Calendars for Humans:
How to undo the all-day cram
Learning Outcomes

1. Implement time-saving interruption busters.
2. Address meeting culture in your organization.
3. Construct and interpret metrics to reveal conflicting priorities.
4. Optimize your calendar to enable time for your most important work
TEAM PAIN

- Too many interruptions - can't focus
- Conflicting priorities - everything is a Priority one!
- Too many meetings
- No time for internal process improvements
- Too many different tools!
- Every reorg brings another process method.

- Burnout
Paula Thrasher
@paula_thrasher

I love having 5 meetings scheduled at the same time - over my lunch break - said no one ever ...

8:50 AM - 14 Sep 2017

3 Likes

2 Likes

Tweet your reply

LiliTree ★ @Lilitree · Nov 2

Replying to @paula_thrasher

This is my life, starting at 7 am.
AND YOU WANT ME TO ATTEND

HOW MANY MEETINGS ON WEDNESDAY?!
The 30 minute jam

The all day cram

The triple booked wham
The 30 minute jam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 meetings a day</th>
<th>perpetual stop and go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

exacerbates context
Back-to-back 7am to 7pm meetings leave zero flexible time
- no room for unexpected important urgent work
- disappointed people
- cancelled meetings (how often cancelled?)
- How much time is wasted rescheduling meetings?
If the no-show person disagrees w/ decision made by the others, then rework occurs to rehash out that decision.
we can’t a or b? Oh, btw hi, still here
Which time thief is preventing you from getting work done?

#MakingWorkVisible
@dominicad

40% Too much work in progress
7% Unknown dependencies
31% Unplanned work
22% Conflicting priorities

45 votes • Final results
TOO MUCH Work-in-Progress (WIP)
I like the person who asked

To Do
Snake drain pipe
Clean garage
Install window
Fence yard
Split fire wood
Fix furnace
Build deck
Replace gutters
Clean roof
Why do you take on more WIP than you have capacity to do?
I don’t want to let the team down
I’d rather start a shiny new thing than toil in something unglamorous.
Didn’t realize how big or complex the request was
The boss asked me
Beware of surveys asking to self-report behavior... My first impulse was “conflicting priorities” as you know the human brain is wired to blame others by default... but who am I kidding? It’s WIP. It always is. You know it is for you too!

Fair point. In my case though, conflicting priorities are often self-imposed. It’s me (not my company) saying, "Yes" too much - b/c I think I can get stuff done faster. But things ALWAYS take longer.
CONFLICTING PRIORITIES
Why Conflicting Priorities matter

People have a finite amount of capacity

https://itrevolution.com/book/the-cornerstone-for-winning/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qav1y7G15JQ
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How to Prioritize? Explicit Prioritization Options

ROI: Return of investment ÷ Cost of investment

CoD: Missed revenue (gen, rev protection) + costs (staffing, operational)

WSJF: Delay cost ÷ Duration

FIFO: First In First Out

HiPPO: Highest Paid Persons Opinion

if work is same size, do work w/ high CoD
If work is same CoD, do short work 1st
if size & CoD are diff, do WSJF

wsjf - http://reinertsenassociates.com/books
Exercise: Discuss Prioritization Policies

Time: 10 min
Instructions: Split up into groups of 3-4, discuss questions below.

Questions:

• What is your prioritization policy & how is it visualized?
• How is work signaled in your organization that it’s been prioritized and ready to be worked on?
• How do people know what work to do next?
• How do you visually distinguish the highest priority?
Work Management Visual: Multi-level view

Dependencies linked across different boards exposes Conflicting Priorities
Conflicting Priorities

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<tr>
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<th>To Do</th>
<th>Doing</th>
<th>Validate</th>
<th>Done</th>
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<td>WORK THAT IS ON HOLD</td>
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Conflicting Priorities is a time thief because people take on too much WIP when priorities are unclear.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Incoming</th>
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Line of commitment
Beastly Practice

Individually named swim lanes

People may prioritize based on making themselves look good to the detriment of the team performance! Same thing at the team level w/ local optimization.
Explicit Prioritization Policies help teams be more predictable

- PNW rainy weather causes unpredictable Landslides
- Limited number of rails - freight trains have higher priority
3 Calendar Solutions

1. Maker calendar: Creative people (developers, designers, writers)
2. Manager calendar: Decision makers
3. Combo calendar: People who do both

http://www.paulgraham.com/makersschedule.html
Ultradiam cycles: brain naturally gets lull in concentration every 90 – 120 min when awake b/c brain wave frequencies rise, then sink. [https://www.polyphasicsociety.com/polyphasic-sleep/science/rhythms/]
Unstructured time after dept meetings

Manager calendar

mgrs meet w/ other mgrs during prime maker time

Upper mgt is in a position to make everyone meet at their frequency. But if they know ppl working for them need long chunks of time, they can arrange calendar to accommodate prime maker time.
Office hours

The core of YC office hours is figure out (a) what is the most important thing to do, (b) how to do it, and (c) how to measure results.

