

BPS 6332-501/SYSM 6320-501

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Group assignment - Book critique Assignment

DEEP WORK by Cal Newport

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INTRODUCTION

Deep work is a concept introduced by Cal Newport, referring to a state of high concentration and productivity in which an individual can perform cognitively demanding tasks with minimal distractions. In today's era, deep work is required due to the increasing prevalence of distractions, particularly from digital technology. This constant connectivity can fragment our attention, making it difficult to engage in the focused, sustained thought necessary for complex tasks. Deep work allows individuals to cut through these distractions, enhance their cognitive abilities, and produce high-quality work efficiently in an environment where such skills are becoming increasingly valuable and rare.

Newport breaks the topic down into two phases. He establishes the theoretical foundation for deep work and discusses its importance in the first phase. Deep work is important since it serves as a technique that grants the capacity to quickly acquire complex abilities and produce work of excellent quality. Deep work is rare, despite its many benefits. The demands of activity and the attraction of instant messaging and on-demand communication may easily outweigh the time and effort required to perform serious work.

Comparatively speaking, deep labor has intrinsic worth and produces a greater sense of fulfillment than surface-level activities. He presents four rules for achieving deep work: Each rule is accompanied by practical advice and strategies for implementation. For instance, "Work Deeply" involves creating rituals and routines to foster deep work, while "Embrace Boredom" focuses on training the brain to withstand distractions.

In the latter part of the book, Newport shifts focus to practical applications, outlining four critical rules to integrate deep work into daily routines.

1) Work Deeply,

- 2) Embrace Boredom,
- 3) Quit Social Media, and
- 4) Drain the Shallows.

These rules are designed to guide the reader in establishing and maintaining a deep work practice amidst distractions. This section is rich with actionable advice, demonstrating how to balance deep and shallow work and manage distractions effectively, making it highly relevant for professionals seeking to enhance productivity and personal growth in a distraction-heavy environment.

Evaluation

The Author's Success

Overall, the author was successful when writing the book to some extent because he started off painting the picture and the idea of “deep work” in the first three chapters and then finished the book by writing about the rules to “deep work” in the final four chapters. This implied that the book was organized and well-thought out. Also, he incorporated many examples of real people and their real life experiences along with facts and statistics to support his reasoning and rules to “deep work”. This included Carl Jung, Bill Gates, and Adam Grant among other greats who retreated to solitude, in order to brainstorm ideas and turn those ideas into amazing works. Providing these examples of great people using “deep work” to accomplish great things assure that he is knowledgeable about the topic and that what he is writing about is attainable if you follow these steps just like the pros who do.

Moreover, the author to some extent was not successful because he only wrote about his point of view. He did not take into consideration any possible objections a person could have to

his writing and/or rebut it. He thought about only his opinion and no one else's. For instance he wrote a whole chapter about how people should quit social media as one of his rules, in order to fully and successfully accomplish "deep work". He did not mean to balance social media with work and make sure to put it aside when you have work to complete, in order to lessen the distraction. He meant go cold turkey; cut it out of your life completely. Of course, with today's generation and easy access to social media due to the prominence of smartphones, this will not sit well with many people because they believe that they can do "deep work" that is of quality, even with social media. They just know when to use social media and when to put it away, in order to be truly productive and commit to the task at hand. Some may argue that their "deep work" involves social media because they are content creators, marketers, and/or influencers that rely heavily/solely on the use of social media. Since these arguments will inevitably come up, the author should have addressed them in the book and provided statistical evidence why one cannot truly commit to "deep work," unless they get rid of social media altogether.

Positive Aspects

Furthermore, previously mentioned above, the author did a great job bringing in examples of real people doing "deep work". He provided a plethora of people and examples in his writing and never seemed to be exhausted of them throughout the book. Also, the organization of the book was done well with the first three chapters about defining the idea of "deep work" and then the final 4 chapters about the rules of it. Each chapter was also broken up into shorter sections with headings and vignettes devoted to each chapter, which not only helps with the organization of the book, but also helps the reader to easily transition from one idea to the next.

