

Multi-tasking vs. Chunking

Introduction

Information technology is permeating every aspect of our modern life. It initiated fundamental changes not only in on how we work but on where and when we do it. It has transformed the nature of work itself.

Globalization had made competition stiffer. In order to survive, business today must be able to cope with the rapid change of information technology and how it revolutionizes the business world. This includes the competitive environment, the organizational structure, the nature of work processes, workspace, and the multi-nationality of workforce as well as balancing the demands of work and life of the workers.

While companies are struggling to adopt ways in order to keep the boundaries between work and home generally patent, the globalization of the American economy have exerted greater pressures for employees to work harder in order to keep abreast with tougher and fast phased competition. The rapid exchange of resources including the labor market through company outsourcing for labor cost reduction places pressures to a typical American laborer to work doubly hard to protect his job. Bridging the barriers of space and time, Information technology opened local companies to the international market which demanded 24 hour service thereby requiring some workers to be on call 24 hours a day as well. With the advances in communication technology, employees are

also easily called, requested or convened through mobile phones or the internet. The increasing feminization of the employment with the liberation of women and their increasing role in partaking in the financial support of family further exacerbated the difficulty to meet family needs. (Perrons, D.2006) Finally, the extant materialistic culture, in contrast to Daoistic traditions, have pushed people to be obsessed to work overtime to earn extra money to cover other trivial things for their family that they believed are more necessary than time spent for family such as expensive toys, clothes and the like. In a worst scenario, parents tend to buy or provide their children expensive materials to cover up for their failure to provide quality time to them.

While alternative working strategies i.e. telecommuting were invented to address the growing demands of work and address modern issues such as congestion and accelerating costs of real estates in order to maintain and sustain the economic progress and stability, multitasking and chunking were devised in order to help a typical laborer cope with demands and pressures of individual work.

Multi Tasking

Multi-tasking is the processing or ability to support or execute numerous tasks at the same. This idea of multitasking in work was derived from the ability of computers to multitask or operate or execute two or more programs simultaneously with a single processor. With the advent of computers, people are afforded to do multitasking. In a very simple scenario for instance, an ordinary employee can prepare printed copies of a

type written material while at the same time continue encoding a report in the computer. The same person can do this at the same get an important document from a client by downloading the file simultaneously from the Internet. In other words, the employee is afforded to do and finish tasks at the same time allowing him or her to be more productive as more work are accomplished in less time.

Because the computer is ultimately the machine that allows employees to multitask, it is prudent to learn the different forms of multitasking in computers. Cooperative Multi-Tasking is the most common form in which software applications seemed to cooperate with one other by automatically allotting time and resources for current operations. Every software that is open does a particular task and shares resources. (Bräunl, T., 2003) Thus, for an employee who is working with the computer, he is able to prepare a memorandum, for instance, by encoding using MS Word while at the same time, conduct research in the Internet through the Explorer. Depending on the system capacity of his work station, the employee may at the same be able to accommodate other works like recording back up files in CD ROM, playing music to create a relaxing ambiance for the whole office, chatting or having a real time discussion with a customer or co-employee through an online or local chat client and printing a hard copy of another document for submission to the boss.

Preemptive Multi-Tasking occurs when the computer system automatically forestalls the opening, operation or control of another application to maintain control to another application. In other words, if the computer becomes overloaded with different work

such as when the usage of its central processing unit or memory exceeds its capacity, it automatically prevents another application to open. In some instances, it allows the user to end other tasks by closing the application. Like people, machines have their limitations. While people breaks down and becomes fatigue for overwork, computer machines hang or conk out. Preemptive multitasking helps in thwarting the computer to crash out and go kaput by halting other tasks and maintaining only the works that it can handle. In applying preemptive tasking to employees, people apply multitasking to works that are complimentary like encoding information obtained from customer while conversing and getting the same. People naturally dispel tasks which are impossible to do at the same time like attending to two different customer inquiries at the same time.

Finally, multi-threading is the simultaneous running or operation of threads or a small but integral part of an application, not a totally new application process per se. (Buchanan,W., 2002) In a typical computer, this includes running system exe files e.g. dllhost, lexpps, spoolsv, service layer among many others. Multi-threading is as natural as how every tasks are operated and completed. In order to attend to the task of attending to a customer through phone for instance, an employee naturally performs “thread” tasks like making the necessary controls to the communication device, listening to the customer, replying correctly and with utmost courtesy by heeding company policy.

Chunking

Whereas multitasking allows a person to do more jobs at a time by performing different tasks and projects at once, an alternative to such working style is chunking. One talks to the phone, encodes, prints and downloads a document all at once in the same way that a computer runs different applications at the same time. However, this style of working deprives one of focusing on something which may compromise the quality of work. Moreover, working like a busy bee can scatter one's brain which can lead to fatigue and even depression. In computers, multitasking is possible up to a certain point or number of tasks to be done. Overloading a computer with work will crash it. On the other hand, overworking the computer can accelerate its wear and tear and eventually curtail its life.

