

1 The Context

Who hasn't experienced time anxiety when faced with a task that has to be finished by a certain deadline? In these circumstances, who hasn't felt the need to put off that task, to "come up for air"? Who hasn't had that unpleasant sensation of depending on time, chasing after appointments, giving up what one loves to do for lack of time?

"Remember, Time is a greedy player who wins without cheating, every round!" writes Baudelaire in his poem "The Clock" (1). Is this the true nature of time? Or is it only one of the possible ways to consider time? And more generally speaking, why do people have such a problem in the way they relate to time? Where does it come from, this anxiety that we've all experienced at the thought that "time is slipping away"?

Thinkers, philosophers, scientists – anyone who's taken on the challenge of attempting to define time in and of itself and the relationship between people and time has always been forced to admit defeat. Such an inquiry, in fact, is inevitably limited and never complete. Few have given us any truly insightful perspectives. For example, according to the work of Bergson (3) and Minkowski (16), two profoundly interrelated aspects seem to coexist with reference to time:

- *Becoming.* An abstract, dimensional aspect of time, which gives rise to the habit of measuring time (seconds, minutes, hours); the idea of representing time on an axis, as we would spatial dimensions; the concept of the duration of an event (the distance between two points on the temporal axis); the idea of being late (once again the distance between two points on the temporal axis).
- The succession of events. A concrete aspect of temporal order: we wake up, we take a shower, we have breakfast, we study, we have lunch, we have a nap, we play, we eat, and we go to bed. Children come to have this notion of time before they develop the idea of abstract time which passes regardless of the events that take place (16).

Of these two aspects, it is *becoming* that generates anxiety – it is, by nature, elusive, indefinite, infinite: time passes, slips away, moves toward the future (16). If we try to measure ourselves against the passage of time, we feel inadequate, oppressed, enslaved, defeated, more and more with every second that goes by. We lose our *élan vital* (3), our vital contact, which enables us to accomplish things. "Two hours have gone by and I'm still not done; two days have gone by and I'm still not done." In a moment of weakness, the purpose of the activity at hand is often no longer even clear. The succession of events, instead, seems to be the less anxiety-ridden aspect of time. At times it may even represent the regular succession of activity, a calm-inducing rhythm.

1.1 Goals of the Pomodoro Technique

The aim of the Pomodoro Technique is to provide a simple tool/process for improving productivity (your own and that of your team) which is able to do the following:

- Alleviate anxiety linked to *becoming*
- Enhance focus and concentration by cutting down on interruptions
- Increase awareness of your decisions
- Boost motivation and keep it constant
- Bolster the determination to achieve your goals
- Refine the estimation process, both in qualitative and quantitative terms
- Improve your work or study process
- Strengthen your determination to keep on applying yourself in the face of complex situations

1.2 Basic Assumptions

The Pomodoro Technique is founded on three basic assumptions:

- A different way of seeing time (no longer focused on the concept of *becoming*) alleviates anxiety and in doing so leads to enhanced personal effectiveness.
- Better use of the mind enables us to achieve greater clarity of thought, higher consciousness, and sharper focus, all the while facilitating learning.
- Employing easy-to-use, unobtrusive tools reduces the complexity of applying the Technique while favoring continuity, and allows you to concentrate your efforts on the activities you want to accomplish. Many time management techniques fail because they subject the people who use them to a higher level of added complexity with respect to the intrinsic complexity of the task at hand.

The primary inspiration for Pomodoro Technique was drawn from the following ideas: time-boxing (14), the cognitive techniques described by Buzan, among others, (6, 7, 8) relating to how the mind works, and the dynamics of play outlined by Gadamer (10). Notions relating to structuring objectives and activities incrementally are detailed in Gilb (11).