Additionally, the author utilized such an eloquent vocabulary and word choice that included words like “formalize,” “painstakingly,” “ruthlessly,” and “cultivating” along with many more that keeps the reader on the edge of their seat anticipatedly waiting for the next word for him to use. The reader is guaranteed to learn a new word and/or how to effectively use a word that he or she already knows. Thus, his word choice helps paint a vivid picture in our brains, which helps the reader better visualize what he is writing about, in order to help with comprehension.

Moreover, he effectively used research and studies to back up his writing. For instance, he used Clifford Nass’ research on multitasking and constantly switching between online and “deep work” affects working memory and causes more mistakes, involving filtering out irrelevancy (Newport, 2016, p.158). Another study that he included involved Leslie Perlow’s study on how emails and a person’s desire to be connected to the world at all times could be the bane of productivity at work (Newport, 2016, p. 56-58). They claim that responding to email can decrease the productivity of a worker and keep them from doing quality, “deep work.”

Negative Aspects

Despite the positive aspects of the book, as previously mentioned above, the author failed to address any objections with rebuttals about why someone should quit social media altogether, in order to do “deep work”, instead of balancing the usage of social media and “deep work”. Also, he did not bother to address that now in today’s age, many people’s work requires social media, especially in marketing, and people in this field that uses social media could argue that they are able to do “deep work” using social media. According to Chien-Wei & Nai-Hwa (2017, p.1), many companies have resorted to social media, in order to “accelerat[e] or influenc[e] consumer behavior.” They claim that “Social media marketing, which may be

the hottest new marketing concept, entails how technology enables and aids people to connect socially with their social networks.” They also mention that they have no other way around marketing besides taking into consideration the use of using social media networks. It has become one of the easiest and most effective ways to market to consumers because almost everyone these days are on social media and have easy access to it due to the prominence of smart devices, which means that sellers and buyers are easily connected and makes marketing, selling, and buying easier for all parties if they connect through social media. If a business wants to stay on top, then they have no choice but to use social media marketing. Since so many companies are using social media marketing these days and it is someone’s job it is hard to cold turkey social media, in order to do “deep work” like the author suggests. Also, these social media marketers will argue that although they use social media for their job, they can still produce quality, “deep work”. Thus, this undermines the author’s viewpoint and in order to make his writing stronger he should have mentioned the objection and rebuttal it.

Another common objection that someone could have is towards his point of view about multitasking. Newport states that according to Clifford Nass, multitasking makes it hard for people to “filter out irrelevancy”, are more prone to making mistakes, and they cannot “manage a working memory” (Nass, 2010, as cited in Newport, 2016, 158). There are many jobs out there that rely on multitasking, in order to get their job done because they have to wear many hats at one time, such as an event planner, a truck driver, an administrative assistant, a school teacher, and a marketing manager. These people could argue that although they have to multitask on the job, they still produce quality, “deep work,” which contradicts Newport’s opinions on multitasking. According to Van der Stede (2018, p.85), professors and other “academics have inherently multifaceted jobs requiring their attention across a range of (typically three) activities

(research, teaching, service)—that is, professors multitask.” This is because professors have to wear many hats and in order to complete all their roles in a timely manner, they have to learn how to multitask efficiently. Van der Stede also makes an argument that “multitasking, when handled judiciously, makes for a richer, not poorer, profession and a richer experience for those who profess it—the professors.” Based on Vander Stede’s (2018, p. 93) experiences of multitasking as a professor and others in his report, he concluded that:

This statement merely reinforces what I already concluded above, namely that effectively multitasking professors may have a broader impact and, I believe, derive a sense of job satisfaction exceeding any job-related tensions that multitasking also may induce. Thus, I, for one, and for what it is worth, certainly have experienced a multitasking mindset to be a “net positive.”

Ultimately, Van der Stede’s report about professors’ multitasking and why it is important for them to do so, in order to be productive and get work done well efficiently, contradicts Newport’s opinions about why people should not multitask, in order to do quality, “deep work”. It would have been nice to see Newport do some research on the opposing side and provide a rebuttal why professors and other occupations that require multitasking should still not do it, in order to be the most productive and produce the best quality of “deep work” as possible. Since he did not, the book lacks in this area.