Chunking is a work strategy which makes use of time management especially when working on various projects and assignments. Chunking is a process of suppressing time for work. It is based on the concept of grouping things or information which corresponds to creating sets of time. In computers, chunking can refer to the grouping of data for efficient transmission or grouping of information into concepts or chunks for better presentation. The first pertains to the method of packet switching, a means of economically sending and receiving data over network channels in which data transmitted are grouped into small bundle of information or blocks of data called packets containing the payload and routing information. (Hunt, C., 2002) The latter on the other hand, is most commonly seen in the presentation of information in a webpage in which information are presented in outline form i.e. bulleted list, headings and short sentences, to make reading and understanding faster and easier. This method seeks to contain short-

term memory restrictions by arranging or laying out information into small number of units. (Lidwell, W., et al, 2003)

In terms of human work, chunking is implemented by grouping your time and allotting your time on a particular task or work to do. An hour or hours of time depending on the need and complexity of the work can be allocated for a particular project you are working on. In which case, every hour of your day is scheduled making every hour of the day productive. Even the schedule of one's free time or rest can be scheduled on a regular basis. Letting other people know your chunking schedule also allows them the immediately schedule when to visit you or when not to disturb you because you are working. Blocking out one or two hours at a time permits greater time for concentration. Focusing on one job at a time can make perform and finish the task thoroughly, completely and with quality. It will also help keep your desk and thoughts clean during intervals, which allow you to clear up your mind and start fresh so to speak to a new project or new task. This makes you more objective in the performance of your function. And because managing your time or scheduling your task for the day does not only include one's means of living, chunking actually extends to how you spend your whole day. This applies to doing house hold chores, taking a break, spending quality time with your loved ones i.e. children or spouse, relaxing and recreating.

Chunking therefore allows one to organize your daily tasks and prevent mishaps. Because everything is scheduled by the dot, every task is sure to be performed. In multitasking, there is a possibility that if there are too many things that are in our mind at

the same time, we tend to forget or neglect the one that we don't prioritize. More often than not, while these things that we tend to forget are not important in work, these are the most important in life like calling your loved ones or spending time with them. Moreover, since chunking clearly defines or tells us what we ought to do at the moment, it helps us clearly monitor the progression of the project. Doing many tasks all at the same time may confuse a person as to where he/ she is on a particular tasks that he's doing. Where are we again? What am I saying again? These are the common questions of a person who is talking to a customer personally while at the same time talking to a client over the phone.

Conclusion

These two working techniques are neither better nor worse over the other. Both have advantages and disadvantages. In today's world, where competitions are tighter and everything is faster, multitasking is more like a conventional work process. This is especially true with the advent of information technology. Multitasking is apparently beneficial because it allows one to be more productive with their time by being able to do more things at a time. Computers are the workstations that allow people to multitask because it can really perform operations simultaneously. But however, multitasking have limitations in as much as the central processing unit of computers do. When computers reach a certain point when all its resources are used, it usually crashes. Printing a document, downloading a file from the Internet and encoding a memorandum for your boss can be done simultaneously. However, if additional task will be included like

rendering an animated video in the same computer, the workstation will definitely crash and all other tasks will be corrupted if not halted. In other words, multitasking remains advantageous as long as the number of the task to be performed can be fairly accommodate without compromising quality of work and overworking the machine or person. In that sense, multitasking is more advantageous than chunking because more work can be done in shorted period of time.

There are tasks, works and projects; however that require full attention and focus. These are tasks which cannot be part of a multitasking endeavor. A meeting with the CEO for one is a task that requires one's full attention and time. In which case, chunking applies. In some instances, multitasking reduces the effectiveness of a person because too much work becomes stressful. In which case, it means that there simply is work overload. This means that some work that is done via multitasking must be dropped. In worst case, it means that the person should focus on only one work, which is chunking. For instance, computer rendition of an animated video will take all the resources of the computer. Hence, it should focus on the rendering job alone and drop other operations like printing or encoding. In humans, doing a marketing presentation of a product to the most important client of the company entails full attention and time. All other tasks will be set aside. The preparation of a report will be done later, the meeting with another client will be scheduled later and even accommodating calls will be deferred. In that sense, chunking is more advantageous than multitasking because works or projects to be done require focus and full attention.

In a nutshell, the effectiveness and advantages of the two working techniques depend on different circumstances or is on a case to case basis. Multitasking is advantageous only to an extent that it does not compromise quality of work and the health of the employee. More often than not, multitasking is good for machines and bad for humans. (Davidson, J., 1999) Although the work of the computer machine is actually work of a human. Chunking is advantageous if a project or task require scheduling and full attention. Under these premises, it is a matter of discerning the situations which working technique may be applied in order to reap its advantages. In the end, it is always good to manage or organize your time. And it is also good if you can do two things at a time.

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