

## **This is The Good, The Bad and The Ugly of Multitasking**

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### **Introduction**

Many organisations and manager praise the practice of multitasking at work. Many believe that multitasking helps with performance management and this has been seen in many cases, where production rate has increased as a result. On the other hand, many people also many forget some setbacks that this may have on employees and potentially on the quality of work that is delivered at the end of the day. The term multitasking came from the computer terms as it is known that these machines are equipped to do this very well (Melanie, 2009). Learning about this brought about a very important question: if computers were created to multitasking, yet at times they fail and crash, what more for a human being? This article will outline the various aspects of pushing for multitasking as a normal practice in an organisation.

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### **What is multitasking?**

Melanie (2009), defines multitasking in the relative performance by an employee of handling more than one task, or activity, at the same time. An example of multitasking is taking phone calls while typing an email. It is not a difficult thing to do, usually if you have less complicated tasks to do.

### **Advantages of multitasking**

Multitasking has many benefits for both the employee and the organisation as a whole. When you manage to complete a few things at once, a result can be free time to do other things that would have taken up space if that had not been done. Some examples of the advantages of multitasking:

- **Saving Time** – One of the most obvious and important benefits multitasking at work is that it enables employees to save time. Instead of focusing on one task at a time, combining them

allows you to get everything done more quickly. An easy example to understand is: rather than going for an hour's job around the neighbourhood and then listening to your favourite album at home while doing nothing, it is possible to run while listening to the album. When you get home, you can do something else instead. By doing this, one may have more time for their families and friends.

- **Saving money** - For employers, multitasking can save a lot of money. If you're able to use multitasking to do things you'd otherwise delegate to employees or others, you can save money. Rather than hiring someone to file papers for you, do this while you're on the telephone with a client. When you can use multitasking to decrease the number of employees needed or the number of hours they work, you can save money.
- **Increased productivity** - Multitasking increases productivity for everyone. If a company has three employees who can multitask effectively, they will accomplish a lot more than the same number of workers who do not multitask. This could decrease the time needed for projects and certain tasks. For an individual, multitasking can even increase productivity around the house. This is especially helpful when someone has a lot to accomplish, such as during holidays or special events.
- **Prevention of procrastination** - Those who multitask will be less likely to procrastinate between tasks. Such people will be more motivated because they will see what they're getting done and achieving. When someone is multitasking, it's more difficult to find the time to procrastinate and therefore waste time.

### **Disadvantages of multitasking**

Although multitasking has its benefits, there also some aspects that can show the negative side of multitasking:

- **Multitasking can result in time wasted** due to employees switching from one job to another and causing more errors due to insufficient attention. This can be explained by research done which explains that, because the brain cannot fully focus when multitasking, people take longer to complete tasks and are predisposed to error. When people attempt to complete many tasks at one time, or rapidly between them, errors shoot up and it takes far longer. A study by Meyer and David Kieras found that in the interim between each exchange, the brain makes no progress whatsoever. Therefore, multitasking people not only perform each task less suitably but lose time in the process.
- **Loss of concentration and memory loss** – It has been found that people who frequently juggle various types of electronic communications and media have trouble focusing their attention on tasks that they need to complete. As a result, they take longer to switch between tasks, and don't perform as well on memory tests as those who don't (Clifford, 2019).
- **Quality of work** – Since employees will be putting their attention on various items at a time, the quality of the work that they produce may be jeopardised. The unfortunate scenario that takes place is that organisational managers expect the quality to remain the same when time and effort is divided into different tasks in the same amount of time given. 3 items may have deadlines around the same time, where the employee does not have the necessary hours at hand to put into them.

- Poor cognitive performance – Research has found that too much pressure on multitasking in the workplace can result in the increased levels of stress in the employee. When stress is high, brain functioning can slow down which can then reverse the intended results of the multitasking that was needed in the first place. Because of this, productivity is lost.

### **The effects of multitasking**

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### **What can be done to improve the effects of multitasking?**

- Studies have shown that some people can be trained to multitask where changes in brain activity have been measured as improving the performance of multiple tasks (see below: The brain's role). Multitasking can also be assisted with coordination techniques, such as taking notes periodically or logging current status during an interruption to help resume a prior task midway.
- Organisations can find ways in which they can encourage higher productivity without necessarily pushing for vigorous multitasking. With this, managers need to know their subordinates well so that they know how they work. Some people work better in that setting than others and these differences are okay as long as employees are presenting quality results.
- Managers need to remember that employees have families have friends outside the workplace environment. At times, multitasking forces employees to take their work home as they are chasing deadlines at work. In these cases, some people then distance themselves from their families. To avoid this, the work culture should limit working to the workplace unless very urgent.

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