

TIME MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

In late 2016, I launched a survey to which more than 300 Lebanese professionals of all walks answered. Its purpose was to learn more about the qualities / behaviors the Lebanese Professionals cherished the most.

The survey gave rise to the publication of two articles in the past two years covering 1) the questions in it that related to the Qualities the Lebanese Professionals appreciated, as well as 2) the issues of Motivation and Personal Development. This is the third and last article based on the survey and that addresses the way the Lebanese Professionals appreciate the importance of Time and how they deal with its Planning.

Keywords

Time Management, Planning, Putting 1st thing first, Procrastination, Saying “No”, Delegation, Outliers.

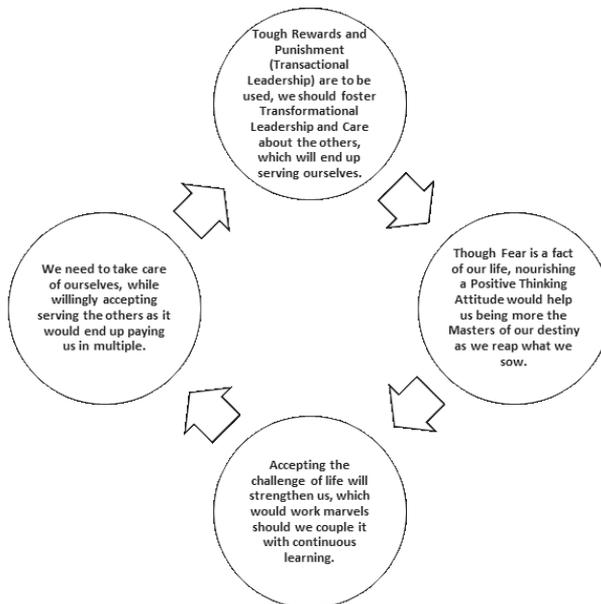
INTRODUCTION

This is the third article pertaining to the survey carried out late 2016 that dealt with the qualities/behaviors the Lebanese Professionals cherished the most. The first article related to the survey highlighted the qualities /traits the Lebanese professionals believe condition most their success based on an online survey addressed to few hundred professionals of various fields, age and education, covering both employed and self-employed seniors. The most important qualities / traits that were advocated are: **SELF-CONFIDENCE, POSITIVE ATTITUDE, HARD WORK AND PERSEVERANCE, ACCUMULATING ADVANTAGE (QUALITIES) and INTEGRITY**. The following three qualities / traits were then added in the article to render the success model more significant and comprehensive: **KNOWING**

ONE'S DESIRE, WORKING ON GETTING LUCKY and NURTURING THE TURF. These qualities were summed up in the following matrix:



The second article was also published in POEM in its 2019 issue number 31 and covered the topics of Motivation and Self-development addressed in the initial survey, i.e.: Motivation, and Positive thinking and personal development. It came up with the following summary diagram:



The present article is the third and last one related to the study and aims at addressing the importance of time and the usefulness of planning our future works so as to optimize this scarce and dear resource without which nothing can be done. It is split into two parts, one documenting the answers pertaining to Time Management of the Lebanese Professionals that were surveyed, and the second one talking about the Planning issues as these interviewed professionals perceived them.

1. ON TIME

Many of us often feel short of time and wish if they only had more of it, wanting their week to be of eight days! (Who wouldn't love to have more time to live better and to work more).

No doubt in our mind that Time is our most precious, yet most limited resource. It is very perishable. It cannot be stored, hired, or bought. Its supply is inelastic and we cannot replace it... at a time everything requires it, and it keeps on passing at the same pace. We can call it the "Tic-toc challenge".

Because most of us have less time than we would normally want to have, our priority should then be to optimize its usage by managing what we do while it passes (the time over which we have a control! Time that we can put into action productively).

Studies typically show that an average individual can quickly **become two times more productive** without increasing the number of their working hours. In fact, we can do that simply by planning and better managing our time usage: Investing time to get what we decide we want out of life; Making time usage a goal-oriented action; Getting time to serve us and stop being at the service of time. We would want to do that to be more effective; improve our job and life by becoming more productive and less tense and anxious...

