Time and Project Management for Graduate Students

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Time and Project Management

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Introduction (Who?)

- PhD. in Computer Science 1996, University of Calgary
- DoLittle: A Multi-strategy planning system
- Lecturer at University of Auckland (3 years)
- Research Artificial Intelligence and Robotics
- Intelligent IR on the WWW. Navigation in highly dynamic environments
- Coach of the All Botz
  - RoboCup: International competition
  - Robots playing soccer on a table tennis field
  - Toy cars, commercial video camera, PCs running Linux
  - Image processing, computer vision, low level OS, path planning, control theory, strategic planning, networking, multi-agent coordination

Why me?

- Time **Management**
- Lots of bad managers
  - ITSS Auckland
  - AMC in Calgary
- Large project, lots of work, 22 Students, late nights (bedsheets in the lab).
- Version control. Code sharing
- Recent graduate

A day in the life of a Grad Student (Why?)

7:00 Alarm rings

Went to sleep at 2:00. Turn off alarm

10:00 Wake up

No milk, no breakfast

Remembers meeting/demo of MEA with supervisor

11:00 Goto University

Thinks about implementation of CBR

Read email, Usenet, WWW

Have lunch

13:00 Meet Tony, hear about new Linux kernel

ftp, compile, debug, install

tell Tony

15:00 Almost miss meeting with supervisor

Demo doesn't work

Supervisor talks about Jim's paper

Supervisor asks about similarity metric

17:00	Play soccer (MWF), Quake (TR)
19:00	Go home
	Cancel outing with girlfriend
	Turn TV and Radio on
	Try and fix program. The new kernel
21:00	Hungry. Start cooking dinner
21:01	Come up with one idea for a new test
21:02	Very excited, now he knows what the problem is
21:30	Smoke alarm goes off. No time to eat now anyways
00:30	Fixed the problem and added code (Similarity Metric)
00:35	Really hungry, order Pizza
	Watch Star Trek and read Jim's paper
02:00	Goto sleep

Time Management

- Does s/he sound familiar?
- Not a bad student
- Tony thinks she is great
- Supervisor, girlfriend?
- Time Management is Commonsense!
- Use your time in the most effective/productive way
  - Which things are (not) important
  - Use your time effectively (80/20)
  - Increase the amount of time for work
  - Control distractions
  - Reduce stress

How do you spend your time?

- Memory is not a good guide
- Activitylog
  - Write down the things that you do each day
  - Write down how you feel (tired)
  - Extension of your design notebook
- Analyze the ActivityLog
  - How much time do you spent on email?
  - How much rest do you get?
  - At which times do you work best?

How should you spent your time?

- Planning (so that's why me)
- Find out what you want

Who's for dinner?

- You can invite five people for dinner
- Living, dead, fictional
- Who do you want to talk to?
- Write down the name of the person on the left

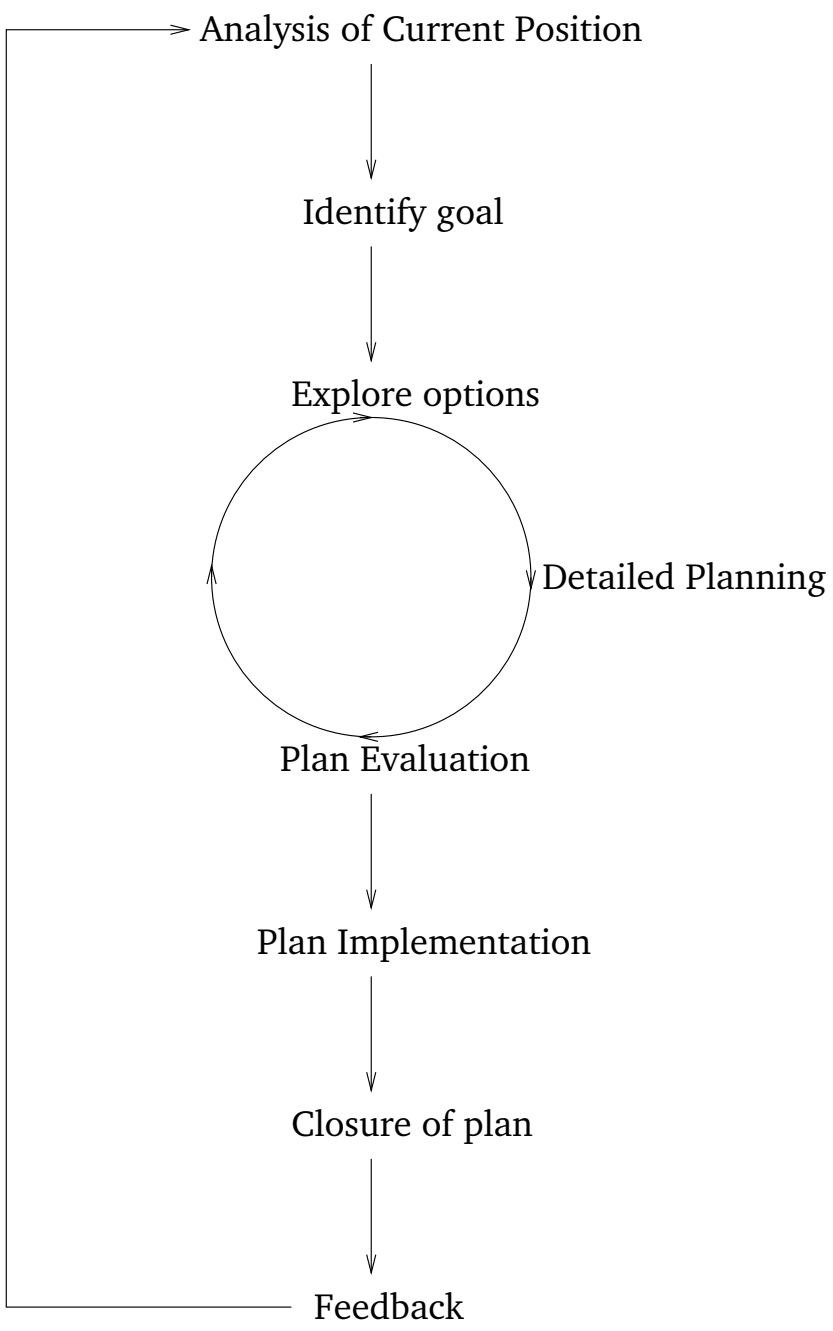
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- Write down why you want to talk to them on the right
- What do you find important?
- Look at the reasons to find out your **values** (artistic, attitude, career, education, family, financial, physical, pleasure, public service)
- Does your activity log reflect your values?
- How can you improve it?

