allows our business to advance".

The value of knowledge-work is widely adopted at an organisational level; an example is the Lean philosophy which has made Toyota to one of the strongest if not the strongest one in the automobile industry. In the concept of Lean production Lean knowledge can be found. Lean knowledge implies to deliver good results through learning, hence learning to learn is more important than performance improvements (May, 2005, p. 39).

Information overload

What is information load?

As a result of the introduction of knowledge work and IT we have continuously to deal with new information, both at home and at work. "Information overload" is a term which according to Edmunds & Morris has several definitions; the phenomenon is described by Edmunds & Morris as the feeling of "having to much information which uses up too much of their time, causing them to feel stressed which, in turn, affects their decision-making" (Edmunds & Morris, 2000, p.19). Wikipedia (2006, Information overload) defines "information overload" as a "state of having too much information to make a decision or remain informed about a topic".

What's the problem?

Information overload is a cause to stress and Black (2005, Chapter 1, Cope with information overload) argues that information overload might lead to anxiety and short-term memory problems, poor concentration and reducing in decision-making skills. Edmunds and Morris (2000, p. 21) argue that information overload is a factor to stress but also point out that there exists research which argues that the problem that information overload leads to is stress that will fade away when getting used to deal with a huge amount of data.

How can we fight information overload problems?

To fight information overload problems there is a need for realising the problem and take control. We need to learn to receive information in an efficient way and to learn to say NO to information, to throw away useless information and to use sorting and filtering tools (Black, 2005, Chapter 1).

Stress

What is stress?

Stress affects us all the time and is psychological, mental or emotional reactions on demands which are placed on us. Stress becomes a problem when stress reaches our limits and demands that we make adjustments with the result that our psychological abilities are reduced (Training Solution, 2002).

Stress is a vital part of motivation and without any degree of stress life would tend to become a dreadful bore. On the other hand, too much stress can lead to anxiety and depression; it can be a fine line between *normal* stress as an emotion and dealing with stress as a mental sickness (Sapolsky, 2003).

A big factor to stress can be lack of time, or the feeling of lack of time. In project organisations, the work load together with the fear of loosing your job and corporative politics are the biggest sources to stress. Both under- and over-workload can be sources to stress (Verma, 1996, Chapter 6 - sources of stress).

We are all motivated by different things but Hertzberg in Boddy (2002) found in a survey that there are a few factors which are present when talking about success. These were: achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility and advancement. The research also found factors which appeared in dissatisfaction; these were: company policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions. These are factors that not direct stress but many of them have connections to stress; for example is achievement influenced by stress. If there would not be any stress involved there would not be important to achieve the goals' set up.

Stress can be found in different areas and with different degrees of seriousness; for example post-traumatic stress disorder is a very serious state which might occur when a human has been exposed to a trauma where actual or threatened to death was involved (Wikipedia, 2006, Post-traumatic stress disorder). Stress related to illnesses, such grave post-traumatic stress disorder, is not discussed in this thesis; in the thesis stress is in the range from motivation to burnout.

What's the problem?

When talking about stress in consideration to time management the main attribute about stress impact on humans is when stress reaches counter-productive levels.

Besides anxiety and depression stress can be connected to compromised immune system, anger, aggression, boredom, nervousness, withdrawal and nightmares (eStressHelp). To prevent these states time management is supposed to be significant.

Self balance

Self balance is a concept which can be defined in many ways. The concept work-life balance is in general seen as a positive word and self balance is used as notation on a state where one individual is in a balanced state. Self balance is usually used as contrast to a state where an individual work too much and has a negative mind set. The negative mindset and high stress level often result in a state less productive than if in balance. Hutchings (2002, Chapter 7) points out that a balanced life-style results in better productivity and less illnesses.

Pickering (2001, Chapter 1- Self balance, key to balance) provides two advices which sum up the importance of time management when considering self balance. The first advice is: *To control your life you have to control your time*. This advice is due to the fact time is an important constrain of life, both in the sense that life is limited by time and that time is an atomic entity which not can be modified. Pickering's second advice is: *You cannot save time - you can only invest in it*. The second advice reinforces the thought that time is an atomic entity which cannot be changed. The only thing one can do is to change the way we use our time. The key message is that time is crucial for everybody, and the ability to effective use time is a knowledge often neglected when developing ourselves.

Theory part 2 - Personal productivity

This chapter discusses how we can stop or manage the negative factors which were presented in the prior chapter on work-life balance; the review in this chapter is focused on how we can work smarter and what factors are negative to productivity. Better productivity is by time management the cure for the new work situation.

What is productivity?

The word "productivity" belongs to the category of words often heard but which are difficult to define in an unambiguous way. The word productivity itself is often connected to negative feelings, which probably has its roots in workplaces where productivity almost always is used when we have to work harder to meet harder production demands. As we will see, this is only one side of the coin. The simplest definition of productivity might be "a value between input and output". Productivity often occurs in discussions on how to increase production output. Focus is then on increasing output with the same resources or less. As will be more obvious later, this is not always the case when talking about personal productivity. Here we might want to decrease input and maintain the same level of output; in other words work less but continue to complete the given work-tasks.

A more complex picture is provided by the Montreal Declaration of the World Confederation of Productivity Science 1990 (Harung, 1998, pp. 415-416), where productivity was said to consist of three components; effectiveness, efficiency and occupancy. Harung (1998) defines the components as "*Effectiveness* means that activity is directed to meeting genuine individual and social needs; *Efficiency* means that activity is performed in such a manner that the resources expanded are no more than necessary; and *Occupancy* means that effective and efficient activity occurs continually and without interruption" (pp. 415-416). Effectiveness can sometimes be defined as "the ability to produce an effect" (Wikipedia, 2006, Effectiveness). When this definition of effectiveness is used, the term "efficacy" is introduced. Efficacy then refers to "doing the right things". The later definition of effectiveness in combination with efficacy then covers the same domain as the first more general definition of effectiveness which included meeting genuine needs. In this thesis the first broader definition of effectiveness will be used. To sum up what productivity consists of using, the definitions Harung (1998) provides us are:

- **effectiveness**: the ability to produce an effect with genuine individual and social needs
- **efficiency**: the ability to produce as high output with as small input as possible
- **occupancy**: that effective and efficient activity occurs continually and without interruption

These three important theoretical building blocks can then be used to collect more hands-on topics within personal productivity. There exists a numeral of topics within personal productivity; some are critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, organising yourself, problem solving and time management (McNamara, 1999). There exists an endless amount of topics like the ones McNamara presents. What topics are valid is impossible to decide. It depends on factors as personal productivity status, and which tasks are to be completed.

Personal development

Along with personal productivity personal development is often heard. The two terms do not stand for the same thing; but they do have a relationship and hopefully engaging in personal development will lead to good personal productivity. Personal development covers all perspectives on an individual both professional as well as personal. Leah (2006) summarises five skills you need to get ahead. The skills are: communicational skills, time-management skills, conflict-management skills, decision-making skills and negotiation skills. With this list Leah does point out that productivity is important by mentioning time management but also points to other skills which are needed to "get ahead".

Why care about productivity

We want to become more productive to be able to avoid too much stress or burnout, and to be able to spend more time with our families, friends or just get more time for your self. To become more productive shall be the weapon to defend your spare time. It is important to realise that work flow might never end; therefore it is not the final solution against stress to become productive.