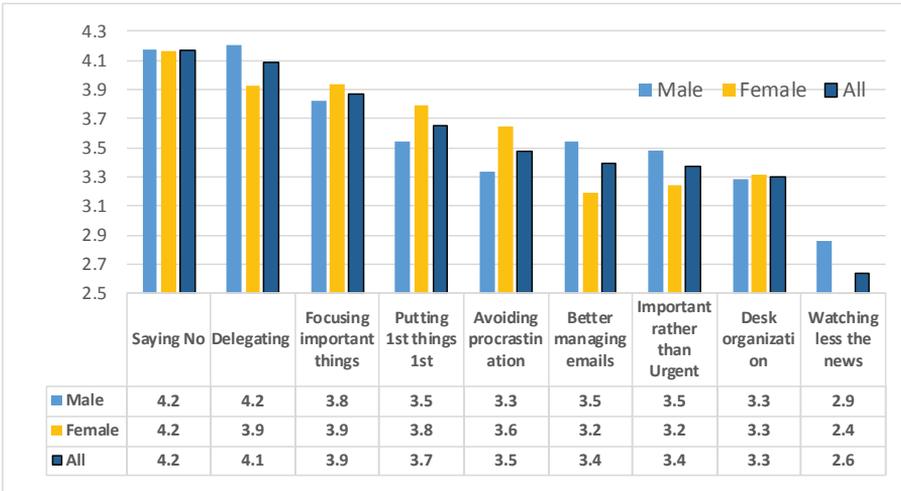
The objectives of time management are rather clear to most of us: It helps us achieve what we want, and faster; It helps us get more done in less time; It helps us better control our waste time; It helps us find more leisure time and feel more energized; It helps us fulfill more tasks in less time, and in turn feel more fulfilled; It helps us feel calmer and less stressed over time... In the end, it helps us improving our lifestyle, by stopping wasting our time and start using it wisely.

To learn more about the way the Lebanese professionals appreciate and manage time, the survey raised the following questions listed by order of the importance given to them¹ by the surveyed professionals:

1. Saying No when we have to (Question 5.3.)
2. Delegating to Assistants whatever they can properly handle (Question 4.2.)

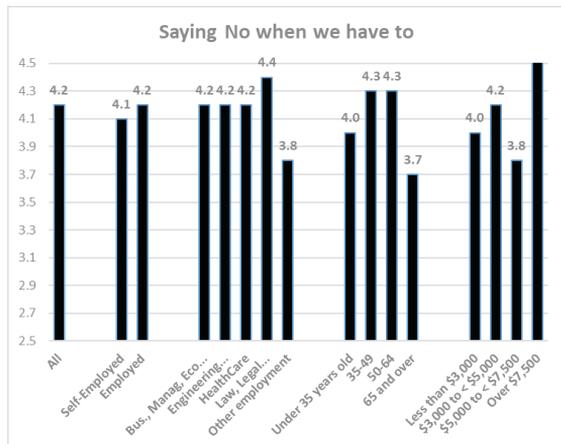
1. See graphic hereafter.

3. Focusing on the important things (doing more of them; doing them longer and getting better at them (Question 4.5.)
4. Dealing more with the important issues rather than the Urgent ones (Question 4.1.)
5. Putting 1st things 1st (applying the Pareto principle: the 20/80 rule)(Question 6)
6. Avoiding procrastination (Question 4.4.)
7. Improving on our desk’s organization (Question 5.2.)
8. Watching less the news (Question 5.4.)



Let us explore further the questions we raised in the survey:

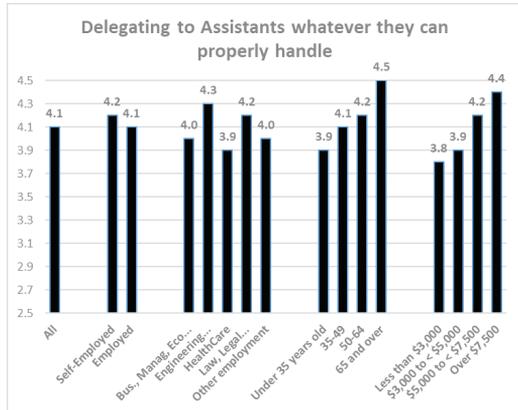
1.1. Saying No when we have to is a major time saver. It permits us not to be dominated by the others and be the masters of our time usage. This is especially needed knowing that we cannot do it all and that our time is limited. Selfishness is required to handle our important tasks.