Finally, another differing viewpoint about his writing and again showed no effort to mention let alone combat it was Perlow’s study on emails, desire to be constantly connected, and the bane to productivity. They claimed that sending emails was not required to do a job and that sending emails could reduce the productivity and quality of work of workers. On the contrary, there are many jobs that require workers to use email during the day and be connected constantly

online, but they still remain productive and produce quality work. They would argue that they produce deep work as well. These jobs are teachers (some parents and other school staff members communicate solely through email and they need to be able to respond in a timely manner to any concerns regarding their job, students, and other obligations), a sales representative that uses only email, and a secretary to name a few. According to Polyakov (2023), email is not dead because of “the sheer ubiquity of email often means that it is the first point of integration for many business tools.” He goes on saying that email is an integral part of many applicant tracking systems and HR tech, productivity and project management tools, and customer relationship management along with many more. These tools and the use of email, which, indeed, contradicts Newport’s viewpoints on the use of email, actually enables organizations to “dramatically improve user productivity and ensure individuals and teams can stay in the loop and up to date without having to toggle between various applications and interfaces.” Not only that but email allows flexibility and attachments along with global reach according to Polyakov. Thus, people do disagree with Newport in regards to email and its effect of productivity at work. Newport should have done research on any anticipated objection, incorporated it in his book, and given a rebuttal to strengthen his writing and viewpoints. Overall, if the author spent some time mentioning objections and refuting them to prove that his point of view is superior, then it would make his book more successful.

Author’s Ideas and Support

Overall, the author’s assumptions, reasoning, and conclusions were well supported to some extent because he pulled from research studies, such as Perlow’s and Nass’ along with mentioning many greats who retreated to solitude, in order to produce quality, “deep work” like Carl Jung, Mark Zuckerberg, and Bill Gates. The abundance of examples and research

mentioned in this book proves that he took the necessary time and due diligence needed to be well-informed about his topic and write a whole book about it. However, since he was reluctant to bring up any objections to his views on quitting social media, multitasking, and emails and spent the necessary time to refute them, in order to better support his ideas, his writing was not as supported as it can be. In English 101 classes, students as young as middle schoolers are taught to think of, research, and write about counterarguments to their writing and rebuttal them, in order to make their writing stronger and point of view seem more superior than others. He was basically beating around the bush when writing his book when he does not bring up any possible objections to his book and refutes them, especially when he is well aware of the objections. He would not be writing a book with such controversial ideas, regarding social media, emails, and multitasking, if he was unaware of the status quo opinion/objections towards his ideas. His reluctance to do so sheds light on how unsupported his writing truly was since he avoided the opposing viewpoints altogether. Since mentioning objections and coming up with rebuttals is such a novice skill that is taught to students as young as 12, then an author as experienced as Newport should be doing it in all his books, in order to make his writing stronger and more supported. According to the University of Nevada, Reno's writing center (n.d.), they argue that "a counterargument may make an essay more persuasive because it shows that the writer has considered multiple sides of the issue." They even cited within their page that "Barnet and Bedau (2005, as cited in *Counterarguments, n.d.*) propose that critical thinking is enhanced through imagining both sides of an argument." Thus, this implies that utilizing a counterargument and rebutting actually strengthens an author's writing and therefore, Newport should have provided counterarguments to his viewpoints, in order to make it stronger and more persuasive. Ultimately, in a nutshell, an author should anticipate any objections to his point of

view and rebuttal them with evidence, in order to make his opinions superior over others and to make his writing more supported.

Are the Ideas Interesting?