The productivity process

Being productive is a process and not something you concur with and then possess; therefore theory about personal productivity often focuses on reinforce habits and processes. To be able to evolve individual habits an honest self-image has to be the start of the improvement procedure. Personal development also demands time, and a great amount. These factors together with the insight into your own ability can be a bitter reality which makes personal development easy to omit (Marquardt, 1999, The process of personal development).

Different views on productivity

There exist at-least two views on productivity; the psychological and the practical. The psychological aspect focuses gaining a positive flow in life; both in the professional life as well as in the personal life outside work. The practical aspects are procedures and tools to be able to become more productive. Examples of the practical aspects can be procedures on how to perform work, tools for make work easier or simple things which make life easier.

Effectiveness

According to Harung (1998, pp. 415-416) "effectiveness implied that activities was directed to meet genuine individual and social needs". Being effective then both means doing something and doing the right things. To be able to know if the right things are performed a goal has to be present, otherwise there is no way to know if actions taken are the right ones.

Merron (2005) debates the significance of self-awareness in becoming effective. Merron argues that effective consultants are engaging in activities, practices or disciplines which have the goal to analyse thoughts, feelings and beliefs. When engaging in self-awareness activities personal goals will probably become clear. These goals are a key to become effective; without knowing where you are (self-awareness) and where you want to go (goals), there is no way to know the way. To identify your personal goals you are likely to decide which one will be the target for the defined goal (Harward Business School Publishing, 2005).

One big issue within the field of studies on self-awareness is time, and on how much time is spent on a specific task. The idea is that there is no sense in spending great amounts of time into task which will help you fulfill non-important goals. Adair & Allen (2003) among other suggest using a time log to track spent time. Keeping a time log might not be an activity which is needed forever but it can be a vital tool to get a better understanding of where you spend all of your time.

When having become self-aware and have a great knowledge, there is a missing part, which means extending the clear vision to the surrounding. In other words, it is needed to clarify the job. Every task to complete is not always directly aimed at getting your pay-check. In-clarity in the purpose of tasks and general lack of clarity concerning one's job is a great factor to time-waste, Tracy (2004) concludes that lack of clarity is the number one enemy to productivity. Another point which Bellman (2001) highlights the value of making work rewarding. Bellman also provides models for how to get things done when you are not in charge.

Bly (1999) points out that focus is crucial to be able to be effective. He gives example of easy practical tips as just shutting the door or asking people to be quiet as tips on how to very easily create an environment which one can be more focused in.

Efficiency

Efficiency is defined by Wikipedia as "doing the things right" (Wikipedia, 2006, Efficiency). According to Harung (1998, pp. 415-416) efficiency "means that activity is performed in such a manner that the resources expended are no more than necessary". Efficiency does not imply that you take your resources and make the best use of them; this since efficiency is not considered if the task which are described is efficient i.e., a task which targets the goal. We can be very efficient but in the meantime be on the wrong activities.

Just as with effectiveness we often do not train our ability to become more efficient in a proper way. Within sports athletes exercise constantly in order to become better and better. The same occurs when professional musicians train on their instrument. Within business it is not so common that businessmen take time to enhance their skills to the same extent.

Occupancy

Harung (1998) provides a definition on the last term occupancy; "occupancy means that effective and efficient activity occurs continually and without interruption" (Harung, 1998, pp. 415-416). The concept is to provide good logistics which provide the tools effectiveness and efficacy with material to work on. In a factory, occupancy would be represented by the line which makes each machine works without pauses. When applying Harung's definitions to personal productivity, scheduling and planning are the concepts which are most visible. However techniques for switching between different tasks or contexts fast also fall into the category of occupancy.

Planning

According to Nicholls the key to effective time management lies in not marking tasks as urgent if they indeed are not. Urgent tasks will steal attraction from other tasks and take more space than necessary. What is important might be easy to decide; it is more important to complete the project report which will result in 100 000 Euros on the bank account than making a call to your friend and book the tennis court for your upcoming game. But if you find yourself thinking about the tennis game instead of writing the project report it might be better to make the call and then continue with the project report. In this example an unimportant task steals the attention from an important task; this is a behavior which is very hard to change. It is probably how the brain is working and the best thing we can do is to deal with it. Nicholls (2001) stresses the importance of labeling our work in appropriate ways, if labeling tasks by importance it is vital to label it in a clear and structured way.

Counter-productive activities

To become productive it is as important to stop performing counter-productive activities as start practising productivity activities. In many occasions it might be so that identifying ones counter-productive habits and change them might be an appropriate solution. In this chapter counter-productive activities are discussed.

Multi-tasking

Multi-tasking is something which comes hand in hand with knowledge work and the leaner workplace. Multi-tasking is often seen as something which highly productive professionals master. The truth is probably that they are good at working with several things at the same time without conducting any multi-tasking. Multi-tasking does split focus and contributes to

stress (Weeks & Chan-Fisher, 2004). Pophal-Grensing (2006) lists multi-tasking as the number one time-waster; and that multi-tasking might be an efficient factor is not true according to Pophal-Grensing.

Procrastination

Procrastination is a central concept within time management theory; in short "procrastination" can be described as the avoidance of an action to later. Hence an individual who is procrastinating is deferring tasks which he or she will have to complete at a later occasion. Procrastination can lead to feeling of stress and guilt, and is a counter-productive custom (Wikipedia, Procrastination, 2006). The stress and guilt often experienced when procrastinating is a symptom of the uncompleted commitments the procrastinator has either to other people or to themselves. Procrastination is a common phenomenon and Leftwich (2006) reports that a study performed in 2001 showed that up to 70% of the North American people are having problems with procrastination. Procrastination is however becoming a problem when an individual experiences either stress, guilt or other symptoms related to work-life balance. Wikipedia (Procrastination, 2006) even concludes that "chronic procrastination may be a sign of an underlying psychological or physiological disorder". Reasons to procrastinate a task is often connected to such beliefs and feelings as the task is difficult, the task is too knowledge demanding, the lack of knowledge to solve the task or fear to not be able to complete the task. More complex reasons contributing to procrastination are perfectionism, resistance about completing work which a person you dislike will favor, the feeling that the task is not fair and it is not your job to complete it, self-drowning in the sense that an individual is negative and disbelief's him or her self, often thinks that a success was just luck (Calpoly, 2006).

We can overcome procrastination by first identifying the problem by distinguishing problems as; low self-confidence, fear and anxiety, problems with concentration, the feeling of being too busy, bad time management, difficulties in making decisions and the appearance of perfectionism. Once a procrastination problem state has been identified one has to review personal goals, and personal attributes as strengths and weaknesses. When a better and more valid self image is present it is possible to create a plan which leads from our current position to our goals (Calpoly, 2006).

Theory part 3 - Getting Things Done

Introduction

David Allen is the president of The David Allen Company and one of the world's most influential individuals in the field of personal productivity (The Gadget Show, 2005). Allen has worked in management consultancy and has been an executive coach for over twenty years. Allen has been a keynote speaker and facilitator for among others the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Navy, and L.L. Bean. Articles on David Allen and his work-life system "Getting Things Done" can be found in The Guardian, Philadelphia Inquirer, American way magazine and others (The David Allen Company, 2006). Allen's work has been publicised in Fast Company, Fortune, the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and others (Allen, 2001, p. foreword). Allen is the creator of the Getting Things Done work-life management system, which is presented in his best-selling book *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (2001, 2003). The book has gained 3rd place on BusinessWeek´s paperback business book long running best-sellers top list (BusinessWeek, 2006) and 30th on the International Digital Publishing Forums eBook list for December 2005 (International Digital Publishing Forum, 2005), a list which had best-sellers as *Star Wars Espisode III* and *The Da Vinci Code* at the top.