We should not be manipulated by the sentiment that we owe the others as we especially owe ourselves. When we say no, we are not rejecting the others, but simply giving priority to our own duties. We have to have our best interests at heart. Therefore, we need to set boundaries to our gentleness and avoid taking more than what we can take.

This statement is very much accepted, especially by the Female professionals who gave it 4.6/5, but equally by the Male professionals who gave it also a high score of 4.4/5. It was however less appreciated by the elderly people who gave it 3.7 only, probably because they have more time to spare and maybe because they appreciate serving the others more than the younger professionals do.

1.2. Delegating to assistants whatever they can properly handle not only would make us gain valuable time, but it also boosts the morale of our assistants and develops further their capabilities. We should stop doing what we trust our assistants can do, especially when we are overloaded.

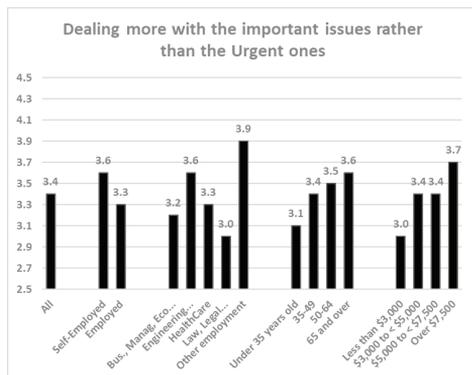
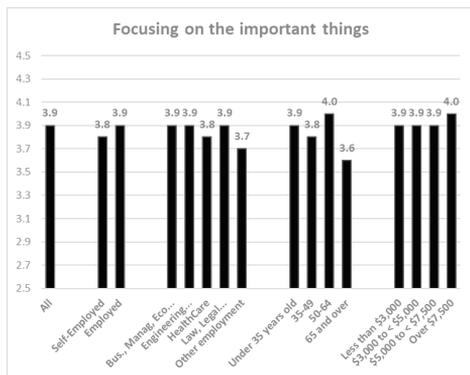


Let the others work for us. “Do unto others” would prove to be a blessing for both our assistants and ourselves. In fact, we owe our assistants the chance to develop, especially for the dedicated and capable ones, applying the 20/80 principle of Pareto².

This statement was rated 4.1 by Males and 3.9 by Females.

Engineers went more for it than the others (4.3), and so did the highly paid professionals who gave it a score of 4.4 vs only 3.8 by the professionals who are paid less than \$3,000.

In fact, we need to **focus on the important things**³ to optimize our time management, issue that was addressed by the following two questions:



2. Keeping the important 20s for ourselves and delegating as much as possible the rest.
3. What you stay focused on will grow – Roy T, Bennet.

1.3. Focusing on the important things: A relatively high level of 3.9 was granted by the professionals with the highest score of 4.0 granted by the elderly and well paid people.

1.4. However, **Dealing more with the important issues rather the urgent ones** came up with lower scores, ascertaining that Lebanese professionals focused more on urgency rather than on importance. Maybe the rush they are put under due to the unstable situation the country is going through negatively impacts the Lebanese professionals. It is however unfortunate as, here again, applying the Pareto 20/80 principle would have been the name of the game as it is the universal truth about the imbalance of inputs to outputs.

In fact, the secret of achieving more with less is in optimizing time consumption. When in a challenging situation, one should rather figure out what they have to accomplish in broad terms (master the global picture) and have a good understanding of each of the tasks that need to be carried out.

We need to find a way to get first things done first – to “Eat the frog”. We need to clear first the unpleasant tasks to help us feel much better⁴. We need to tackle the biggest tasks first and get them out of our way to alleviate the pressure and anxiety that they have built up in us, and that prevent us from getting things done effectively. Let’s start our day eliminating small things too, such as dealing with our important emails and placing some urgent phone calls... get these tasks out of our way to feel we are mastering more our time.