3:05 AM - 20 Oct 2017

199 Retweets 790 Likes
## Combo calendar - before

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Webinar</td>
<td>Breakout</td>
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<td>Expenses</td>
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<td>Travel</td>
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<td>Int-1 Release Demo</td>
<td>Happy hour</td>
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Combo calendar - after

- Intro Call
- Value Stream Map
- Tasktop Training
- Data Stream
- DOES 17 Call
- Gateway Int
- Prep talk
- Gateway Int
- Data Stream
- Expenses
- Pomodoro time
- DND
- Webinar
- Breakout
- Stand
- Field Qs
- Quarterly reportings
- Devops West
- All Hands
- Busy
- Int-1 Release Demo
- Travel
- Happy hour
Pomodoros

Break down work into time-boxed intervals separated by short breaks.

Set timer for 25 or 30 min and work to finish your task until timer rings.

Pomodoros provide intense focus time
Do-not-disturb hours

Set a regular cadence to let people know when you are available and when you are not available.
“But that won’t work here.”
How to influence others - show the data

1 metric trend in 4 areas:
- Speed
- Productivity
- Quality
- Predictability

See impacts of change in 1 metric by showing all 4 metrics

Inspired by Troy Magennis & Larry Maccherone, “Doing Team Metrics Right,”
http://focusedobjective.com/team-metrics-right/
1/4 How fast?  Flow Time

Unplanned work delays
Planned work

Influence others using the power of visualization

Unplanned work delays
Planned work

Influence others using the power of visualization
Look at Throughput

2/4 How productive? Throughput

What we’re measuring impacts people b/c people value what is measured.
Exercise: Visualize impacts of conflicting priorities

Time: 15 min
Instructions:
• Split up into groups of 3
• Do steps 1, 2 and 3 of the Balanced workflow exercise.
• Discuss what types of work items you would want to measure for your team or organization.
Work Type Distribution

- Features
- Defects
- Risks
- Debts
3/4 How good? Quality

Change Failure Rate

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<th># of total done items</th>
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<tr>
<td>5/17 = 29.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/18 = 33.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0/5 = 0%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Oh - ok – I see what you mean!!!
When people complain that things take too long, measure actuals. It’s useful to test opinions against data.

Percentiles answers Q: “What’s the probability of completing work in x days?”

90th percentile filtered on business requests
When people complain that things take too long, measure actuals. It’s useful to test opinions against data.

Percentiles answer Q: “What’s the probability of completing work in x days?”

<table>
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<th>Percentile</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>11 Sep 17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>18 Sep 17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25 Sep 17</td>
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Dominica’s Hypothesis:

Explicit prioritization policies and correct WIP levels will help teams be more predictable.

Why? Because people are clear on what to do and have capacity to finish work before time thieves sneak in and do damage.
THREE TAKEAWAYS

1. Visualize work to see problems & risks to provoke necessary convos for change.

2. Capture & present metrics to help others understand the load on teams & impacts from overbooked calendars & conflicting Priorities.

3. Be clear on what too much “Yes” (too much WIP) does to your organization.
“The difference between successful people and very successful people is that very successful people say “no” to almost everything.”

~Warren Buffett

The problem is that we don’t protect our hours from being stolen. We allow thieves to steal time from us, day after day after day.
Email: dominica@SendYourSlides.com
Subject: flow
To receive:

- copy of this presentation deck
- excerpts of Making Work Visible
- Tasktop video on TFS/SN tool integration
- Forrester article: Agile-Plus-DevOps With Value Stream Management
Beware the Red Yellow Green (RYG) Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECTS</th>
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<th>SCHEDULE</th>
<th>BUDGET</th>
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<td>Sarah</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Jerry</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Julia</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Adam</td>
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<td>Conflicting Priorities</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Ann</td>
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</table>

“If we have data, let’s look at data. If all we have are opinions, let’s go with mine.”
~ Jim Barksdale

Think about when you visit a badly designed website and how little you trust it.