Allen asks us: *when do people feel best*? A common answer is: usually before vacation. Allen then argues that the good feelings emerge not mainly from the fact that we are about to have vacation but from the actions we perform before taking our holiday; completing work which we previous have put aside and now have in a queue. We complete the unfinished commitment so we not have to think about them while on holiday or have to start digging in to them when coming back from the vacation. Allen then wonders why we not try to live with no unfinished commitment all the time.

GTD is built on the axiom that you feel better when having no or less unfinished commitments. GTD relies on that we catch our thoughts and write them down into a system which we trust. The main point is to write down thoughts which steel our attention the most, independently on the importance of the task connected to the thought. This axiom which GTD relies on is a common used technique and example is given by Gragg (2005, p. 19) who writes "If you feel overwhelmed, try to figure out what's stressing you most. If you can write everything that pressuring you, it might be a shorter list that you expected". This is also the same technique as simple to-do lists are built upon.

Many aspects of the GTD are supposed to grow and become a natural part of life; this is true both for the process, the project planning, collection habit and the next-action decision habit. In Figure 1 below (see page 13) Allen's visual representation of the GTD process is presented.

Getting Things Done Explained

Overview

GTD is as Allen describes it a system, i.e. a work-life management system (Allen, 2006, online). Allen takes a step which is kind off questionable when he rejects the idea of divide work-task and free-time task planning. His reason for doing this is because of the work environment of today no longer has clear boundaries and more often is of cognitive nature. Mankind does not possess the capacity to decide over it by him- or herself. There is no way to turn work related thoughts out of our mind outside of work. Unfinished work will haunt us while we are at home as well as personal matters will not avoid our attention while at work. Allen defines unfinished work or commitments as stuff. The stuff is what steels your attention when you think about other tasks you have to complete than the one you is working on.

The GTD system consists of a process for dealing with everyday actions. This process is here described as the GTD process. The GTD process consists of five different phases which are designed to work as an incremental path. The five phases of the process are: collect, process, organise, review and do. The phases are described in detail in the following chapter *The GTD process*. Allen also puts focus on how planning shall be conducted and gives an uncomplicated process for project planning. The process is not intended to replace ordinary big project planning but it is project planning in GTD style, where a project is defined as a desired result that requires more than one action step (Allen, 2001, p. 37). Allen defines what he calls natural planning, which he describes with the brain's way of planning explained and defined. GTD also includes tips on how to get projects under control. An example of this is Allen's thoughts about the role of vertical and horizontal management in the GTD system. GTD is build on the foundation that all unfinished commitment or stuff as Allen calls it, are collected and placed into buckets. These buckets are then continuously reviewed. Since we know we will review the bucket where the action is we can stop thinking on the action. We can only do this if we have a system we trust. One of the most important philosophies is "the next-action decision". The philosophy is very straight forward and simple but according to Allen very effective. The main thought is that if the next step towards the goal is not established and clearly specified, there is a great risk that it will be procrastinated. When specifying the next action the project's direction is also defined and if the next action differs between people, the project might not be sufficiently described and different people might vision different outcomes. Outcome is another topic GTD focuses on.
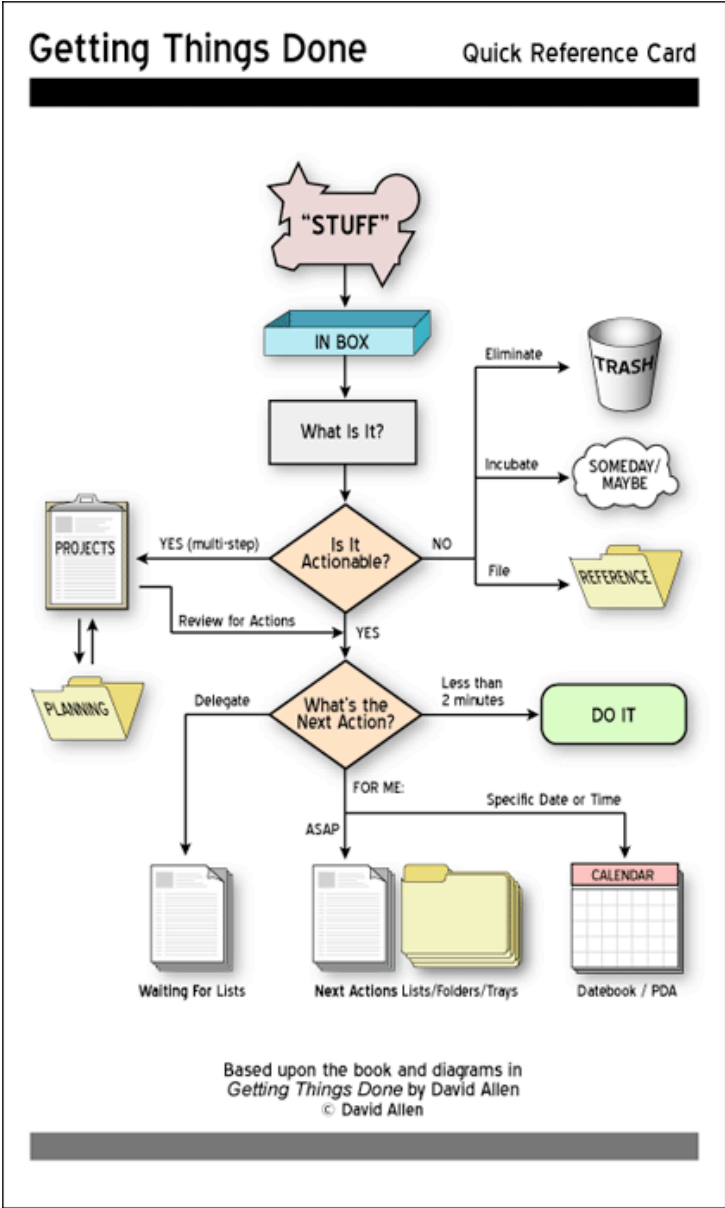
Figure 1. A visual representation of David Allen's GTD system (http://www.davidco.com), Illustration by Douglas Johnston (Source: http://www.douglasjohnston.net/weblog/ archives/2005/06/08/gtd-diagram/).

People will start to trust you when you do not forget things. When starting to collect your stuff the first time you might feel some anxiety, and this is how you are starting to process the stuff. When you understand the negative feelings for your stuff you are able to get rid of the anxiety which existed before the collection started; it was just pushed away from your mind. Initially the feelings will not be of only good feelings. When you know how much work load you have you can actually say no when some one asks you to do something without getting a bad conscience.

It is crucial for the system that you keep your agreements. If you don't you have to deal with it, there are three solutions to a broken agreement according to Allen (2001, p. 227):

- Don't make the agreement
- Complete the agreement
- Re-negotiate the agreement

If a broken agreement is not dealt with it is a source of unpleasant feelings. To which extent do you need to collect information? It is better to cover too much than too little. When getting more experience the question will not be so hard to understand anymore (Allen, 2001, p. 232).

Next action focus

The next-action is a significant part of the theory behind GTD; the idea is that if you take one step irrespective to how small it is, it will bring you nearer the completion of the commitment. Allen stresses the essential value of declaring the next-action decision, both by stating an action and by making a good action. A bad action is tires; a better action would be buying new tires (Allen, 2001, p. 238). By declaring the next-action an option of doing is created, and if we don't have specified what to do, it is unlikely something is going to be done. The declaration of the next-action also provides clarity, both while working on your own and when working in group. It also gives accountability to actions; and who are supposed to do what? Allen (2001, pp. 244-248) also believes the establishment of next-action will give increased productivity and empowerment.