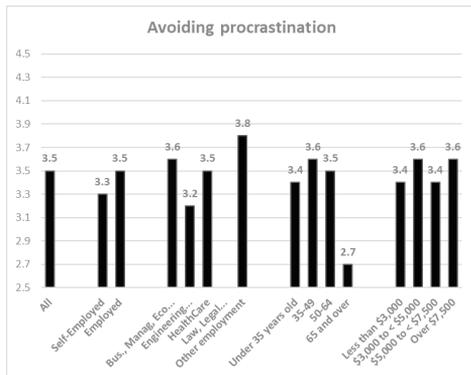
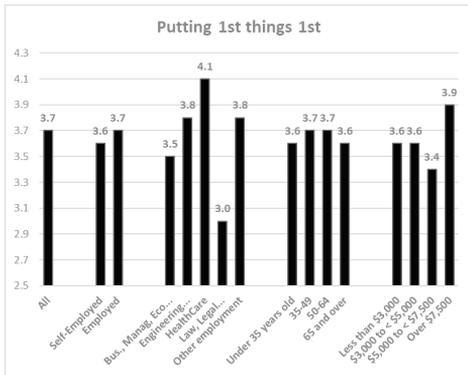
However, we should always keep in mind that the name of the game is to give priority to the important tasks and not to the urgent ones, i.e. not tackling tasks as they come along. This requires mastery of self and discipline backed by principle number three from the renowned book of Stephen Covey⁵ “Prioritize effectively”, which means organizing and implementing to be effective prior to being efficient⁶.

1.5. Putting first things first, is the ABC of time management wisdom. However, it only scored 3.7 by the Lebanese professionals with the highest score of 4.1 given by the Healthcare professionals - which is understandable as per the requirements of their profession.

4. Put yourself in a better mood.

5. The 7 habits of highly effective people.

6. Effectiveness here is about putting 1st things 1st, and efficiency is about managing out time with discipline.

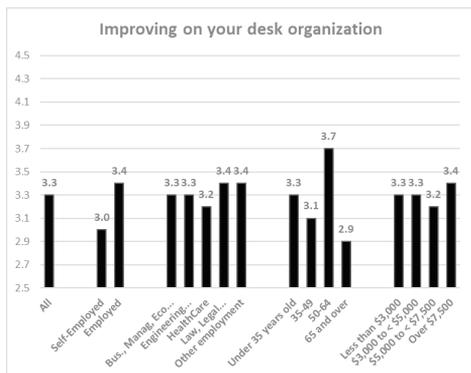


1.6. To optimize the efficiency of our time usage, we need to stop putting things off and start getting things done as if tomorrow never comes. We feel undecided, guilty and rotten when we are aware of our **procrastination** as it tells us to which extent we are being lazy and could cause us missing good opportunities... and such pushes us further down the road in our vicious circle of incompetence. In fact, our brain prefers procrastination as Caroline Webb puts it: “The problem is our brains are programmed to procrastinate. In general, we all tend to struggle with tasks that promise *future* upside in return for efforts we take now. That’s because it’s easier for our brains to process concrete rather than abstract things, and the immediate hassle is very tangible compared with those unknowable, uncertain future benefits. So the short-term effort easily dominates the long-term upside in our minds—an example of something that behavioral scientists call *present bias*”.

The **procrastination** statement was rated 3.5 in a comparable manner by Males and Females. And the average score applied as well to the majority of the classes of the Lebanese professionals, except for the elderly people who really neglected the importance of procrastination rating it an average 2.7/5. We simply need to remember that, as Roy T. Bennet put it, “Maturity is when you stop complaining and making excuses, and start making changes”.

1.7. Furthermore, **Improving on our desk organization** will render our work less stressful, will help focus more and can improve our productivity. So, let us:

- Eliminate duplicate tools,
- Free space and set order,
- Keep the files that we are not working on off the desk (putting them in the drawers for example),
- Have a small plant and a photo of our beloved ones,

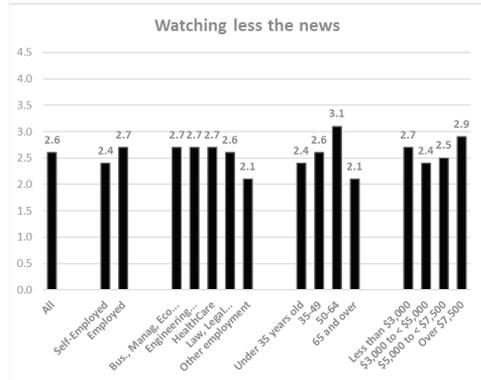


7. The article was published in the book: HBR guide to being more productive.

- Assign place to our desk tools and keep them in their respective places,
- Clean our office desk in the evening and have it ready for our next day (who would not want to start his/her day with a clean desk!)

The average score of 3.3. was granted to this statement (one would have expected more) with the highest score given by the professionals belonging to the age bracket of 50 to 64 years.