Goals

- Goal setting. Sharp, clearly defined, positive goals
  - Be more productive by knowing what is important
  - Increase motivation
  - Increase satisfaction and self confidence
- Set **Performance** not **Outcome** goals
- Goals must be at the right level (not too hard, not too easy)
  - Fear of failure
  - Insufficient information
  - Always expect your best performance
  - Lack of respect for self (sleep, rest), burn out
- Think through your goals: required skills, information, assistance, resources. Possible problems. Problematic assumptions.
- Quantum leap approach sometimes works

Planning Cycle



Planning Cycle

- What needs to be done?
- Annoyances list
- Strength, Weaknesses , Opportunities, Threats
- Define the aim of your plan
- Exploring options:
  - Logical thinking, critical reasoning (thesis)
  - Mindmap
  - Brain storming
  - Research, literature review
- Pick the best option
- Detailed planning
  - Identify key actions
  - Prioritize actions, mock deadlines
  - Control mechanisms (measure progress)

Planning

- Plan from the longest to the shortest time span (1 year, 6 month, 1 month, 1 week, tomorrow). Avoid clashes in the future
- Weekly schedule:
  - Do the same things at the same time
  - Allow for flexibility (1 hour/day)
  - Know your energy zones. Difficult tasks in the morning
  - Make time for reviewing your notes
  - Break big tasks into smaller ones
  - Make time to take care of sleep, breaks, food, laundry, relax.

TO DO list

- Daily list of activities
- The night before
- Copy over from previous day (or delete)
- Cross off items that you have finished
- Prioritize the list using the 80/20 rule. Pareto Principle
- Pick the 20% that yield the biggest gain
- Urgent $\neq$ important

Procrastination

- Think positive about outcome
- Too complex, break it down into small steps (CBR)
- Create an incentive, reward.
  - List what you like to do (play games, read, ...)
  - Do not watch TV until the first chapter is written
- No fear of failure. Writers block. First draft doesn't have to be perfect
- Delegate
- Avoid distractions
- Don't over-plan! Top-down design
- Don't try and make everything perfect
- Emotional blocks: boredom, anger, guilt. Discipline
- Procrastination High: Adrenaline rush for meeting deadlines. Use intermediate deadlines.

Distractions

- Physically block out distractions. Visitors.
- Quiet study area, lock door, turn off TV
- Email:
  - Handle each piece of email only once
  - Discard, forward, reply, edit, save
- Switching and floundering (Lack of concentration or focus)
- Get rid of unwanted jobs

Creating more quality time

- Be aware of your energy zones. Look at your activity log to find out when you are most effective
- Eating patterns, rest, and energy
- Good breakfast with carbohydrates. Mid-moning snack. Protein (Egg).
- Big lunch and alcohol diverts blood, oxygen
- Take small breaks often (50 minutes)
- Try and experiment with different patterns
- Get up earlier. 1 hour = 10 weeks/year. Get into the rhythm.
- Meetings with your supervisor: Send abstracts etc. prior to meeting. 15 minutes early, review your notes, prepare questions, write summary into your design book.

Summary

- Time management is commonsense
- **But** it requires a change of **attitudes**
- Change of attitudes is a slow process
- Positive reinforcement
- Concentrate on **results**, not on being busy
- Use an activity log to check your time and energy
- Setting goals and plans