Outcome focus

To be able to declare a next-action it is crucial to know what the desired outcome is, therefore GTD is very focused on the project outcome. Being outcome focused each of your projects will enable you to become multi-level outcome focused more easily (Allen, 2001, p. 253).

The GTD process

Allen (2001) highlights the importance of stepping though the GTD process phases without starting the next phase before finishing the present; the only exception is the first phase which has to be valid all the time. All stuff need to pass through each process.

Collect

The first phase *collect* implies not so surprisingly collection. In this phase we attach all stuff to our GTD system. Stuff that will end up in actions that takes less than two minutes to perform might stay in our head though-out the GTD process and might not end up in our project list. Stuff that needs more time than two minutes to complete is to be filed in an inbox for later processing. It is vital for the process to have a nice set of inboxes. GTD uses inboxes as collection-points which act as a place-holder for stuff until we can process it. Examples of inboxes are the obvious e-mail inbox and paper inbox but it can also be a notepad, a digital voice recording device or a digital PDA. These can all be seen as different inboxes, serving the same purpose; collecting items which later will have to be processed (Allen, 2001, p. 27). The important thing is always to have an inbox so the collection becomes easy and soon a habit. An inbox according to Allen is supposed to work as your mailbox and not as e-mail inboxes often are used; as archives. You should never leave something in your inbox; the inbox is a placeholder until it gets your attention to be processed.

Allen writes "as soon as you attach a "should", "need to" or "ought to" an item, it becomes incomplete" (Allen, 2001, p. 26). When starting with GTD Allen concludes that it is hard to know what to collect, but he concludes that if some stuff steals your mind, it has to be collected. Allen uses the term "ram dump" for this activity which is inspired from computers.

It is very easy to start processing and organising things in this phase; it should be avoided at all costs. Processing and organising stuff creates barriers for collecting things. Processing and organising are later problems.

Process

When processing your inboxes it is good to process one item at a time. The first to do when processing an item is to ask the question "What is it?". If the item not is actionable we place the item either in the trash, or save it for later use in "someday/maybe" or store the information in our archive. For all items which are actionable we have to define the expected outcome and what the next-action is. After the initial decisions we now have an item which we have to do something about. We can do it, delegate it or defer it and do it later. All things which we are to do with more than two actions will have to be put in a project list (Allen, 2001, pp. 31-35).

Getting Things Done Explained

Organise

The things to organise are both the stuff and the information it becomes when being processed.

Buckets

The buckets might be the most dominant GTD information carrier. The buckets are place-holders for information.

Information

With too many projects there will be different sorts of information that are connected, and there has to be a simple and convenient way to store the information in connection to the project.

Calendar

There are three things that are valid to put in a calendar: 1. Actions who have to be performed at a specific time; 2. Things which have to be performed a specific date; 3. Information which are of value a specific day (Allen, 2001, p. 39).

No more "Daily To-Do" Lists

The so often used daily to-do lists do not work since your priorities are likely to alter through out the day. The second problem is that things which did not end up on your list might be forgotten even if they would have been good to do on the day (Allen, 2001, p. 40).

Next action lists

One of the most central concepts of GTD is to always have a clear next action on all projects. Without the next action there is no clear path from your current position towards the goal. It might be good to know the whole way to the goal but since this is very hard and the path might change while completing tasks it is better to focus on having a doable next action. The next action can be compared to a small, well defined step which will bring you closer to the goal.

Review

Most people will not argue that review is a good thing to do; the question is what is to be reviewed and to which extent. Allen (Allen, 2001, p. 46) argues you to "review your lists as often as needed to, to get them off your mind". Allen sees a weekly review as a critical success factor when using the GTD system. There might also be a good thing to have a monthly and a yearly review. Daily reviews of your system shall only be done to the extent that you know what to do.

The weekly review shall at least involve the following (Allen, 2001, p. 47):

Getting Things Done Explained

4. Gather and process all your "stuff".

5. Review your system.

6. Update your lists.

7. Get clean, clear, current, and complete.

To be able to have the luxury to really work focused on the weeks it is crucial to be disciplined with the weekly reviews. Most people are feeling very good before free time, why? Is this so because of that they are having some time off or because of the "before vacation" organising they just have done? Allen (2001) thinks in organising of no lose ends is a big factor.

Do

The do phase is maybe the most important. To collect, process, organise and review are processes that all have been conducted to enable work to be done in the best manner. List of all things which are doable are now presented, so what should be done? Often there are different resistances for different things. It might be easier to call your boss and tell him about how your project was a success and that you ended up way under budget than telling him that you needed to fire people from your staff. Allen argues the two minutes rule as crucial and very effective against procrastinating. The rule is very simple; if an action takes less than two minutes then do it now! The danger with the rule is that people tend to make two fun minutes longer than two minutes and likewise two boring or hard minutes are easy to procrastinate.

Allen introduces three different models for choosing what to do. They all rely in some way on intuition but have different angles. The models for choosing action in the moment are:

- The four-criteria model for choosing actions in the moment
- The threefold model for evaluating daily work
- The six-level model for reviewing your own work

The models are meant to complement each other by view the same problem from different directions (Allen, 2001, p. 49). While these steps, criteria and attitudes not can be seen as space science there is a point in taking them in to consideration to emphasise the system thinking which a vital part of GTD deals with.

The four-criteria model for choosing actions in the moment

The four criteria are in order:

1. Context

2. Time available

3. Energy available

4. Priority

This model helps to decide what action is most appropriate to deal with at a specific time. It is important to notice that priority is the last criteria in choosing what action to do. Many other techniques for time-management rely heavily on priorities.

The threefold model for evaluating daily work

When working and getting things done are there three types of different activities to devote:

- Doing predefined work
- Doing work as it shows up
- Defining work

While these steps not can be seen as space science, there is a point in taking them in to consideration when here is a need for emphasising the system thinking which a vital part of GTD is.

The six-level model for reviewing your own work

Allen defines a notation of altitudes to describe personal goals, priorities i.e., these are:

- 20 000 meters: life
- 15 000 meters: Three- to five-year vision
- 10 000 meters: One- to two-year goals
- 5 000 meters: Areas of responsibility
- 3 000 meters: Current projects
- Runway: Current actions

GTD is not a priority or goal focused system since Allen does not se how this helps in the moment. He does consider and thinks goals and visions are vital in ones life. The big difference in between GTD and many other theories is in the way GTD utilises the goals and visions. GTD uses goals and visions to steer which projects to initiate but emphasises on the irrelevance in the smallest action in the moment. The important part with the model is that it defines and gives a structure to normal behavior. It is very easy to be lazy and trying to take short-ways and by doing so miss out crucial moments in the process. An example of this the "lets get to it", lets solve the problem expression, is often found in engineering people. The relevant issue is "Why do we have to solve the problem?" It is very often this vital question is forgotten; even that we know it is a valid question to ask.

Project planning

In this section, issues such as goals, principles, vision/outcome, brainstorm, organise, and next action are discussed.