1.8. For many international professionals, **Watching more the news** is a major source of wasting time. This is not the perception of our Lebanese professionals who seem to need to watch more the news than their international peers because of the pace of the major events we witness in Lebanon and the direct impact of these on our business mood and direct environment. This explains why this statement got a low grade of 2.6, reflecting the felt need of the Lebanese professionals to follow more closely the news of their country and its surroundings, especially in times of turbulence or tension in the country or in the area.



2. On Planning

No one doubts the importance of Planning in optimizing the usage of time (this scarce resource) and in being effective in its deployment. Moreover, organizations must plan to take into account the future. They need that to know the attributes of the future to effectively manage their present strengths and weaknesses, as well as their opportunities and threats accordingly. By doing so, organizations provide themselves with tools that help them better orient and control their activities, and as such improve their time management. It will help them render their time management more systematic and optimize their resources allocation and consumption.

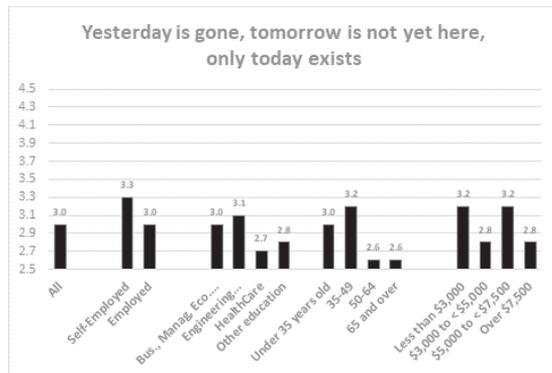
The following questions were raised in the survey to learn more about the points the Professionals considered important to master for coming up with a better planning:

1. *Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is not yet here, only today exists (Question 14.8)*
2. *Noting that we are not fortune tellers, do you think that building your future is possible and that you are not to be left to the hands of fate? (Question 10)*
3. *Because of the unpredictability of the future, the best thing to do is to work on building ourselves to the maximum and remaining alert to exploit more and better the opportunities (Question 11)*

8. Or Reading or listening to it.

4. *Personal success depends on Luck (opportunities afforded that are purely coincidental, unintended and unearned) and on our Capability to exploit it (Question 19.1)*
5. *Outliers (outstanding performers) are those who have been given opportunities – and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them- Malcolm Gladwell (Question 19.4)*
6. *Do you consider yourself more of a figures oriented person rather than a philosopher (Question 15)*
7. *A major part of our good decision making is based on our intuition/ subconscious mind, over and above our rational thinking (Question 14.4)*
8. *To succeed in business, one has to strike an acceptable balance between rational and intuitive thinking (Question 19.7)*
9. *We need to better tolerate Ambiguity and accept Uncertainty (Question 19.6)*

2.1. The saying of mother Theresa that **“yesterday is gone, tomorrow is not yet here and only today exists”** may well insinuate that we have to work as work comes on daily basis, doing our best and leaving for God the rest - leaving the past behind us while praying the Lord for a good tomorrow. As if we are saying that we should not bother

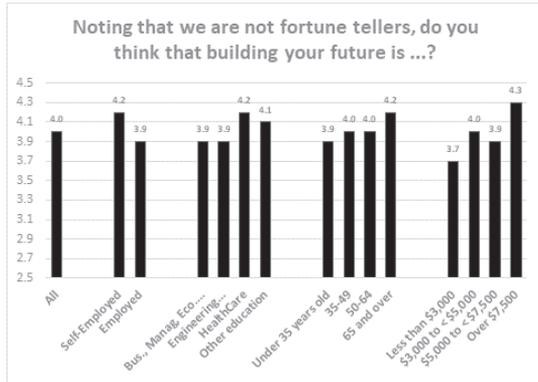


planning tomorrow; let it be; let it come...! However, we know that today has its roots in yesterday and that tomorrow starts now. This is to say that we have to learn from yesterday and work today in a way to see tomorrow come to the best of our dreams (as tomorrow always comes). The score given by the professionals to this question of 3.0 / 5⁹ proves that a major part of the professionals don't go with mother Theresa about thinking of today as tomorrow never comes. It seems as well that the professionals think that one has to work in a proactive manner and that planning tomorrow is needed.

