Information Overload:
Navigating Through the Chaos
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Learning Objectives

• Distinguish between relevant information and irrelevant information

• Identify resources available to manage information effectively

Information Overload

As time progresses, information overload is becoming a bigger issue in today’s technology driven society. People who are able to deal with it effectively maintain an advantage that will become extremely useful in the next few years.
Information Overload Explanation

- What exactly is information overload?
  - This is when we attempt to deal with more information than we are able to effectively process to bring about sensible decisions.

- Result:
  - Delay in making decisions
  - Make the wrong decision

Did You Know?

“A weekday edition of The New York Times contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in 17th century England.”

~ R.S. Wurman, Information Anxiety (written in 1989)

Research on Information Overload

- When employees are interrupted by an email it takes an average of 24 minutes to return to the suspended task

- 2,300 employees judged nearly one third of the emails they receive to be unnecessary, but spend two hours a day processing them

http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/blog/2009/sep/24/information-overload
Poll

- On average, how much time during the day do you spend sifting through information (i.e. E-mails, Junk mail, Research)?
  - A. 30 minutes-1 hour
  - B. 2-3 hours
  - C. 4-5 hours

Causes

- A rapidly increasing rate of new information being produced
- The ease of duplication and transmission of data across the internet
- An increase in the available channels of incoming information (e.g. telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, rss)
- Large amounts of historical information to dig through
- Contradictions and inaccuracies in available information
- A lack of a method for comparing and processing different kinds of information
- The pieces of information are unrelated or do not have any overall structure to reveal their relationships

Symptoms of Information Overload

- Increased cardiovascular stress, due to a rise in blood pressure
- Weakened vision
- Confusion and frustration
- Impaired judgment based on overconfidence
- Decreased benevolence to others
Poll

• How well do you feel you manage information coming from various sources?
  A. Very well
  B. I am able to successfully manage information sometimes
  C. I find it difficult to manage information

How to Manage Information

• Organizational
• Individual

Three Principles of Managing Information

• Information is only relevant and needed when it is necessary for making a decision
• Information is only required when needed in making a decision
• Information must be accurate in order to make a decision
Checklist

• All information we receive should be put up against the following checklist:
  – Is the information relevant?
  – Is the information accurate?
  – Is the information timely?
  – Is the information complete?
  – Is the information simple?

Organizational: Best Practices

• Employer “best practices”
  – What “method” will you use for communication?
    • E-mail
      – Short messages: EDM (End of Message)
      – Encourage brief messages (no more than 5 sentences)
      – Use specific subject lines (not “FYI” or “tomorrow”)
      – Resist replying to all
      – Avoid personal e-mails to colleagues on work e-mail
  – SharePoint? Blogs/wikis?
  – File Sharing
    • Establish best practices for file naming (Information Overload vs. Information Overload Presentation 9-12-11.ppt)

Organizational Cont....

– E-mail:
  • No need to maintain contact lists individually
  • Practice good etiquette (keep the personal out of professional)
– Set limits for yourself and respect other people’s limits
  • You cannot be available 24/7
  • Don’t expect others to be either
  • Do not have meetings without agendas, moderators, or a minute taker
**Individual Solutions**

- **Organize your workspace**
  - Everything has a “home”
  - File cabinet with folders
  - Bookcase for books
  - You use it, you put it back
  - Set up time each week (15 minutes on Fridays) to weed, recycle, organize, clean, etc.
  - You do NOT need to print everything
  - You do NOT need to keep everything
  - You do NOT need to read everything

**Individual Solutions: Keeping Info.**

- Ask the following questions:
  - Can I access this information from another source if I do need it?
  - Is this an item that I really need? How will it help me?
  - Now that I’ve read it and understand it, do I need to keep it?
  - If I do decide to keep it, where can I put it so that it is easily accessible and I don’t have to hunt for it?

**Individual Solutions: E-mail**

- How many accounts do you need?
  - One personal and one professional (?)
- Do not leave inbox open all day
  - Designate specific times that you will check e-mail
  - Create an e-mail signature that reads “I answer e-mail at 10 a.m., 1 p.m., and 4 p.m. If you need a quicker response, please call.”
  - Act on the message immediately after you receive it (Respond, delete, file)
Individual Solution: E-mail Cont…

- If you need to keep messages, create folders
  - Useful names
  - Once a week or month weed (put this on your calendar)
  - Don’t save everything – be realistic
- Modify junk folders in your e-mail
  - [http://www.unw.edu/itsd/services/communication/SPAM.html](http://www.unw.edu/itsd/services/communication/SPAM.html)
- Good gauge – mailbox size
  - [http://www.unw.edu/itsd/help/instructions/ManageYourEmail.html](http://www.unw.edu/itsd/help/instructions/ManageYourEmail.html)
- Store large files on SAMMY/TIMMY - not in your e-mail
  - [http://www.unw.edu/itsd/help/instructions/Sammy.html](http://www.unw.edu/itsd/help/instructions/Sammy.html)

Individual Solutions: Phone Calls

- Do not answer phone calls from unrecognized numbers (unless it is your job to answer the phone)
- Do not answer phone calls if you are concentrating on something (the caller can leave a voicemail)
- Tools:
  - [http://jott.com/default.aspx](http://jott.com/default.aspx)

Personal Life

- Get rid of junk mail
  - [http://www.stopjunkmail.org/](http://www.stopjunkmail.org/)
- Are you able to keep work separate from personal?
- Disconnect from technology
- Social Networking:
  - Can’t keep up on Facebook?
    - Create lists (e.g. “Important People”)
    - Do you really need 500 friends? Really?
  - [http://www.digsby.com/](http://www.digsby.com/) (brings all your contacts together in one place)
### Additional Resources

- [http://readitlaterlist.com/](http://readitlaterlist.com/)
- [http://www.rememberthemilk.com/](http://www.rememberthemilk.com/)
- Firefox bookmark add-ons

### Additional Resources on Information Overload

- “Death by Information Overload” (article by Paul Hemp in *Harvard Business Review*, September 2009)
- [http://www.iorgforum.org/](http://www.iorgforum.org/)
- [http://communicationoverload.com/](http://communicationoverload.com/)

### Resources

Contact your EAP

or

Work-Life Program

for

Assistance
Thank You!

Questions???