On another note, Newport's ideas are "interesting" to some extent. According to Davis (1971), "interesting theories are those which deny certain assumptions of their audience, while non-interesting theories are those which affirm certain assumptions of their audience." Thus, this implies that his writing is somewhat interesting because his viewpoints on quitting social media and refraining from sending emails and multitasking, in order to be productive and do quality, "deep work" contradicts the viewpoints of many people, including readers. He did not straightforwardly deny their assumptions about social media, emails, and multitasking. However, writing about quitting social media, and refraining from multitasking and sending emails at work in a way denies the vast majority of people who believe that they can still do deep work and be productive, while on social media, sending emails, and multitasking, especially when many jobs today involve these skills. Conversely, his writing in a way was not interesting according to Davis because it confirmed the viewpoints of the audience. No one is going to argue that "deep work" is valuable and meaningful and that in order to do it one has to work deeply. He wrote entire chapters dedicated to these ideas. Since no one is going to argue against those ideas and it confirms the majority of his audience, it utterly deems his writing not interesting.

Aligning 'Deep Work' Concepts: Bridging Consistencies and Inconsistencies in Managerial Practices and Literature

"Deep Work" by Cal Newport delves into various concepts, acknowledging that not everyone may universally agree with its ideas. A significant focus of the book is on multitasking

and its detrimental impact on productivity and career development. In essence, Newport argues that these factors hinder one's ability to engage in deep, focused work, which he posits is essential for achieving peak productivity and success in one's professional endeavors.

In a rushed scenario, Victor Grillo hastily sent an email, as noted by Sandberg (2006, p.1), instructing the termination of an employee while simultaneously arranging his upcoming vacation to Mexico. Unfortunately, an oversight led to the termination directive reaching the very employee designated for dismissal, resulting in an understandably irate response. In Mexico, Mr. Grillo faced an unforeseen situation, he had unwittingly been assigned an extravagant presidential suite at a hefty \$3,000 per night. Reflecting on the ordeal, Mr. Grillo candidly admitted, "I'm just not smart enough to multitask." This anecdote serves as a compelling illustration of the pitfalls associated with multitasking and the potential repercussions in both professional and personal spheres.

Burkeman (2023) says that the allure of multitasking often masks its counterproductive nature. Despite our historical inclination to juggle tasks, the reality is that we often accomplish everything worse, not better. Research supports this, revealing that only a minimal percentage can genuinely perform well under the strain of simultaneous tasks. Burkeman's argument extends beyond individual struggles, addressing the societal pressure to multitask in the face of numerous demands. Real-world scenarios, like the pitfalls of distracted driving, serve as poignant examples, demonstrating that attempting to manage multiple tasks simultaneously often results in compromised performance.

The overarching theme in both "Deep Work" and Burkeman's perspective aligns with universally accepted principles of time management and employee well-being. The consensus is

that true effectiveness arises from focused, sequential approaches, challenging the widely held belief in multitasking as a panacea.

Basecamp CEO Jason Fried challenges the conventional belief that working overtime is the key to success, asserting, “People are always surprised by that, and I tell them you can get plenty of stuff done in 32 and 40 hours if you cut out all the stuff that’s taking up your time.” Proudly upholding a strict 40-hour workweek, Fried ensures a balanced life for his 56 remote employees, even implementing a condensed 32-hour workweek from May to September.

In contrast to typical meeting-heavy practices, Fried notes, “I can probably count on one hand how many times we’ve had a meeting with more than four people,” emphasizing the efficiency gained with fewer participants. Basecamp's customer support team lead, Chase Clemons, explains, “It’s not about working faster, but rather working smarter,” highlighting the focus on efficiency in the shortened workweek. Fried underlines the detrimental impact of overworking, stating, “If you’re overworked and tired, you make mistakes, and mistakes are costly.” This approach aligns with the principles of flexibility, time management, and employee well-being, challenging the notion that extended work hours are synonymous with increased productivity.

Similarly, as part of Buffer's broader Theme Days strategy, Focus Fridays stand out as a dedicated time for concentrated, uninterrupted work. This strategic choice reflects Buffer's commitment to fostering productivity and employee well-being by allowing team members to set aside specific periods for deep, focused tasks without the interruptions of meetings or other distractions. The structured nature of Focus Fridays aligns with principles of effective time management and contributes to a work culture that values intentional, quality work over constant

task-switching. This deliberate approach underlines Buffer's commitment to creating a balanced and productive work environment.

