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Activity Based Module for Training Engineering Undergraduates in Time Management

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Abstract: One's success depends majorly on the ability to use their time effectively, be productive, & attain the desired goals. According to research, poor academic success by students in higher education contributing to their decrease professional performance is a result of poor time- management skills. Time- management is the ability to use the time at hand productively and efficiently to not just accomplish the daily tasks but also the larger goals in life. The authors of this paper attempt to dispense a robust activity-based design to train students in managing their time effectively. The objective is attained by providing an array of engrossing activities based on classical and conventional time management techniques.
Keywords: Time –management, engrossing activities, professional performance, undergraduate students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Time management is a chief life skill that ascertains growth and helps accomplish goals, thus, propelling an individual climb the ladder of success. Time management is defined as a process of skillfully applying time to finish and perfect a specific activity within time constraints (Harris, 2008). If one knows how to manage their time effectively, one is able to unlock and discover many benefits. These include: greater productivity, enhanced efficiency, reduced stress, more discipline, and better organization. Good time management skills transfer the pivot from pursuits to results. It finds its way into any professional sphere as employees' time management skills can decide the success of any project that they are working on. If inculcated in students in their formative years, it offers ceaseless benefits. Time management skills have been shown to have a positive impact on student learning and student outcomes (Kearns & Gardiner, 2007; Kelly, 2002; McKenzie & Gow, 2004).

Students who are able to develop time management strategies and set appropriate work goals for themselves offer a self-regulatory framework (Miller, Greene, Montalvo, Ravindran, & Nichols, 1996). It has been identified that even though one recognizes the importance of time management, one might not be sure of the ways to learn and teach these skills. The authors of this paper aim to provide a framework to the trainers to impart effective sessions to students and help them develop time management skills. The authors have designed a module including activities that focus on analyzing and identifying various factors that act as time wasters, and create an effective action plan to practice time management. It is an amalgamation of the classical and conventional time management techniques.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Proposed Design

1) Session I - (Duration- 2 hours approx.)

a) Activity 1: What I did yesterday?

Objective: Identify the time wasters.

Instructions: The facilitator asks the students to list down 10 things, on Sheet A that, they did the previous day during the productive work hours. On Sheet B, the students are asked to list down 5 things that would help them reach their desired goal/s.

Later, the students are instructed to look at both the lists together and identify if the tasks listed on Sheet A match with those listed on Sheet B.

De-brief: The reflective moment is the realization that most of our activities can be classified as 'time wasters' as they are insignificant in achieving our goals. Through this activity students can balance their expectations and monitor their schedule to increase their efficiency.

b) Activity 2: Carry your goals!

Objective:

- To have clearer vision of one's goals.
- To make oneself consciously aware of the goals.

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Instructions: The facilitator asks the students to creatively design their individual goal cards for the listed categories: career goals, family goals, relationships goals and spiritual goals. Students should be made to share their goals with their peers.
Students can then carry/ post/ place these goal cards in places around them that keeps reminding them and thus, making them consciously aware of their goals.
De-brief: This activity helps students identify their goals in an objective manner and create a path that leads to fulfillment of their goals. Sharing the goals with their peers will help students strive harder to achieve their goals and act as a commitment made to self and others in general. Carrying the goal cards will help individuals stay focused and realize their goals.

c) Activity 3: Tik Tok!
Objective: Learn to prioritize.
Instructions: Students will be divided in teams of 5-6 members each. They will be provided with a list of activities to be accomplished within a stipulated period of time. Each activity will carry a numeral value as indicated against it. The team with the highest cumulative score will emerge as the winner of the activity.

Debrief: It is a common observation that most of the teams will either analyze the time taken for the task to complete or the difficulty level of the task. While doing so they may compare the value points associated with each task and prioritize accordingly. The facilitator is required to ask following set of questions as a part of debriefing:

- How did the teams decide what tasks they wanted to do?
- Were any decisions based on task dependencies?