While big part of GTD is focused on horizontal management Allen also gives principles of mastering vertical management by providing a project planning process. The GTD project planning process is a process for GTD projects and is not meant to replace normal project planning processes; the GTD process has similarities to project planning processes used on normal projects. Allen's project planning process is very simple and it is according to Allen our brains normal planning process defined. Allen calls this process "natural planning". Allen then describes unnatural planning and concludes this unnatural planning to be very common (Allen, 2001, pp. 56-62).

Goals

Opposite to the reactive planning process, Allen emphasises the important question to ask "Why"? According to Allen (Allen, 2001) answering the question **why?** creates success criteria, motivates the work, makes things clearer/easier to perform and increases opportunities. If there are no goal for the project it is very hard to value how important the project is in money and which budget the project shall receive.

Principe

The second phase in the GTD project planning process is to identify the principles which regard the project. The declaration of that kind of principles helps to give a better picture of what and how the project is to be performed. Allen defines the principles as the answer to the question "*I would give others totally free rein to do this as long as they . . —what?*" (Allen, 2001, p. 66).

Vision/outcome

The question to ask in this phase is **what?** This is the final phase in which we in some way are trying to find out what to do and how. It is very important to define what deliverables have to be completed. It is very hard to complete a journey if the destination is not set. Allen noted the importance of making a mental image of the outcome and defines the following three steps as a good route to obtain a mental image of the outcome (Allen, 2001, p. 69):

- View the project from beyond the completion date.
- Envision "Wild Success"! (Suspend "Yeh but ..")
- Capture features, aspects, qualities you imagine in place.

Focus shall be on finding out which steps that were most apparent.

Brainstorm

The brainstorming phase in the GTD project planning process is not to give any advises on how to conclude brainstorming which differ from prior theory. The important thing is the alignment of the brainstorming. Following the GTD process, the brainstorming is performed with goals, principles and desired outcome declared. A foundation in GTD is to become more productive and creative in which brainstorming is a determinative factor. It is important to have a maybe list of projects which you can attach ideas of project which might not ever end up completed but will only act as creative catalysing materials. Allen gives us three rules for brainstorming:

- Do not judge, challenge, evaluate, or criticise.
- Go for quantity not quality.
- Put analysis and organisation in the background.

Organise

The organise phase in GTD is what most people would call "project planning". Now is the time for identifying actions of the project which are vital for success. The identified actions are ordered by component, sequence or priority. In this phase it might be good to use some project management tool for making GANTT diagram if it is desired (Allen, 2001, pp. 74-75). It is very hard to know to which extent to plan. How many details shall be covered? Allen advices to plan to the extent that the project is not in the head and steels the attention anymore.

Next action

The next-action philosophy might be one of the most important parts of GTD. It is applicable on almost everything, from small personal projects to meetings about big complex matters. The next-action way of thinking is a part of the do phase of the GTD process.

Getting projects under control

Allen concludes that it is often people need more informal tools to be able to be productive and proactive. Formal (software) tools for instance the GANTT diagram, are often used and there are no problems in lack of knowledge in this field (Allen, 2001, pp. 211-212).

The nature of the projects will differ from large projects to projects in which you are participating, to small two-action projects as change buy and change a light-bulb in the hall. The later might just need a note at the shopping list. Different projects demand different amounts of planning. As in other parts of GTD Allen (2001) empathises on the idea to plan as much as the mind is free. Allen also gives a set of practical advices regarding tools for project

planning. The tips cover all from the importance of always having a pen at hand to the benefit of outline software.

Purpose statement

The purpose of the research is to investigate David Allen's Getting Things Done work-life balance system. The research takes an exploratory approach and the focus is on using the big online community with GTD and personal productivity interested individuals and uses their thoughts and writings on the topic to get a better understanding of GTD and personal productivity in general. Since the research has an exploratory approach on GTD no activities have been taken to quantify different opinions, in fact the opposite situation rules the research; it is concerned about finding out as much different opinions on GTD and personal productivity in general and possible problems with the GTD approach.

Research methodology

Procedure

A body of theoretical and practical knowledge is provided in the three theoretical framework chapters above. The content structure in theory chapters dealing with *work-life balance* and *personal productivity* are used as keywords in the data gathering process. The data collected is presented in the result chapter and are then discussed with theoretical body of knowledge in mind. The result is discussed in the discussion chapter, and is concluded in a conclusion chapter.

Participants

No clear participant group or organisation has been chosen for this study. The study does however use a group of people to collect the results. The data gathering process uses tools which a specific group of individual uses and this process creates the research participants. The population group is probably a big one but there is a lack of clear boundaries; this is however not supposed to provide any problems in an exploratory research as this one.

Data presentation

The research data is information from a certain individual's blog post. To enable transparency, the data is presented in short form ordered by author and structured by the content in the theoretical framework chapter. The author is presented in bold text. Life-hackers tend to have a heavily outline list addiction. This means that a lot of data will be presented in bullet form, and these lists are presented in with "#1 bullet one, #2 bullet two" to keep the thesis paper within the page limit. The list representation would be:

1. Bullet one
2. Bullet two

Data

Primary data is collected by using life-hacker Internet tools as Technocrati[6], Digg[7], Tagjag[8] and in some extent Google. These tools have been used with keywords from the theoretical framework chapters of *work-life balance* and *personal productivity*. The main purpose with the primary data is to gather information directly from GTD users concerning the GTD system. The data is supposed to spread light, both positive as well as negative aspects, on GTD.

There is a risk when using life-hacker and GTD friendly parts of the Internet for searching information about both positive and negative thoughts. It is such as seeking bad things about golf in a Golfshop; people are expected to have a positive attitude, otherwise they would probably not have been in the shop. This is a big source for bias in the research, but in the other end information about GTD is not easy to collect. There are probably no businesses which force their staff to use GTD. There are no local user groups; and if so they would probably be even more adverse against spreading negative thoughts. There exists a fundamental problem that many blog-posts are not as a personal journal of one's thoughts; blog-posts are often aimed for other in the same way as articles are. The advises posted in the blog post must be collected in some way thought-out personal experience, so the finding is in one way already analysed and worked on. The data is often presented in lists; an occurrence which is normal. People appreciating GTD is probably people who like system thinking and abstract viewing. To present data in lists is therefore a normal way to do it since it is in some way an abstraction of data from text in the same way GTD abstracts a system from normal life to make things easier to get an overview.

In the data collection process focus is on catching new approaches and ideas. Quantifying data with multiple sources is not a part of this study. Redundant data is avoided; this study focuses on overview and to bring a broader view of GTD.

Secondary data

For the theoretical framework chapters, focus has been on collection theory in traditional forums such as scientific peer-reviewed research paper databases and books. Chalmers, Northumbria and Lund Universities library services have been used for finding articles within the chosen topic. If books used were found at the Internet service Books24x7 the online version was used for easier transparency.

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[6] http://www.technocrati.com

[7] http://www.digg.com

[8] http://tagjag.com

Results

The results are presented in the order of the theoretical chapters present different problems.

Work-life balance

Stress

Patricia's (2006, managing stress) five steps for a new approach to life regarding managing stress are: #1 Expect it, #2 embrace it, #3 evaluate it, #4 engage it #5 emerge from it for a new approach to life. The main lesson Patricia provides is that we have to expect every compartment of our life to devote attention to function properly. Therefore it is crucial to act and not react.

Ichsan (2006) tells about managing stress by managing time. Ichsan highlights the connection between stress and time. He debates that lack of prioritisation is an important source of stress and empathises the value of prioritisation to establish to-do lists. Ichsan also thinks that small gaps of time can be made to big time savers if we are capable to change task quickly. A small time gap in traffic jam can work as a time to read through an important paper. Ichsan wants us to not think of these situations as time-wasters but as opportunities to complete tasks. Ichsan emphasises the importance of understanding the value of time; learn to say no and think of time as you think the president thinks of his.