The book provides numerous compelling examples for its various concepts, but certain topics within it present weaker arguments. Notably, the idea of "No constant connectivity" appears to face considerable opposition from the real world. (Newport, 2016, p. 35-36) Perlow's experiment required a weekly day of disconnection, during which team members abstained from email communication. Despite initial resistance, the team observed favorable outcomes, such as enhanced communication and the delivery of a higher-quality product to clients. The disruption caused by constant email checks, extending beyond regular work hours, was identified as a hindrance to mental restoration. However, most people widely regard email and social media as effective platforms to catapult their careers.

Lesonsky (2020) states that email marketing stands out as an unparalleled tool in propelling businesses to new heights, challenging the evolving landscape of marketing practices. Despite the dynamic nature of marketing, email remains a steadfast avenue, providing the highest return on investment (ROI) compared to other channels—\$42 for every dollar spent.

Small businesses, recognizing the pivotal role of email marketing, have embraced it as a means to promote their ventures, communicate with leads and customers, and ultimately drive success. The effectiveness of email marketing is evident, with 79% of businesses acknowledging its importance to their operations.

Much like the undeniable effectiveness of email marketing, social media and networking have become inseparable tools for businesses. (Newport, 2016) suggests that individuals who can minimize or eliminate distractions, particularly those from social media, are better positioned to achieve deep work and make significant contributions in their respective fields. Despite concerns

raised, the prevailing view in today's business landscape is that social media plays a vital role in company success. Recognized for its impact on marketing, brand building, and customer engagement, social media is considered integral to modern business strategies. While distractions are acknowledged, businesses increasingly see strategic social media integration as a dynamic asset for growth and competitiveness.

Gomez (2023) emphasizes the paramount importance of social media marketing for businesses, backed by compelling statistics. Notably, 94% of business leaders recognize the positive impact of social data on building brand reputation and loyalty. Additionally, 92% acknowledge that social insights inform stronger competitive positioning. Social data, cited by 91% of leaders, contributes to a more customer-centric business strategy, while an equal percentage attests to its positive impact on public relations outcomes. In crisis management, 84% of business leaders affirm the valuable role of social data and insights. Moreover, 68% of consumers follow brands on social media to stay informed about new products or services, underlining the platform's role in social commerce. Finally, 88% of leaders assert that social data is critical for delivering exceptional customer care. These compelling figures collectively underscore the multifaceted and indispensable role of social media in shaping modern business success.

While the discussion around the drawbacks of constant connectivity and distraction is well-articulated, envisioning a life without these integral features seems challenging. (Newport, 2016) , introduces the concept of the Eudaimonia Machine, sparking considerable debate on the merits of working in isolation. Despite the acknowledged benefits of deep, focused work, the prevailing sentiment leans towards the effectiveness of working in open spaces that foster networking and collaboration. The debate underscores the ongoing tension between the solitude

required for deep work and the advantages of a more interconnected and collaborative work environment.

The example of the researcher at Bellingshausen Station in Antarctica illustrated by Abrams (2023) shows the potential psychological toll of working in isolation. In this case, the researcher allegedly stabbed a colleague, and some reports linked this incident to the victim revealing the endings of books the attacker was reading. The extreme reaction suggests that the combination of isolation and confined conditions in remote locations can lead to heightened emotional responses and strained interpersonal dynamics. This real-life scenario serves as a powerful illustration of how the challenges of working in isolation can manifest in unexpected and severe ways.

Google's redesign of its offices post-pandemic according to Vincent (2021) includes a notable emphasis on outdoor spaces, introducing open-air work and meeting areas featuring tables and chairs within tents. This strategic shift acknowledges the significance of outdoor environments for employee well-being, offering natural light, fresh air, and the flexibility to maintain physical distance (due to Covid-19). The incorporation of outdoor spaces aligns with changing expectations, providing a collaborative and health-conscious alternative to traditional indoor workspaces. This move reflects Google's commitment to creating a dynamic and satisfying work environment, catering to the evolving needs of employees in the post-pandemic era.

