­­ Time management is a very important and highly beneficial skill to have in our lives. Since we have a limited amount of time, the art of using it the most efficient way to achieve our goals is valued very highly in our day-to-day professional and personal activities.

What makes a great time management? Most sources ([1], [3], [5], and [7]) indicated that a great time management consists of these four steps (specific terminology was taken from [7]):

1. Defining the activities

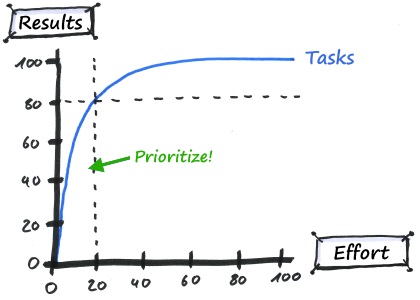
2. Sequencing the activities

3. Estimating activity resources

4. Developing and controlling the schedule

Defining the activities: To start working on something, a list of tasks to be accomplished is required first. Since it’s a beginning stage, task may be more high-level (without much detail) at first and details can be added later in the process ([7]).

Sequencing the activities: In order to know with which task to begin and to what tasks to proceed in the future, tasks should be put in order. Usually tasks are ordered based on their importance – from highest to lowest. There are two most popular strategies that might help you to decide on the order: the Pareto Principle and Eisenhower Matrix ([2]). The Pareto Principle refers to that usually 80% of our tasks take up 20% of our time. The remaining 20% of our tasks however, account for 80% of our work effort. Not all project related fall under your personal responsibility and, on the other hand, not all the tasks necessarily should be completed by a specific member of the team (assuming you work in a team). Lastly, in contrast to the feeling we sometimes get, not every task has to be completed immediately ([2]) Eisenhower Matrix addresses all those aspects and can help us to prioritize our work according to their urgency and importance.



Pareto Principle (on the left) and Eisenhower Matrix (on the right)

([2])

Estimating activity resources: After you’ve put your tasks in the order, you might want to estimate how much time each task will take. Make sure to account for any variables that might affect the time for completion. Even if your estimates will be proven wrong sometimes, you’ll gain valuable experience and potentially will make more accurate predictions in the future.

Developing and controlling the schedule: Finally, when all the previous steps are completed, it’s time to create our schedule! Schedule should consist of all our tasks in our selected priority order, in addition to their duration. Gantt charts is the most popular way to track (create a schedule(s) for) a project [1]. And as vast majority of things in our life, Gantt charts are not ideal, so depending on your needs, you might want to try some alternatives, such as: task lists, spreadsheets, flow diagrams, Kanban boards, or Status reports [4]. While creating a schedule, make sure to allocate some buffer time, since accidents happen and humans are not robots, thus can’t work without breaks [2] [6]. After your schedule is complete, a good practice is to keep a log of your progress, checking it against your schedule as frequently as possible. If there are some issues you might want to change the schedule if possible or change your work on the project to fit the schedule.

Time management, as a skill, can be applied to almost any area in our life, so there shouldn’t be any problems to apply it directly to CS/DS projects. And while “applying” is totally different from “knowing”, knowing about the time-management strategy discussed above should hopefully facilitate better time-management from my side in my future undertakings.

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