**JUST Training Fiche: Being smart, effective and efficient in managing your workload**

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| **Title** | Being smart, effective and efficient in managing your workload | |
| **Keywords** | Communication, Management | |
| **Provided by** | IDP | |
| **Language** | English | |
| **Objectives** | The objectives of this module are to help learners **better plan and strategise their workload** by prioritising tasks and commitments, to teach them **how to perform under pressure** and how to remain productive at their best. | |
| **Learning outcomes** | * More efficient and more effective management of workload * Better understanding of task prioritisation * Hacks to perform under pressure | |
| **Training Area** | **Business Etiquette** |  |
| **Digital Skills** |  |
| **Soft Skills** |  |
| **Smart Working** | **X** |
| **Content index** | **Being smart, effective and efficient in managing your workload**  **Unit 1: The work-breakdown approach for hybrid workers**  Section 1: Eating An Elephant One Bite At A Time  Section 2: The Input → Output → Outcome cycle to manage your work  **Unit 2: Performing under pressure**  Section 1: How do you find balance when things get rough?  Section 2: Prioritizing priorities - how to do it | |
| **Training content** | **Being smart, effective and efficient in managing your workload**  **Unit 1: The work-breakdown approach for hybrid workers**  **Eating An Elephant One Bite at A Time**  *Eating an elephant one bite at a time* is a notorious idiom from the South African theologian and bishop Desmond Tutu.  The expression is frequently used in the business environment, and it refers to the opportunity of accomplishing something that seems too big to be dealt with until it is done piece by piece, one step after the other.  During your onboarding period and at the very early stage of your professional development, most of the time, you will feel tired, under pressure, and overwhelmed by new tasks that accumulate faster than how you can process them.  Be assured that this impression is mostly due to the lack from your side (for now) of robust, sound and reliable self-organisation techniques. In the next paragraphs, you will be introduced to some of these techniques that help in moving forward with agility and effectiveness.  **Plan to have a plan**  The very first trick to reduce this sense of pressure addresses the opportunity to schedule, plan and strategise your workload. In other words, you wish to start cutting the many pieces of the elephant.  Once you start perceiving that too many things are adding up to your agenda, that is the moment in which you have to:   1. Take a deep breath and have a moment for yourself; 2. Write down all the things that are pending from your side in the form of a to-do list; 3. Go through each of the points of your action list and break down a plan; 4. Once things are in order, you will soon start realising how indeed, things are reasonably manageable.   *Set work packages that lead you to more manageable workload*    **WPs (work packages)** include a set of activities (i.e., tasks) that lead you to the achievement of major results: the publication and delivery of an important report, the submission of an analysis, or whatever might be concretely expected from you.  A whole WP (ex., **WP3**) might be represented, for instance, by the submission to the whole project team of a Project Management Plan (PMP).  The draft and consolidation of the project management plan include indeed various sub-task and activities that lead you to its completion. If you are requested to prepare such a document, do not conceive it as a whole task but rather as a system of integrated activities.  Going back to the example of the PMP, let’s suppose that the preparation of this document can be formally broken down into **six separate activities**. Thinking of the JUST’s PMP, we can identify them as follows:   1. Draft of the initial outline: consolidation of the table of content 2. Initial validation of first two sections: Introduction to the project and expected outcomes 3. Detailed presentation of project results and milestones 4. Punctual and precise disclosure of financial management and budget control 5. Arrangement and planning of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for quality assurance 6. Presentation of STKH engagement strategies and PR plan     With that in mind, now you can finally visualise the concrete time that the achievements of this WP will absorb you and how tasks are spread over time – i.e. when they are due.  Save for yourself some margins of flexibility: it is a good recommendation to overestimate on purpose the time needed for a specific action if case any urgency requires you to put aside what you’re doing and focus on something else.  Try to stick to the plan but be ready for frequent adjustments.  **Setting up a work plan agenda**    Meeting the deadlines that you set for yourself over a medium-long period implies from your side great discipline and organisation starting from the very way you plan your daily working routine.  **Pink**: prolific to start the date and programme the action plan accordingly.  **Blue**: check emails and set up priorities, focus and energies are at their peak, prioritise inputs and deliverables that will inform the work of somebody else.  **Red**: break, recharge your batteries and don’t forget to call your parents…  **Light blue**: check emails, refine and review your / others’ work, and pass on secondary priorities.  **Green**: wrap up the day, catch up on all the remaining pending tasks, plan and update the agenda for the next following days.  Use this time available to review your weekly schedule, see if your agenda needs any adjustment, and identify and select priorities that need quick action.  These hours should be dedicated to in-depth planning of all incoming WPs in the next 60 days and strategising your medium-long workload.  Spend time to plan your agenda for the next 14 days, and highlight and pinpoint tasks that should fit under the **blue** timeslot.  Check how everything is going; are you on schedule and on time for everything?  **The Input → Output → Outcome cycle to manage your work**  The key to task prioritisation comes with the understating of the various variables that make a task more urgent than others.  