2.2. In fact, a major part of the professionals confirmed their conviction that, **though they were not fortunetellers, they would not want to leave the future to fate.** This question scored a high 4.0/5 with the highest score coming from the highest paid professionals (4.3). True that only God knows tomorrow, but we have to plan to get more prepared to exploit the opportunities God puts our way. We need to have the vision and to be ready to affront the challenges of tomorrow working on becoming history makers rather than accepting to be simple history

9. The lowest score of 2.6 was given by the elderly people.

readers. We need to be alert continuously and work on regular basis shaping our future to the best of our capabilities and dreams. We need to remember that tomorrow is the result of our today’s actions and that it is not fate. Therefore, lets “be lucky” exploiting favorably what comes our way rather than expecting only favorable matters put on our road.

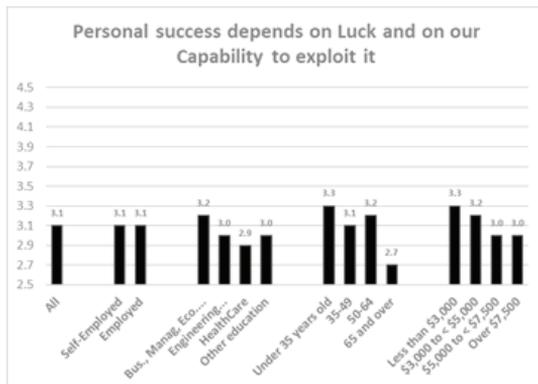


2.3. It looks obvious that we have to build our future at a time 1) we cannot foresee the future and 2) we know it will be different from today, and more and more so due to the fast pace of change. That is exactly why “because of the unpredictability of the future, the best thing to do is to work on building ourselves to the maximum and remaining alert to exploit more and better the opportunities” that come our way, question that scored a high 4.3/5 with a narrow gap going between 4.1 and 4.4.



No one denies the presence of luck, bad one as good one. The issue is how ready are we to be less affected by bad luck and more ready to catch and better exploit good luck.

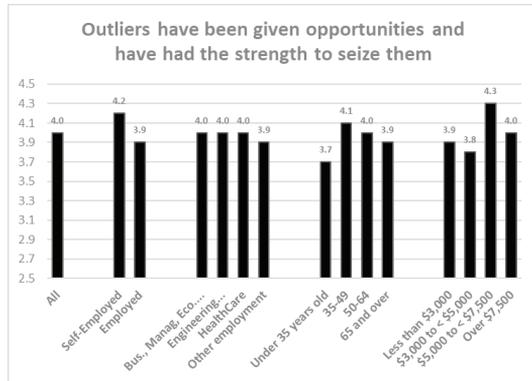
2.4. The above mentioned building ourselves is what permits the high performers to take more advantage than the others of the opportunities that are granted to all of us by being magnetized, i.e. by being, as we Lebanese rightfully put it, of those who sand turns into gold in their hands. The relatively low score given to the question “Personal success depends on Luck and on our Capability to exploit it” of 3.1. denotes that the Lebanese



denotes that the Lebanese

professionals don't count much on luck, though, we may presume, recognize its presence. The issue is then an issue of attitude that calls on being prepared to earn the benefits of catching more and better the opportunities of life.

2.5. We need to admit that the **“Outliers (outstanding performers) are those who have been given opportunities – and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them”** – Malcolm Gladwell. A score of 4.0 was granted to this statement with a higher score coming from those who are on the high side of their earnings; they seem to be reaping the value of being prepared.



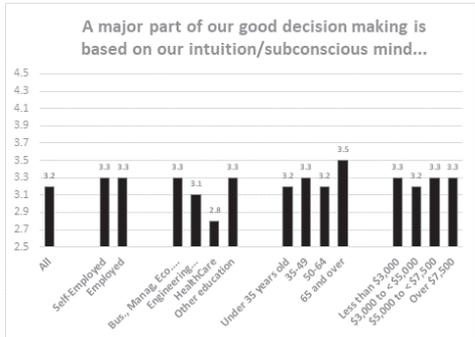
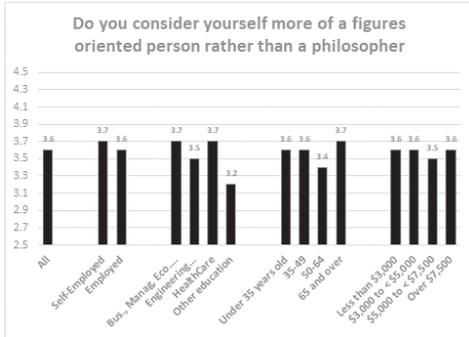
2.6. Fine, so we better plan our future to see it coming our way, the way we want it, more than the way fate shaped it for us. Grant you that we are not fortunetellers and, as such, we will never manage planning our future in an accurate manner in such a volatile, turbulent and uncertain environment. Still, we will be better off if we plan our future with some solid analysis and not only counting on our intuition. Wouldn't we? The issue is to determine the following basic questions:

- How much analysis should we afford doing to plan our future?
- To which extent should we strive at being figures oriented?
- How much should we fish for unshakable facts?
- Can't we also count on our intuition, on our gut feelings, on our subconscious mind? And to which extent?

The above issues were covered by the following two additional questions in the survey:

- a. Do you consider yourself more of a figures oriented person rather than a philosopher (Question 15)
- b. A major part of our good decision-making is based on our intuition/subconscious mind, over and above our rational thinking (Question 14.4).

The answers came with respectively the following average scores: 3.6 and 3.2.



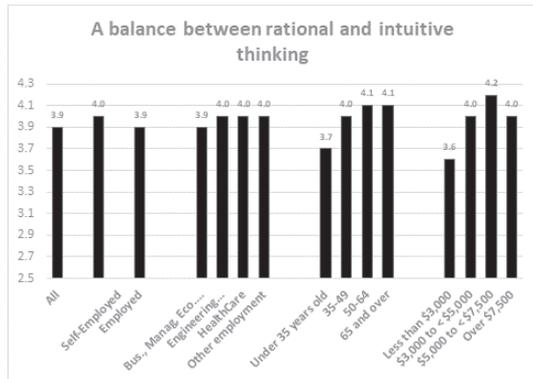
The score for question (a) ranked very comparably by males and females; it ranked 3.2 however for the “Other Employment” category. For question (b), the differences between the professionals coming from different educational backgrounds were significant. The score of 2.8 was given by the “Healthcare” sector indicating that these professionals, thanks God, counted more on facts and figures rather than on their intuition. The results of these two questions however tell us that the Lebanese professionals sustain what Henri Poincaré once said: “It is through science that we prove, but through intuition that we discover”. In fact, many of our decisions are based on gut feeling, on our intuition and subconscious mind, more than on our logical analysis. I believe that we all agree that often enough we are driven by feelings that we cannot justify... we simply cannot then prove our point of view, and still we feel very right about these feelings. As Blaise Pascal once advocated, *our heart has reasons that we cannot comprehend with our reason (Le Cœur a ses raisons que la Raison ne connaît point)*. In these instances, our heart directs us in the right direction without our reason managing to explain the good reasons standing behind our intuition.

However, the point is not choosing between reason and intuition. It is rather about combining these two directions to come, as much as possible, to a common Yes status. Whenever your heart says No, redo your analysis, and do not easily go for a Yes whenever your heart says No.

2.7. Of course, the more rational we can be, the better. But, fact finding and analysis is time consuming and can sometimes prove expensive, let alone that sometimes it can prove to be not easily feasible due to lack of information or time. In fact, **“To succeed in business, one has to strike an acceptable balance between rational and intuitive thinking”**. If we were to act only based on our rational thinking we won’t do much. That is why the question was graded high: 4.0/5 as a global average, and higher for the highly paid professionals who have learned to count more on their intuition, and whose, most probably, well sharpened intuition paid them well by promoting their rank in their organization. Actually, we should

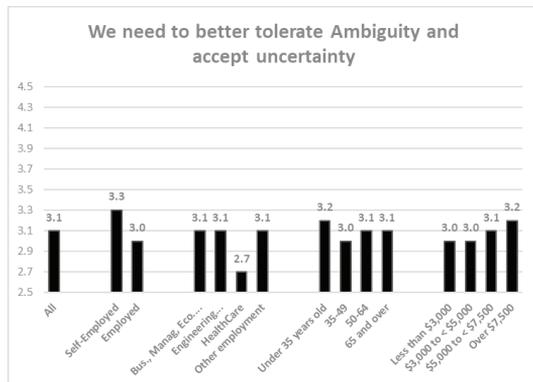
not always seek comprehensive analysis and should count more on our intuition each time:

- The issue is not of a high importance,
- The data on hand is not sufficient,
- The decision to make is reversible,
- The decision is urgent.



