

The Real Costs of Organizational Multitasking

Research behind the games and drawings

Multitasking: Switching Costs

Multitasking: Switching Costs. American Psychological Association (2006, March 20).

Retrieved June 11, 2019, from <https://www.apa.org/research/action/multitask>

- 3 types of multitasking:
 - A. Performing 2 tasks simultaneously
 - B. Switching from one task to another without completing the first task
 - C. Performing 2 or more tasks in rapid succession.
- B and C are the most costly when performing complex tasks
- Multitasking has two executive function tasks: Goal Shifting and Rule Activation
- **Problems only arise when the switching costs conflict with environmental demands on productivity or safety.** This explains why someone may be able to multitask easily without consequence on their own time or when doing individual activities, but the cost may become more visible in a collaborative effort or under high stress.
- Multitasking is costly and increases the risk of error
- **Brief mental blocks can cause someone to lose up to 40% of their productivity (when context switching between only 2 tasks)**

The Effects of Multitasking on Organizations

The Effects of Multitasking on Organizations. Realization (n.d.)

Retrieved May 1, 2019 from http://www.realization.com/pdf/Effects_of_Multitasking_on_Organizations.pdf

(link no longer active, [access full PDF here](#))

- 45 organizations included, with employee numbers ranging from 1,000 to 50,000.
- Reducing multitasking results in getting work done faster. Once multitasking was eliminated or reduced, these 45 organizations showed tremendous increases in throughput and significant reductions in cycle time. The mean throughput increase was 59.8 percent, and the median increase was 38.2 percent. The median cycle time reduction was 31 percent, while the mean reduction was 35.5 percent.
- **Reducing organizational multitasking increases overall productivity. The 45 organizations Realization examined saw a median increase in productivity of 38 percent.**

The Employee Burnout Crisis

The Employee Burnout Crisis: Study Reveals Big Workplace Challenges in 2017. Kronos Incorporated (n.d.)

Retrieved June 11, 2019 from

<https://www.kronos.com/about-us/newsroom/employee-burnout-crisis-study-reveals-big-workplace-challenge-2017>

- Survey included 614 HR leaders – including Chief Human Resource Officers (CHRO), vice presidents of HR, HR directors, and HR managers from organizations with 100 to 2,500+ employees
- 87 percent of respondents calling improved retention a high / critical priority.
- **95 percent of human resource leaders admit employee burnout is sabotaging workforce retention**

- Unfair compensation (41 percent), unreasonable workload (32 percent), and too much overtime / after-hours work (32 percent) are the top three contributors to burnout
- Despite 87 percent of HR leaders calling improved retention a critical or high priority over the next five years, one-fifth (20 percent) said there are **too many competing priorities to focus on fixing the issue.**
- Despite well documented costs of employee turnover, organizations are more apt to invest in recruiting new employees as opposed to retaining existing talent.

Who multi-tasks and why? Multi-tasking ability, perceived multi-tasking ability, impulsivity, and sensation seeking

Sanbonmatsu, D. M., Strayer, D. L., Medeiros-Ward, N., & Watson, J. M. Who multi-tasks and why? Multi-tasking ability, perceived multi-tasking ability, impulsivity, and sensation seeking. PloS one, 8(1), e54402. (2013, January 23).

Retrieved June 11, 2019, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3553130/>

- **"Perceptions of the ability to multi-task were found to be badly inflated;** in fact, the majority of participants judged themselves to be above average in the ability to multi-task. **These estimations had little grounding in reality** as perceived multi-tasking ability was not significantly correlated with actual multi-tasking ability."

Executive Control of Cognitive Processes in Task Switching

Rubinstein, J. S., Meyer, D. E., & Evans, J. E. Executive Control of Cognitive Processes in Task Switching. Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance (2001, January 13)

Retrieved June 11, 2019, from <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/xhp274763.pdf>

- Productivity losses of up to 40% when context switching between 2 tasks.
- Productivity losses increase when additional tasks are added
- Costs of context switching also come in the form of **limited executive functioning capacity related to creativity, planning, analysis, problem solving, and communication**

White Supremacy Culture

From Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001

Retrieved from: http://www.cwsworkshop.org/PARC_site_B/dr-culture.html

- Organizational multitasking that creates a sense of urgency and focuses on the short-term, at the expense of long-term outcomes is damaging because it creates implicit norms and standards that privilege white supremacy culture. This is damaging to both people of color and to white people.
- A continual sense of urgency makes it difficult to take time to engage in continuous improvement, collaboration, thoughtful decision-making, and lack of consideration of long-term consequences

Idleness Aversion and the Need for Justifiable Busyness

Hsee, C. K., Yang, A. X., & Wang, L. Idleness Aversion and the Need for Justifiable Busyness. Psychological Science (2010, July)

Retrieved June 11, 2019, from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44673229_Idleness_Aversion_and_the_Need_for_Justifiable_Busyness

- People (in Western cultures) love to be busy and have a **cognitive bias towards busyness**. Leads to a focus on outputs over outcomes
- The researchers also found that we use busyness to hide from our laziness and fear of failure. We burn valuable time doing things that aren't necessary or important because this busyness makes us feel productive.