Information overload

Finck (2006) concludes that in the beginning of the information age, information was seen as something that solved problems. Today the amount of information available can prevent us from finding valuable information. Finck also highlights the importance of thinking about what information others are favorable to receive. This applies to both simple actions as mail writing to building web-sites; what information does the reader has any use for? Finck's thought is not controversial, in-fact it complies with most theory about information overload.

Krill (2000) provides tips on what to do and what not to do to be able to fight information overload.

Do:

- Develop an information management strategy that works for you.
- Filter information.
- Accept that not all pertinent data can be examined prior to a decision when data volumes are exceedingly high.
- Attempt to recognise quality data.

- Take control.

Don't

- Let information take control of you by working 60 to 70 hours per week.
- Take cell phones or computers on vacations.
- Attempt to examine every piece of data available.
- Focus on things beyond your control, such as the number of new Web pages being added daily.

Personal development

Patricia (2006, personal development) draws parallels from a baby learning to walk and the encouraging parents and individuals with personal development. What happens if we don't try to get better? Patricia suggests that we spend a few minutes each morning to prepare for the day. She also concludes that personal improvement requires dedication, courage, and persistence.

Cox (2006) debates on that we can become almost 100% effective in all areas in our life. The key according to Cox is to focus on one project at a time and always working on staying motivated. Cox mentions the attempt to multi-tasking as a problem. Achieving 100% effectiveness is according to Cox hard but it is vital to understand that it can be done.

Robbi (2006) sums up how to become an achiever with the following items: #1 Decide exactly what you want in goals or objectives, #2 Make a list of everything you have to do today to move towards achievement of your goals and objectives, #3 Organise your list by priority and select A1. as your most important and single task, #4 Begin Immediately on no.1 task and discipline yourself to work on it single-mindedly until it is complete, #5 Repeat to yourself constantly - DO IT NOW, DO IT NOW, DO IT NOW!!! #6 Most important, be consistent. Like a true achiever.

Sharma (2006) has completed a list containing the top 200 secrets to success in life. Sharma do not define what success in life is. The top 5 secrets are: #1 Sleep less, #2 Set aside one hour each morning for personal development, #3 Do not let the things matter the most be set aside for the more unimportant things, #4 Use the rubber band method, each time a negative thought crosses your mind snap the rubber band on your wrist, #5 Always answer the phone with enthusiast in your voice. Other positive approaches in the list are laughing 5 minutes in the mirror every morning, learn to meditate.

Pavlina (2005a) makes strong reasoning about the value of knowing your individual purpose. Pavlina draws the similarities that if you do not know your purpose and your needs you are probably working on others´ needs. He even makes the rather harsh comparison with working for another to own. You are working for someone else and trying to satisfy your boss, your

customer and others. With this reasoning Pavlina tries to motivate the importance of high-level focus.

Estill (2006) gives 12 tips of business experience for personal development: #1 Have goals, #2 Analyse how you spend your time, #3 Keep a to-do list, #4 Prioritise your list, #5 Control procrastination, #6 Organise, #7 Delegate, #8 Master efficiency tricks, #9 It's OK to say no, #10 Focus.

Time management

Hunter (2006, Top Three Benefits to Utilising Time Management Software) argues over the importance in using time management software for being more productive and getting a better balance in life.

Hunter (2006, Three Time Management Techniques) presents three time management techniques for productivity. The first technique involves splitting our time into categories. The categories Hunter presents are: Category 1 - Negative productivity (things we should have done), Category 2 - Running interference (we will get interfered), Category 3 - Accomplished tasks, Category 4 - Working in solitude (working but not on the things you planned), Category 5 - Leisure time.

The second technique Hunter presents stresses planning to be vital for productivity. Hunter even suggests us "making a list of everything we need to do" and to prioritise these lists. Each morning shall involve planning time to get a good overview of the work.

The third and last of Hunter's techniques involves the use of tools, a desktop calendar or software like Microsoft Outlook. Hunter argues that when integration between desktop software i.e. Outlook and cell phone tools will provide an even better solutions to become productive. As a final note Hunter writes that learning to say "no" is a core feature to become productive.

Bischke (2006) thinks that it is possible to have more than 24 hours every day, he even gives a prescription on a 36 hour day! Bischke provides 10 strategies to enable a 36 hour day. The strategies are #1 Optimise your sleep, #2 Optimise your diet, #3 Multi-task, #4 Get organised, #5 Improve your typing speed, #6 Improve your reading speed, #7 Learn out loud, #8 Use software to your advantage, #9 Cut your TV time in half, #10 Get help from others. Bischke calculates how much time one can save from "normal" state and add the time to 24 hours and end up with 36 hours.

Result

Motivation

Harris (2006) provides his thoughts on how he stays motivated while working from home. Harris uses Getting Things Done as an organising system and strongly encourages the use of 10 minutes work and then 2 minutes break. Harris also wants us to break the border from doing something, starting the day with doing something before doing anything else. Harris also stresses the value of exercise to keep motivated and focused.

Personal productivity

Zimmerman (2006) concludes that his roadmap to success with 12 secrets can be summarised with the word "responsibility". Zimmerman argues that when taking responsibility you are in control. Zimmerman also highlights that the word "responsibility" is a dirty word which most people have a negative feeling about.

Counterproductive activities

Multi-tasking

Izzaldin (2006) gives 10 tips on how to handle interruptions: #1 saying no in a smart way. Izzaldin's tips are practical and strategic ways to neglect and steer away from those who interrupt and want to steel your attention.

Procrastination

To fight procrastination **Pavlina** (2006) suggests us to: Replace "Have To" With "Want To", Replace "Finish It" With "Begin It", Replace Perfectionism With Permission To Be Human, Replace Deprivation With Guaranteed Fun, Use Time-boxing (30 minutes and rewards) to scale down a large task to a multiple task action.

Ferrier (2006) sums up three tricks for overcoming procrastination. Ferrier argues that time management techniques might help against procrastination but will not solve a procrastination problem. The tricks are: #1 When faced with a task, establish if it can be completed now, #2 If you come up against a task that can be done quickly (e.g., an email that only needs a quick reply), do it now, #3 Force yourself to complete something by making commitment to third parties.

Carlin (2006) gives the following tips: #1 Create daily "to-do", #2 Break large tasks into smaller steps, #3 Set deadlines, #4 Think positive "I will, I can", #5 Do one hard thing the first thing in the morning, #6 Clutter kills productivity, #7 Take a few minutes each day to review progress, #8 Don´t let unexpected events throw you off, #9 Don't let it get you down if you find it hard to break the procrastination habit in one day, #10 Stop thinking "Hmm, maybe I'll do what this article suggests" and just do it!

Result

Forster (2002) writes that to conquer procrastination one just has to get the file out. Forster argues that we then have forced ourselves into a position where we have to make an active decision on what to do. Complete or file the task. If the task not can be found in a file, it might be a book you should start writing; starting a word document might be the start to overcome procrastination.

GTD

Tucker (2006) highlights that GTD has taken the role not only as a personal productivity theory but as a company strategy; example of this is Hagerty Insurance in which one third of the 300 employees uses GTD. Hagerty Insurance has seen na increase in productivity and reduced general stress.