Of course, whenever the decision to be made is on the opposite sides of the above, we should “sleep on it” and give more weight to our reason than to our intuition.

2.8. Whichever way we consider our planning approach, we need to assess **“to which extent we should tolerate ambiguity and accept uncertainty”** which scored an average of 3.1, with a higher acceptance made by Self-employed and Highly paid professionals, and with a much lower acceptance made by the Healthcare people (as expected). In fact, in business, as Richard



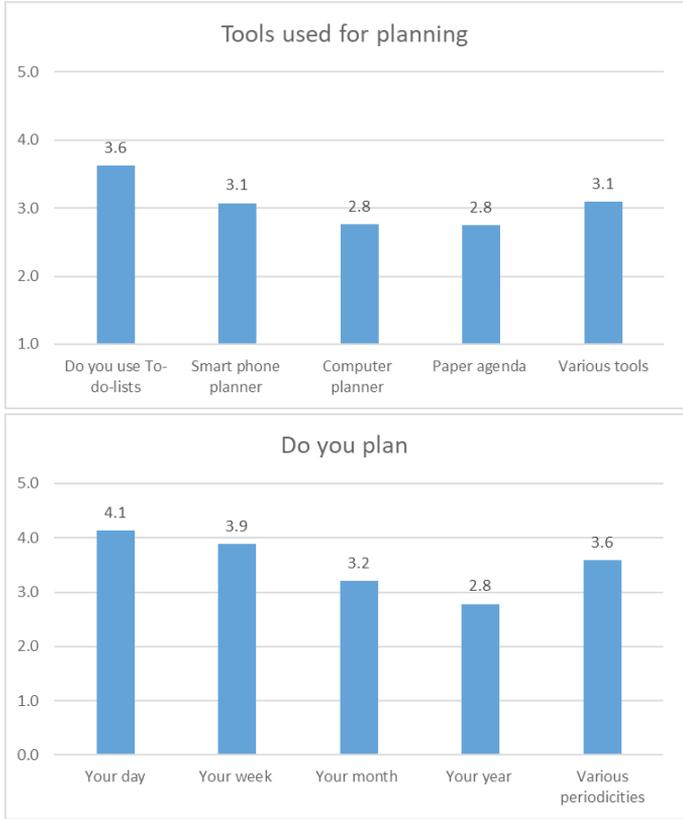
Kach put it well, “Being mostly correct and decisive typically yields better results than taking the time to figure out what is perfectly correct” as if he was telling us to “aim a little, shoot, assess and re-aim”. In fact, few things are certain, and ambiguity is very often the name of the game. We need to learn how to embrace ambiguity and accept uncertainty, especially when we do not have the time for exploring in sufficient details the issue under consideration. If we wait to feel certain, often we will not move. Let us remember that our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, but from wanting to control it – Khalil Gibran.

3. The usage of planning aid tools and the need to keep the plans up to date

We use many tools to help ourselves in plotting our coming days’ usage of time. We do it on daily basis for the few days to come; on weekly basis for the weeks, and on monthly basis as well - Sometimes, especially when we are to book our time usage for more than the coming few months, we may even do our planning for the few years to come. Of course, the longer our scope of planning is, the more general our plans would be.

As our memory is shorter than what we want it to be, let alone it is also selective, we would want to document in writing our future plans. We can do that manually using plain agendas and to do lists, or, more and more so, electronically using our computers, tablets, cell phones and alike.

The survey addressed these issues and came up with the following average responses for the Lebanese professionals that were interviewed:



Lebanese professionals look like mainly using To-Do checklists for the coming few days.

CONCLUSION

Time matters and we should manage it properly. This is especially important when we notice that a lot of people believe that due to it shortage, they cannot make all their dreams come true, travel frequently to exotic locations, get enough sleep every night, spend enough time with their loved ones... All this, they feel, is because they do not have enough time. However, often enough, it is not limited time that is the problem; it is rather our bad time management.

In the final count, “there are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure” – Collin Powell. In addition, good time management takes times to learn¹⁰, discipline and persistence. It especially requires patience, which is the key to success as Benjamin franklin puts it: “He that can have patience can have what he will”.

10. Though once we put ourselves on the right track of properly managing our time, results will start popping up.