In the ever-evolving landscape of work, the journey through "Deep Work," insights from industry leaders, and real-world examples highlight the delicate balance between focus and connectivity, solitude and collaboration. In this dynamic pursuit, the book and its contextual narratives invite us to reevaluate our approaches, recognizing that success lies not in a

one-size-fits-all solution but in the conscious alignment of individual concentration and collective innovation.

Applications-

1. Productive work environment

Carl Jung constructed a retreat in the woods with the intention of revolutionizing the discipline of psychiatry. Jung found that in Bollingen Tower, he could continue to use his profound thinking skills and use them to create art so amazingly creative that it altered the course of history. Tower was built by Jung as a retreat for solitude and concentrated work, far removed from the distractions of his daily life and professional responsibilities in Zurich. It represented a place where Jung could immerse himself in his thoughts and writings, embodying the principles of deep work.

Similarly, everyone can create their own Bollingen Tower that doesn't have to be far away from the city, which is not even possible for every single person. So, creating a distraction less environment at the place of work is very much important. The main reason Bollingen Tower was built is to keep Carl Jung away from any kind of distractions that affected his research. We can make our office cabin as minimalistic as possible. Having less things on the table which is not required to focus on our work like the calendar, flower vase, magazines, newspapers etc. Avoiding all these extra things in our office chamber will reduce the distractions and help us focus on our deep work.

2. Bimodal Philosophy

Adam Grant, a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, organizes his work life around a distinct split: he dedicates the fall semester to teaching and the spring and summer months to research.

During the fall, Grant focuses intensely on his teaching responsibilities, dedicating his energy and attention to his students and classes. This commitment allows him to be fully present and effective in his teaching role. By batching his teaching into one semester, he creates a clear boundary between this and his research work. Similar to what Bill Gates does twice a year giving this practice a name as “Think weeks”. This requires the ability to control and structure one’s schedule for effective implementation.

3. Chain Method of Productivity

This can be particularly effective for building and sustaining habits that contribute to long-term projects or goals requiring consistent effort. This method leverages the psychological impact of seeing a visual representation of your progress and the motivation to maintain your streak. One good example of this method is the 75-Hard challenge created by entrepreneur Andy Frisella.

This challenge has a few rules which have to be followed every single day until it is successfully done for 75 days continuously. The rules are: working out for 45 minutes twice a day with one outdoor workout, no cheat meals or alcohol, drink one gallon of water everyday, read 10 pages of a non-fictional book and take a picture of oneself every day. If any one of these rules are broken, we must restart from day 1. This is a very good example of how performing a few tasks every single day can make us cultivate a habit and help us become consistent.

4. Balance Work & Break

The key to effective deep work is not just about focusing intensely but also about taking strategic breaks to recharge. Our brains have a limited capacity for sustained concentration. After a period of intense focus, mental resources start to deplete. Breaks

can foster creativity and aid in problem-solving capability. It also prevents the mental and physical symptoms of burnout.

The schools in the Philippines have changed the way they function. Instead of the conventional way of giving breaks during the weekends, the schools in the Philippines have divided the week into two by having breaks on Wednesday and Sunday. This has reduced the burnout in the kids as well as the teachers. Similarly, taking a break when you deserve it is very much important rather than taking a break when you are offered one.

CONCLUSION -

In conclusion, the principles of deep work, as exemplified by visionaries like Carl Jung, Adam Grant, and entrepreneurs like Andy Frisella, underscore the importance of creating intentional and focused environments for optimal productivity. Whether constructing a personal retreat akin to Bollingen Tower, adopting a bimodal philosophy to balance teaching and research, leveraging the chain method for habit formation, or recognizing the significance of strategic breaks, the common thread is a deliberate approach to managing one's cognitive efforts.

Cal Newport's concept of deep work serves as a guiding philosophy in a world inundated with distractions, emphasizing the transformative power of undivided attention and deliberate practice in achieving meaningful and impactful results. By embracing these principles, individuals can navigate the complexities of modern work environments and cultivate a mindset that not only enhances productivity but also fosters creativity, resilience, and long-term success.

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