

## Unit 2: Time planning and task scheduling

### 1. Effective time management

#### 1.1. First step: divide time:

We know that the day has twenty-four hours. However, not all people behave as if they knew it. In fact, they do it as if they thought that one day has many more hours.

One of the keys for a person to be happy is based on the idea of devoting eight hours to sleep, eight hours to work and the remaining eight to perform the activities they like. In this way, time is divided into three equal parts with a number of advantages:

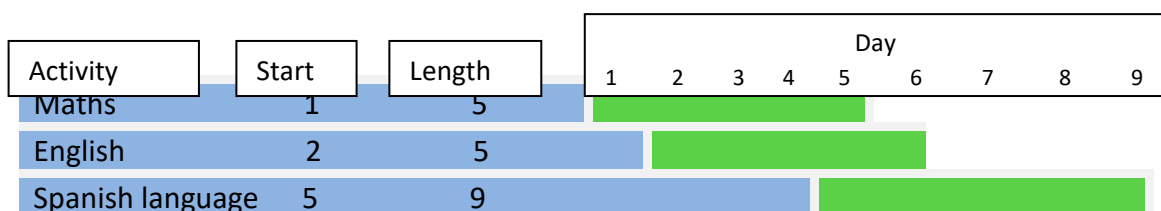
- Sleeping eight hours allows the individual to perform better during the remaining sixteen hours. The body spends energy at a normal rate and facilitates active living.
- Work (on behalf of others, self-employment, studies) makes the person feel useful and often fulfilled. One of the greatest disadvantages of long-term unemployment is precisely the loss of self-esteem for not finding a job.
- Dedicating the remaining eight hours to activities that we enjoy doing (reading, playing, doing sport, walking, going out, being at home) is rewarding for a well-done job and gives us the possibility to know ourselves internally, to seek our limits and to relate to other people.

From the above, we could conclude that a first effective time management consists of dividing the day into three parts and, from here, trying to take advantage of every moment at work and in personal life.

#### 1.2. GANTT. A technique to manage time:

The GANTT diagram was devised by Henry Laurence Gantt in the early twentieth century. It is a very simple graphic method which lets us be able to plan the execution of tasks in time.

Let's see an example: imagine that we must face three tests in the next 9 days. The first of them, Mathematics, within 5 days; the second, English, within 6 days, and the third, Spanish Language, within 9 days. We will make a GANTT diagram to create a study plan.



As we see, the first day we devote all studying time to Mathematics, the second day we dedicate half the time to Maths, assigning the other half to the preparation of the English exam.

On the fifth day already, we will divide time into three parts for every subject and from the seventh day on, we would only dedicate ourselves to preparing the Spanish Language test. Obviously, depending on the content of each test, time allocation will vary each day.

## **2. Planning and decision-making:**

The Gantt diagram which we said in the previous section, belongs to the process we call planning. Planning is important, because it involves a priori reflection on the tasks and goals to be achieved, whatever their nature.

### **2.1. Planning:**

We can say that planning consists of thinking about what is going to be done, how it is going to be done, when it will be done and who will make decisions and how they will be made. In addition, we must think of a system of control of results and assumption of responsibilities.

Planning, in theory, consists of the following phases:

- Setting up general objectives (passing the three exams in the next 9 days).
- Have the necessary resources (planning study time per day, space and materials).
- Defining specific objectives for each day (studying unit 3 of Maths on the first day, for example).
- Implementation (start studying as planned).
- Regular task control (checking if study planning is being performed day by day).
- Decision-taking after control if there are deviations between what is planned and what is implemented, assuming responsibility for such deviations and identifying the causes (underperformance or incorrect planning).

### **2.2. Control as a guarantee of planning**

Controlling and evaluating the partial and global results of a task are essential in order to have warranties that the planning is correct. In this way, the regular control becomes the thermometer of the task execution process. If the planning is not correct or the performance is low, the control will reveal deviations, and this way we will be able to make decisions assuming the responsibility of such deviations. The control gives us feedback on the whole process as well.

However, control has some drawbacks derived from the person performing it:

- If we are scared of making a mistake, we tend to falsify the control stage by deceiving ourselves so that it does not throw deviations.
- An overemphasis on the control stage can lead us to set goals too easy to reach. In this way we make sure that there are no deviations.

### **2.3. Decision-making:**

Decisions must be made throughout the planning, implementation and control process. In addition, it must be borne in mind that, contrary to what is popularly known as "always the fault of another", responsibility must always rest on the decision maker.

Depending on the stage in which we are, we will have:

- Strategic decisions are those that we take when we define the general objectives and we have the necessary resources.
- Tactical decisions are those that we take when we define specific objectives and execute the implementation.
- Control decisions are taken when deviations arise from what was previously planned.

When we make decisions, we will have to evaluate the pros and cons of the decision, control the level of risk associated with the decision, and be prepared to take the responsibility of making a mistake by being able to argue the decision.