Students often tend to choose high-yield, low-effort tasks over the low-yield, high-effort tasks. In a few cases, certain related tasks can be clubbed together to get a higher score and increase the level of performance.

Assignment Session 1:
Task: Logged In!
Students should be asked to prepare an activity log based on the time slots and activities that they do throughout the day using the following format.

Table No. 1. Format for activity log.

Time	Activity	Time Used	Observed energy level during the task	Productivity in percentage	Observations made

2) Session II
a) Activity 1: ABC of Prioritizing.
Objective: To practice prioritizing technique for managing time effectively.
Instructions: Based on the assignment, students will be asked to identify the logged in activities considering their importance and urgency and segregate them into following categories: high priority (important and urgent), medium priority (important or urgent), and low priority (neither important nor urgent). Alternatively, students can further assign priority values to task belonging to same category from most important to least important (1-10).

Debrief: This activity will help students to develop an objective approach towards prioritizing their tasks. Students will be able to do so by analyzing their energy cycle in relation to the required energy levels based on the importance and urgency of each task.

b) Activity 2: The facilitator orients the students on various time management techniques that can be employed for effective and timely completion of the tasks.

- Covey's Time Matrix
- Swiss Cheese Technique
- Premack Principle

III. DISCUSSION

The most effective time management principles include setting goals and creating realistic deadlines to achieve the goal while focusing on one thing and minimizing distractions. A goal card can help an individual focus on intermediate results and instill a sense of motivation to fulfill the plan more effectively. It is a combination of planning, affirming, visualizing and repeating a goal to oneself. The activity 'What I did Yesterday' helps identify the time wasters and is a great way to be mindful about how one spends one's time at hand. An effective solution to this is the Identify- Eliminate- Replace (IER) technique of time-management that focuses on identifying the time wasters, which are often disguised as necessary or urgent tasks. This identification aids to consciously eliminate these otherwise harder to spot activities. Replacing these tasks with goal oriented activities that offer a productive and favorable outcome is the prime objective of this activity.

Establishing priorities is imperative for successful and effectual completion of any task. It allows us to be aware of the task that is important and urgent so that we can keep the low- priority tasks for later. The 'Tik Tok' activity provides an opportunity to the participants to categorize the task to yield the highest reward. Covey's Time Management Matrix allows us to organize our priorities based on the four quadrants: Quadrant 1- Urgent & Important, Quadrant 2- Not Urgent but Important, Quadrant 3- Urgent but not important and Quadrant 4- Not Urgent and Not Important. The objective of the matrix is to make an individual introspect and question whether a certain task brings them closer to their goals or not. It focuses on reprioritizing an individual's 'to-do list' by sorting out the tasks and responsibilities that need immediate attention.

Thus, the secrets of time management lie in proper management of priorities, reducing the time spent on non-priorities, efficient planning, dealing with interruptions, delegation of task along with an individual's skills and constructive analysis.