Pigpogm (2006) provides some dirty secrets on GTD. While Getting Things Done is good, Pigpogm writes that "the best way to get things done is to do them". He mentions the danger in pushing around work in lists and evaluate in which context to do them. The best might be to start doing them, starting with the smallest part. Pigpogm also notes that GTD is of no help at all with making you want to do things.

GTD's lack of high level focus

The experienced GTD user Pavlina (2005b) argues that there is a gap between high level focus on purpose and goals. Pavlina suggests that one should start with a one-sentence on purpose on life goal and a longer mission statement which breaks down high-level purpose in life's different areas: physical, social, mental, career and spiritual. Pavlina highlights that GTD is a low-level system, and does not claim to be anything else. GTD starts with projects, but where do these projects come from? Are the projects worth doing at all?

Blyth (2006) applies Sun Tzu's book "The of War" to GTD and provides some comparisons to personal productivity. Blyth summarises that as with GTD Sun Tzu argues about the importance of taking action, to act and not react and to use the right kind of force for the situation. The whole article makes the strong connection to militaristic approach and highlights the struggle with bad productivity as the enemy. An example is the connection between Sun Tzu's idea to fight where he / she can fight is applied to context. Complete the task if and at the place (context) possible.

Pollard (2006) discusses his modified GTD system and concludes that the main problem with GTD and work is to decide the priority of tasks. Pollard suggests that we should train people in our nearby to not over-prioritise tasks. He also provides three things to consider on priorities: #1 Lower others' expectations, #2 Ask yourself this question: Five years from now, what will the consequences turn out to be if I simply don't do this urgent unimportant task, #3 Delegate these tasks to people who think they are important. Pollard also provides his mantra:

Result

"We do what we must, then we do what's easy, then we do what's fun" and shall free up time to the easy and fun stuff to be really productive. Pollard also believes that most important things are also fun to do.

Result

Discussion

Result overview

The research focus was broadened from GTD to general productivity; this was a result found in data gathering process. Much of the results both contained of thoughts not only on GTD but on the broader productivity view. Since this was an exploratory study, this broadening of focus was a natural evolvement of the research.

Work-life balance

Better prepared

To be able to have a good work-life balance one has to be prepared for new tasks and that task attributes is shifting. The volatile environment raises the stress factor, something which Patricia (2006) highlights. Robbie (2006) writes about the value of being prepared with clear goals and objectives, this to be able to make strategic decisions. Pavlina (2005a) strengthens Robbie's reasoning on the value of being prepared. Pavlina argues that if you do not know your purpose, how can you know what to do, and challenges us to question ourselves who decides our actions if we do not know our own purpose. Estill (2006) joins in on the opinion that having goals is an important contributor being successful in personal development work. Sharma (2006) argues that we should set aside one hour each morning for personal development, to be able to be prepared for the work faced with during the day. The value of being prepared has probably increased with the introduction of knowledge work, where a greater amount of uncertainty about the actual work and tasks exists. The old quote "one can never be enough prepared" seems at first to be valid in the work-life balance context. This is however not true. If we spend all our time trying to get prepared we would not have any time for relaxation this results in that one can be too prepared. One has to try to be prepared enough for the tasks which are likely to occur. One can get the impression that work concerning personal development is according to some eligible to as much time as needed. This is however a problematic approach since it is very hard or even impossible to decide what "needed" means. We will probably have to become better in listening on what our mind tries to tell us, in the same way as our body is telling us if we are in need of stronger back muscles. What factors to use as indicators are hard to decide and probably this requires a completely new study.

Information overload

With the introduction of knowledge work information has transformed from being the source to the solution, to the source of the problem. New technologies such as instant messaging and e-mail have removed a big part of the troubles facing someone who wants to spread information. When sending a mail one will think about if it is worth the work of first writing

the letter and then buying the envelope and stamp before posting the letter. The work connected to sending the letter works as a barrier and information sent in a mail is more likely to have a great value than information sent by e-mail. The big issue is that the work of sending information has been transferred to the receiver in the form of information filtering. Finck (2006) summaries and argues that it is very important to consider the value of the information for the receiver when passing on information. Krill (2000) formalises Finck's thoughts and take them further when suggestion that one should develop an information management strategy, filter data and attempt to separate quality data. Krill argues that one has to strive for control, since the fight against information overload is a process.

In the same way as we need to control information attacking us we need to control the work flow which reaches us. Saying no to work is as important as completing the work we have a commitment to. Izzaldin (2006) provides tips on how to say no in a smart way and Hunter (2006) argues that it is much easier to say no when you know what tasks you have a commitment to do.

Personal productivity

Positive approach

Sharma (2006) might provide the most sensational approach to obtain a positive mind set with a rubber band on your wrist which one would use to punish ourselves when doing something which is negative from a personal productivity point of view. The lesson to learn with Sharma's rubber band practice might be that the main problem with personal development is that one has to change bad habits for better ones. Sharma's method also points out how hard it can be to change routines. Since it is so hard to change habits many professionals have used the service of hiring a productivity coach, this is probably something which will become more common in the same way as people uses psychiatrists to not only cure themselves from a sickness state but to be able to perform at their best. It might even be so that a positive mindset can be the most important factor to focus on. The importance of changing to a more positive mindset is probably more important when having a negative view on work and life than if you have a positive attitude and just have too much to do.

Zen

Even that GTD is heavily used by IT professionals, the core of GTD is going back to basics, and not rely on software to solve planning and organising. Many GTD users do however use software constructed to support the GTD process. Mann (2006) takes the zen[9] approach to the extreme with his Hipster Personal Digital Assistant (Hipster PDA, 2006) when he discards the new digital devices for a bunch of paper-cards connected with a clip. On the other extreme

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[9] A branch of Buddhism which emphasises direct experience and simplicity.

Hunter (2006, Top Three Benefits to Utilising Time Management Software) argues that the use of software to utilise time management is one of the best ways to solve productivity problems. Even that it might seem as no big difference between using traditional software for planning and organisation and GTD software, there exists a critical difference in that GTD software is designed to support the GTD system and the flexibility it provides while traditional software have its roots in traditional planning and organising which is hard to use in the new reality with knowledge work. It is not uncommon in productivity work try to simplify tasks and processes; an example of this is the GTD way of project planning, what Allen calls "natural planning". This is according to Allen the normal way of planning and also the way our brain plan. The problem is according to Allen that we somewhere started to work in another way, which when we analyse it just is not the way to do it. The simplest example is why we sometimes forget to question why we shall complete a task. We start asking why we shall complete the task when we are having problem to complete the task. When we consider this behaviour we realise that it is better to ask why first.

Productivity process

Just as Marquardt (1999) argues productivity is a process which you have to fight and participate in, and so is GTD. The most important theme when talking about time management and productivity is the insight that you start managing how you work continuously in the same way that projects use project management to be able to operate and produce while keeping sane. Allen (The Gadget Show podcast...featuring Allen, 2005) argues that once you really live by GTD you don´t have to worry on quit using the system, he debates that you might stop using GTD in the same manner as you forget to take a shower for a day, you will most likely get back showering. When using GTD it will grow on you as a habit and you will return to your routine even if you forget collecting or conducting weekly reviews.

The productivity work creates too much overhead

There is a risk that work concerning personal development creates too much overhead in comparison with the gained productivity. At the beginning when starting to use any new process or system there is always a period of time when one has to learn the new way to work. The problem is that people sometime forget to work on their actions and focus on working on their productivity system which are intended to utilise time for work, hence the new way of work becomes contra-productive. It is therefore important to review how we use and which results we achieve with the new system, this is however not possible if we do not have any data concerning our initial performance. This proves the value of using a time log before changing working patterns.

