

Organising your thinking time

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It's a branch of time management that's not usually covered in the manuals - how to organise your own quality thinking-time for solving difficult problems.

Yet it's becoming a lot more important, because the problem-solving (or creative) element in daily work is rapidly eclipsing the unthinking, automatic aspect.

Meanwhile, corporate business still clings to obsolete ideas about always being seen and sounding full of activity during working hours.

The person who conforms to this 'busy-busy' image may be using their time inefficiently, with a typical hour split up into sixty, often unrelated little parcels of one minute. But the individual who deliberately sets aside that hour to dig down deep into one big issue, is often, in that culture, made to look idle or unproductive.

There is nothing new about the eternal debate over where great solutions come from. It has spawned colourful theories. Perhaps more significant is the number of business leaders who have, anecdotally, solved a difficult problem while in the bath. We should note at least three points about the bath-time experience. Firstly, it is pleasant to anticipate. Secondly, it contrasts totally with the frenetic pace of the office and thirdly, it is about the only time you won't be interrupted. As it would be difficult to install a bath in your office, it is, nevertheless, worth trying to replicate such relaxing conditions in order to support your problem-solving agenda.

Oases of thought

Not surprisingly, the Buddhists recommend setting aside a little room dedicated to meditation, but some employers might need a bit of persuading about such use of expensive floor space. In any case, there is an electronic equivalent in the form of the podcast. It is true that iplayers can make you look a bit detached from reality (which is of course the whole point), and they can be dangerous if crossing the street.

But the freedom to dive straight into the world of Radiohead, Gorillaz, Bruckner's 4th Symphony or an online course in creative writing, according to your personal taste, is a privilege to be cherished - a dramatic cleansing and purging of a jaded mind.

Another possible 'dar-es-salaam', or haven of peace, could be your lunch-break. That unhealthy, ulcer-conducive, high-speed snacking at the desk, punctuated by phone-calls and e-mails, is just the opposite of a break. And the break is as important as the lunch.

A healthy walk in the middle of the day not only revives your concentration, but enables all kinds of satisfying little mini-sightseeing tours on impulse, to feed your curiosity and keep you well-informed.

As the man said: "if you don't give the brain a break, it'll might you a break-down!"

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