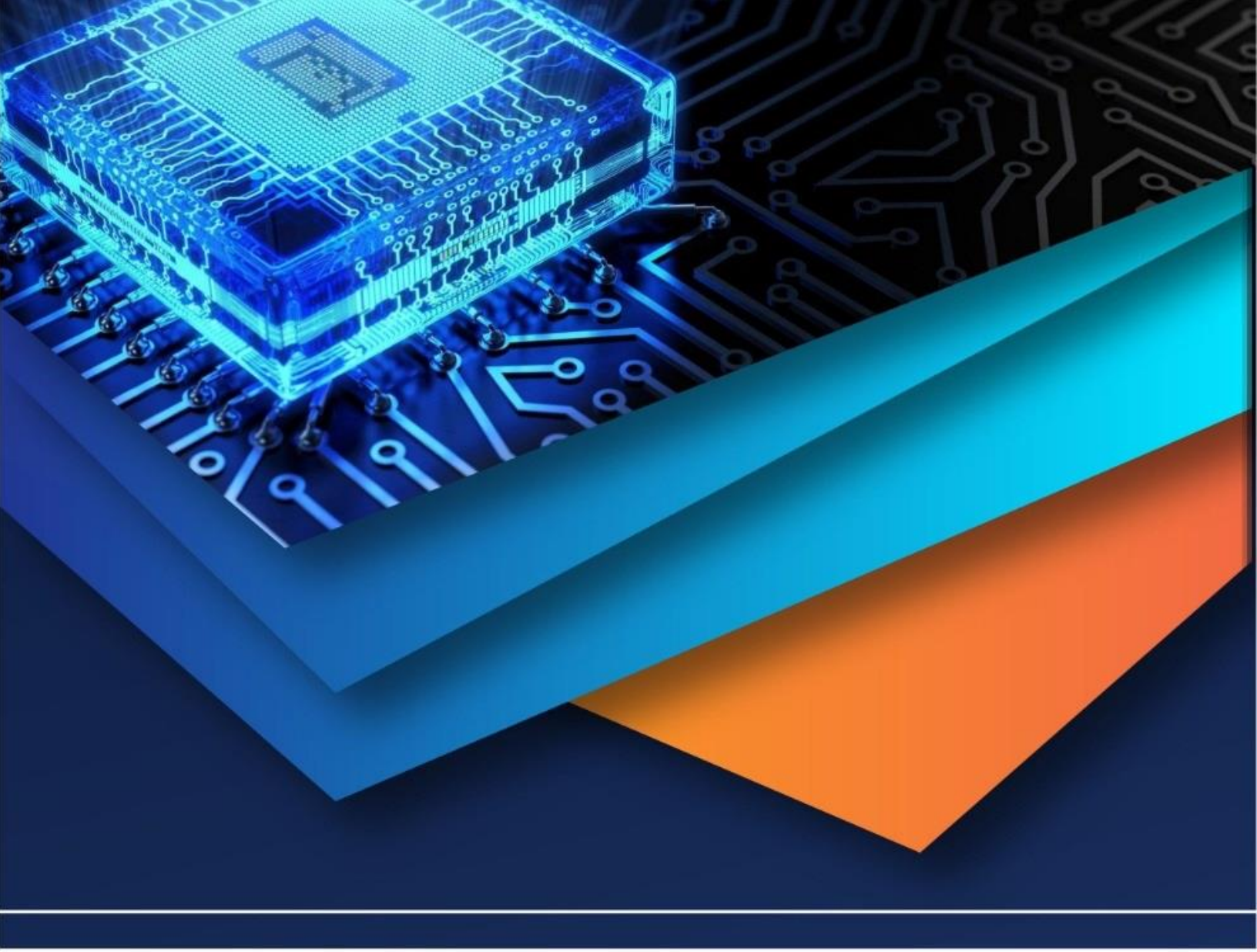
IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This module provides a potent and feasible framework for demonstrating and developing effective time management techniques. Time management is a combination of systematic analysis and development of habits that result in increased productivity, enhanced performance and reduced stress levels without missing the deadlines.

It is impossible to manage time and prioritize tasks if an individual only ponders on the idea and does not take desired actions. Maintaining activity logs and schedulers helps an individual to keep a record of the daily tasks and align them with bigger goals. This record can also help simplify and guide an individual to focus on the important tasks and delegate a few for smart and timely completion, without waiting for them to become urgent and important, and thus induce unrequited stress. The Swiss Cheese Technique is one such tool that helps overcome procrastination by chunking the larger tasks and handling these smaller tasks. Similarly, the Premack's Principle is a theory of reinforcement, which states that a person is more likely to perform a non-preferred task if it is followed by a preferred task which in turn reinforces the zest to accomplish the goal. Students should realize the value of time to succeed in all aspects of life. Along with the techniques discussed in this paper, the students can develop the habit of using planners, organizers and calendars for effective time management.

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