Multi tasking

Even that Bischke (2006) argues that multi-tasking is a core competence in his recipe for having more than 24 hours every day, the most common opinions argue the thought of multi-tasking being an activity which increases productivity as completely not true. To be able to be effective one has to be concentrated; and to argue that thinking about two or more different tasks would make us more concentrated is difficult, just as Weeks and Chan-Fisher (2004) concludes. Pophal-Grensing (2006) even rates multi-tasking as the number one of time waste. The traditional thought that one has to be good in multi-tasking to be productive is probably a myth which bystanders have created when being fooled by productive people's effective way to switch activity. Fast and smart context switches are probably a key to being effective in an environment which demands interaction. It is however important to recognise the difference between multi-tasking as in working on several things at the same time and the ability to switch between action in a smart way, hence it is important to handle interruption in a smart way as Izzaldin (2006) suggests. Most people have probably experienced their most productive moments when they have been able to put other thoughts away only focusing on the task at hand.

Procrastination

Procrastination is a habit which probably everybody considers as counter-productive since saving work for later only will result in us feeling bad about not dealing with the task. To ability to control procrastination is suggested by Carlin (2006) as one of the most important factors to become productive. Even that procrastination often is seen as a counterproductive activity some times we have to procrastinate. It might be so that a task has to be performed on a later day, and then we have to procrastinate. The important thing is that one is not procrastinating activities and creates big queues of work. The big queues of work will oppress us because of all the commitment we have to the work in the queue. The cure against procrastination is probably very individual, but keeping a positive attitude and think "I will and I can" is seen as a core quality by Carlin (2006). Pavlina joins Carlin's thought that positive thinking is crucial and suggests us to replace "Have To" With "Want To", Replace "Finish It" With "Begin It". Negative thinking such as "I can not and I will not" is probably a common reason why people procrastinates difficult tasks. It is also easy to procrastinate if we not are put in a position where we have to make an active decision about if we should start working on the task or wait until later. The thought about the importance of a decision is supported by Ferrier (2006) and is a central thought in GTD. The first step in the GTD process is to decide if the task really is something which we will do, and after that decide when we will complete the task. GTD provides tools for breaking down big difficult tasks into smaller parts with the next action concept; this is a smart system which removes reasons to procrastinate. GTD also forces the individual to an active decision, this will probably also decrease the will to procrastinate.

Getting Things Done

GTD is not a solution to work-life balance, there are some parts missing in high level planning, such as which tasks shall we do and when? Where are the tasks coming from? Do all of your projects and tasks come from your manager (Pavlina, 2005b)? GTD includes a limited support for efficacy work. GTD does have great support for effectiveness; this is what GTD is designed to be. A system for getting things done! GTD is not a system for figuring out what to do. GTD do provide techniques for help considering occupancy. The whole list system is designed to be able in a simple way fill your day. GTD does not provide an advanced scheduling solution; Allen solves the occupancy problem in the simplest way, keeping away from the hard parts with the argumentation that it is impossible to plan in details since priorities and times change dynamically throughout the day.

Practising GTD is probably not a good idea for every one. The best way of getting things done is to just to do them. We have to remember that GTD is a solution on a problem, hence there is no logic in starting to use GTD if you already have a good work-life balance and do not have problems with stress, procrastination and other work-life balance related areas.

While GTD first seems to discard the idea to prioritise tasks one can as likely claim that GTD empathise the value of prioritisation to the extent that Allen want you to value your priorities continuously when deciding what to do. This active approach to prioritise demands a very good self-awareness this to be able to know what your priorities are in the precise moment. As discussed above in high-level planning GTD lacks solid tools for high-level planning.

A problem occurs in waiting for context since there must be a mechanism for updating and follow up the things in the bucket. It is not hard to forget the face that activities are waiting for in the current activity. This makes it crucial to review the "waiting for" bucket continually.

GTD uses the common pattern of "identify, plan, and act" on task level which brings a degree of clearness to tasks which are very needed when working with knowledge work.

Conclusion

We want to become more productive to be able to avoid too much stress and burnout, and to be able to spend more time with our families, friends or just to get more time for ourselves. To become more productive is the weapon that we can use to defend our spare time. It is important to realise that work flow might never end; therefore GTD is not the final solution against stress to become productive. One has to consider the total work load and learn to say no to work if one have too much to do. It is crucial to have an overview of our workload to be able to say no to work without feeling guilty about it.

One can be fooled by the name "Getting Things Done" that if we just follow Allen's system we will not even have to perform the tasks to complete them. This is however not the case, GTD does not make the tasks go away and it does not make the tasks more fun to work on either. GTD does remove barriers which can keep us from completing work. The study has showed that GTD can be very effective but there exists a threat in believing that GTD is the whole solution to gain work-life balance. GTD involves tools considering both effectiveness and occupancy but lacks tools for the third productivity aspects of efficacy. GTD does not attempt to make the tasks more fun and in the end we have to work on our tasks even if using GTD. GTD can even contribute to procrastination, at least when not using the 2 minutes rule, not being strict with the next action on every project and working without deadlines. If we like we can spend time categorising our work in different lists without completing any work; this can in a bad situation protect the procrastinator from the actual work.

The key areas to focus on when conducting personal productivity work is to first identify a need for a more balanced work-life situation. If a need is identified we need to establish a goal. Defining a goal for better work-life balance is hard and the goal will probably have to consist of several other sub-goals concerning for example stress, performance and general happiness. The core of the work-life concept relies on general health and happiness but we have to realise the importance of conducting good work.

When working with personal productivity it is crucial to start with a need for change. The need can be observed as for example high stress level, bad productivity and depression. When a need for change is identified it is important to create a vision and outcome of the personal development work. When then performing the actual development of ourselves we need to schedule time every week to be able to have a manageable process. It is also important to change the attitude towards both work and life to a more positive attitude. We have to think "I will and I can", if we do not do that we are doomed to fail to become productive.

When starting to use Allen's GTD system it is crucial to see GTD as a part of a bigger plan, the personal development plan. GTD handles some aspects but we have to go outside GTD to

reach our most productive state. The most significant part outside GTD is that we need to manage our goals and vision with our life very careful.

One can think about the purpose of work-life balance and how we shall live with productivity demands with knowledge work have introduced. We might have to realise that work-life balance is something which we will se as natural as the actual tasks which we have to complete in the future.

What is the Holy Grail to productivity? Is the Grail the productivity/time management work itself?

The research

The research steered away from analysing only GTD to and got a broader approach with work-life balance and personal productivity. This was probably a result from that GTD not cover all aspects of the problem domain which first thought. The fact that the research got a broader focus shall not be seen as something strange or negative. The research took an exploratory approach from the beginning and the broadening was a result of the nature of the findings.

Conclusion

Further research

This study ends with several questions which would benefit from further study, these are:

- Investigate if GTD has a positive impact on individuals productivity and work-life balance.
- Case studies on individual starting with GTD and problems they face. The research would probably isolate drivers and barriers for successful use of GTD.
- Compare GTD with other time management methods available.
- Longitudinal study comparing people who are using GTD and people who are not.
- Research on if there exist groups of individuals with greater need for time management and how to distinguish those groups.

Furthermore research with larger sample size with the intention to prove GTD's effect on productivity should be addressed.

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