



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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5 April 2005

### Diminishing Productivity!

A study by the "Institute for the Future" revealed that employees of the Fortune 1000 companies send and receive an average of 178 messages a day and are interrupted at least three times in an hour. David Meyer, a researcher on multitasking, says, "People in a work setting, who are banging away on word processors as they simultaneously answer phones and talk to their colleagues or bosses, are doing switches all the time. Not being able to concentrate for say, ten minutes at a time, may mean it's costing a company as much as 20-40% in terms of potential efficiency."

According to Meyer, multitasking may reduce productivity due to the time lost in switching tasks. Multitasking involves two distinct and complementary stages - 'goal shifting' and 'rule activation'. While goal shifting is 'I want to do this now instead of that', rule activation can be verbalized as 'I am turning off the rules for that and turning on the rules for this'. Finally, when the employee resumes his original work, the train of thought is lost and it takes extra effort and time to get back.

Research on 25,000 people worldwide reveals that multitasking increases stress, diminishes perceived control, causes physical discomfort like headaches and makes it difficult to concentrate for extended periods. This is because though the human brain has the excellent capability of switching attention from one thought to the next rapidly, it keeps the unattended thoughts active and keeps interfering with the current tasks.

#### Managing the multitasking madness...

**Estimate time required accurately.** Miscalculation of time required to finish a task leads to frustration and delays the job further. Plan the work to be done in the next 3 or 4 hours. Calculate the time required for each task and follow the schedule.

**Develop external memory.** External memories, like making a note in an organizer or on a post-it, can help to get the burden off the brain.

**Stay focused.** Complete the task on hand before starting the next one. This is the most productive way of working. It is advisable to prevent distractions by keeping the mailbox closed and avoiding phone calls and visitors.

**Down time.** Taking small breaks in between work and weekend outings can help in refreshing the perspective and work more effectively.

Multitasking, though necessary, has to be practiced within certain limits to be really productive. Organizations should realize that the cost of too much multitasking can overrule its benefits.