

# 1. Time management

To talk about time management, we must define some of the characteristics of time:

- It is an absolutely different resource from all those we are used to deal with.
- It is atypical in the sense that it is essential for all human acts and different from all other resources known and used by man.
- It is equitable, since it is the same for everyone, where they may be.
- It is inelastic, since time can't be accumulated, saved, or borrowed.
- It is indispensable, since everything we do requires time.
- It is irreplaceable by any other resource (money, space, etc.).
- It is inexorable; time flows in only one direction and at the same speed.

The factors that have most influence on efficient time management are those of the environment itself. It consists of people, places and things that influence individuals by using time. Some of these environmental factors may be out of our control and yet there are ways to overcome almost all obstacles. By identifying how the behavior of others influences the capacity to manage time, we will manage to find a way to change these behaviors or to moderate the impact that they produce on your own life. On most occasions these people have defined very little, or poorly, their use of time. As we will see later on in detail, a simple way to diagnose time consists in carrying a small notebook everywhere and writing down the activities performed and how long they have taken. Subsequently, we will go on to analyze the notes and detect which two activities are the most time consuming and which two are the least; you will also determine, in a sincere manner, which activities you should devote more time to and which activities you should devote less time to. The conclusions you reach will help you to identify which tasks are most important, enabling you to benefit from a change that helps save time.

## 1.1 Techniques for effective time management

Some ways to order tasks according to their priority so that they can adapt to different styles are listed below.

- **ABC System:** consists in assigning letters to tasks according to their importance. Hence, the letter A corresponds to tasks that must be carried out immediately; tasks B are those that should be done fast although they are not as urgent as tasks A; tasks C can be postponed without a problem, and tasks D do not even need to be performed. This system eliminates the emotional burden from tasks. The ABC system has several practical applications, since we can rate the tasks that we write down in the agenda, the ones on the list of things to do and even create an inbox system on the desktop in which to classify documents as A, B, C or D.
- **Post-it system:** consists of using cards or post-its on which to note the tasks that are pending. They are all placed on the table and then ordered by importance or need for action. You could also use a large magnetic board where you can easily move tasks around. This system has the advantage of introduction and concepts related to effective time management that can be used by several persons at the same time; it is also a visual system that provides a general overview at a single glance.
- **Inventory assessment:** stems from the idea that the best way to learn is to review what has been done during the day and apply it the next day, which is why it is crucial to

assess the productivity of each day by setting the day's objectives every morning. Although this is not, in itself, a method that saves time, it generates time-saving behavioral changes.

➤ **Pareto principle:** according to this principle, in any kind of situation 80% of the value stems from 20% of the elements. For example, 20% of emails we receive give us 80% of the useful information, while the remaining 80% is useless. Another graphic example of the Pareto principle is that 80% of the clothing we usually wear is equivalent to 20% of what we have in the closet. When it comes to ordering priorities, many people use this principle to balance the relative importance of certain activities, as it provides us with a clue to change our behavior and at the same time create value.

➤ **Reward system:** stems from the question that everyone should ask themselves when beginning to order tasks according to their priority: «What is the reward?» Tasks are sorted depending on whether the reward obtained for performing it is high, medium or low. This system presents the difficulty that our emotional reactions and the context of each action have an influence on the decision. One of the ways to measure the use of time in this system is to find out how much money we earn with one hour of work, and whenever we waste time or someone makes us waste our time, to think about how much money we are wasting.

➤ **The ALPEN method:** The overall planning of an activity involves doing the time planning. This is the tool that will allow establishing when to start an activity and how much time it will be needed to perform it. When planning time, an action outline that indicates the most important steps to be carried out should be used. In this respect, the ALPEN method establishes that the fundamental steps are:

1. Set goals by drawing up a list of all the activities to be performed.
2. Estimate the time required for each activity.
3. Reserve contingency time.
4. Establish the importance of each activity and set priorities, assessing the time required and the time available. A useful procedure in this regard is the abovementioned ABC analysis.
5. Use a planning tool such as the agenda.
6. Use control systems to evaluate the direction of the work, especially in medium and long term planning. In order to prepare the plan, it is clear that the time factor should be taken into account; that is, it is necessary to set the time limits of the tasks that are being carried out.

➤ **GTD (Get Things Done).** We will focus on this technique in the next point.