When you look at all of the points in your action list and when you try to strategise their scheduling, the variable that you need to consider to assess their priority is the following:   * Deadline settled for its completion * Inputs that you need to collect for the execution of the given task * The ease of processing the inputs * Recipients of the final results (INTERNAL vs EXTERNAL) * Contribution that your task has on the greater architecture of things * Your familiarity with the given assignment   Depending on this internal evaluation of yours, you might come up with three different levels of urgency:   * High-priority task * Medium priority task * Low-priority task   **A hierarchy of priorities within the hierarchy of priorities**  High-priority tasks:   * Inputs required from you are necessary to move things forward * The task is expected to be completed by your supervisor / external groups of interest * Outcomes generated from the task inform further processes / are tangled to strict deadlines * The deliverable is due by the next 48 h   Medium priority tasks:   * The activity is planned to be concluded later in the next weeks, but the gathering of inputs/processing of data is highly time-consuming * You are not very familiar/proficient with the workload expected to complete the task * Outputs required from you are the inputs expected by other people but not as urgent as to be labelled high-priority resources * The deliverables are due in the next 10 days   Low-priority tasks:   * Deliverables, documents and resources generated from the task are of your need and your need only * Inputs required from you are necessary to move things forward, but the deadline is still negotiable * The deliverable is due not before the next 10 days   **Unit 2: Performing under pressure**  **How do you find balance when things get rough?**  Despite how good you are at scheduling your calendar, there will be, indeed, periods much more challenging and energy-demanding than others.  The magic formula is that no magic formula applies: in every job, in every role, there are seasonal periods of “overwork”. This might be related to distinctive features of the market/industry you operate in that make certain months of the year quite a vibrant experience (digital e-commerce during the Christmas season, tourism during summer, etc.).  You cannot change the rules of the game: what you can do is train your peak performance when the time arrives.  **10 productivity hacks for performance get rough**  Here you will find 10 tips that will turn very useful when things get serious: most of these tricks do not imply any real difference in attitude to what we already saw. They come as practice and operative hacks to maximise even further the impact of your time management skills.   1. **Create time boxes**   Identify slots of time in your calendar that you want to prioritise for specific activities and nothing else.   1. **Focus on what matter**   From time to time, you will be required to reshuffle your agenda in a way that some of the activities shift forwards   1. **Learn to say “no”**   Be always very realistic: you cannot please everyone at any given time   1. **Movement equals motivation**   There is nothing more energy drying than spending 12h in front of a desk. Give a shake to your body   1. **Go offline**   Emails, calls, and messages are a huge source of distraction: inform your colleagues and supervisors that you need some time of focus, peace and absolute silence   1. **Take care of yourself**   Go have a walk, grab something to eat, call a friend…   1. **To-do-listing**   Write down things and try to keep track of everything, you don’t need to process all inputs immediately, but at least it will be easier to come back on your list with an action plan   1. **Eat healthily**   No junk food, no to everything that will make you tired and not productive in the afternoon/evening hours   1. **Two-minute rule**   Anything that requires you less than 2 minutes – and it is not in your time / offline box – do it now. Do not procrastinate about what can be done with no efforts   1. **Monitor your use of social media**   Unless it is for work purposes, avoid social media use in your free time.  **Prioritising priorities - how to do it**  Once again, we are back to talking about the prioritisation of your agenda: you wish to manage the events on your schedule, not the other way around – do not remain a victim of yourself and do not allow external factors to dictate your routines.  To do so, you need to set and stick to three fundamental rules:  **Clean other people’s desks first**  It might seem counterintuitive, but when you are under pressure, there is nothing more unnerving than people constantly reminding you that you are late on that given thing they asked you to do a while ago.  In addition, unfortunately, you will experience firsthand how inconvenient it is not also to process your task because you are still waiting for that file from that person.  **Focus on quick tasks**  Unless you cannot do differently, clean your desk from all those few things occupying your thoughts.  The fact that you manage to go through your action list one bite at a time helps you in generating for yourself a sense of achievement and ownership.  **Safeguard your evening**  It is starting to get late in the evening, and you still have a few pieces on your to-do list…do you really need this work done by tomorrow?  Evening working hours should be reserved for tasks and activities that you know are less energy-demanding (i.e., admin work such as replying to emails that remained pending during the day, rather than production and development)  **Summing up**  **A work-breakdown approach to manage your workload**  Divide your work package into more manageable and less pressing clusters of activities.  **Performing under pressure**  Plan, strategise, monitor and evaluate the execution of things: clear other people’s desks first and move on to what is easier for you.  **Prioritisation**  Focus on what matter the most and move from there accordingly: look into deadlines and the impact of your task.  **Make an order and leave anything to interpretation**  Focus your communication on content and results, and then move into the process leading to your conclusions. | |
| **Glossary** | **Work Package:** WPs (work packages) include a set of activities (i.e., tasks) that lead you to the achievement of major outputs and results: the publication and delivery of an important report, the submission of an analysis, whatever might be concretely expected from you.  **Time boxes:** Slots of time in your calendar that you want to prioritise for specific activities and nothing else.  **Business minutes:** punctual, precise, concise and comprehensive reporting of a decision taken and points of the discussion agreed upon during a meeting.  **Process-oriented communication:** Communication that is focused on the key steps undertaken during a process.  **Content-oriented communication:** Communication that is focused on the key facts of a certain event/process. | |
| **Self-evaluation (multiple choice queries and answers)** | 1. A work breakdown approach to one’s own workload:   1. Is used to identify cause-effect relations between certain events. 2. **Is intended to ease the management and processing of tasks.** 3. Is a quantity-driven process.   2. A typical high-priority task implies:   1. The delivery of inputs is due not before 10 days. 2. The delivery of inputs is due in the next 10 days. 3. **The delivery of inputs that are necessary to move things forward at other people’s desks.**   3. Time boxes:   1. Are timeslots in your calendar that you can use to recharge your energies. 2. **Are timeslots in your calendar that you can use to focus on high-priority tasks.** 3. Are timeslots for exercise and social media.   4. A common hack for managing and storing working documents implies:   1. **Storing your notes by topic.** 2. Storing all of your notes in digital format. 3. Delegate this function to admin staff. | |
| **Bibliography** |  | |
| **Resources (videos, reference link)** |  | |