

In December, 2006, frustrated by my continuing sense that my time was not my own, I started a task log.

In my presentation I discuss (1) the codes I use and why I chose them, (2) what I have discovered as a result of the logging, and (3) challenges related to logging my work.

So, <click> "How to Do Everything and Know What You've Done" or <click> Thirty minutes of material in a five-minute window. Here we go.

<title slide>

Here are the results of my experiment:

<joblintels.blogspot.com>

I'll highlight three things from this display:

1. Time broken down weekly by time spent on various types of tasks;
2. Broken down by percentages as well (at request of supervisor -- note, however, that the logging itself was my idea, not foisted upon me);
3. Raw data appended

The handout shows and tells how I do this in more detail, but basically I enter something like this whenever I complete a task:

<slide> [hrprinter jam]

I enter many of these daily ... nearly never fewer than 10, rarely more than 50. This code gets associated with a timestamp, so at the end of the day I might have a file that looks roughly like this <slide>. A little program I wrote takes all this and makes it meaningful.

I've been doing this since December 2006.

Here is the first set of codes I used:

<slide>

Explain codes: <ar> arrival, <bk> break, etc.

These were ineffective because ...

1. Lots of help requests that were not responded to immediately I categorized as "tk," task. This is calculated as a planned task, though it was not exactly of my initiation. Discretionary time it is not.
2. There are expectations at the seminary of participation in various forms of community life that do not exactly count as work but are also not exactly break or personal time. These codes do not account for that.
3. Some just did not make much sense ("ie," for example).

New codes:

Largely the same as the old, with a few additions and reorganizations.

1. New "hr" category to deal with help requests dealt with spur-of-the-moment. Also a new "up" category for unplanned tasks that I do not initiate. Finally, a "di" category for

self-initiated interruptions (distractions).

2. "cl" category for things like chapel, forum, special events. Moved "bk" from a non-work category to a work category, and resolved to reserve "ps" for any time I take that is not para-seminary time. Added "nw" for additional non-work work -- things like time spent planning the 50th Anniversary or working on the self-study or registering and preparing for, let's say, ATS Educational Technologist meetings in Tampa.
3. Eliminated some of the more nonsensical ones.

Learnings:

1. My method is pretty sustainable. The logging takes not more than about 5 minutes daily.
2. I have more discretionary time than I tend to think. But see below.
3. I am not particularly efficient. My typical time at work is 9 1/2 hours; my typical time actually working is more like 8.

Challenges:

1. Coding continues to vex. "up" is a particularly problematic category; I'm thinking of reserving it for emergency-type situations and using "oi" (other-initiated) for generic tasks that do not qualify as "hr"
2. Proliferation of codes. This method of logging is sustainable in part because of relatively few two-letter codes -- if I had to pay attention to a table of codes everytime I wanted to log something, it would quickly grow out of control.
3. Consistency: sometimes what should properly be "di" is entered as "up;" similarly, some "bk" or "cl" should be considered non-discretionary. This may be intractable.
4. Gaps: sometimes the logger takes too long to appear, so entire phone calls get missed (by the time it comes up, the short call is finished and never gets logged).
5. Job Description: sometimes I think the codes would be better if they would reflect areas of my job description (user support, administration, supervision and training, etc.) That makes it much harder to neatly categorize things, I think.
6. Honesty: it is easy to bundle a personal conversation in the hallway with a help request. The "re" (reading and research) category most conceals this as my RSS feeds are a mix of legitimate work-related reading and personal interest reading -- AKMA, for example, is primarily personal interest that I justify because of his sometimes relevant to work posting.

Interested?

<http://www.madgrab.net> contains a link to a zipped bundle of scripts that mostly self-install (instructions included).

Questions?