

## Section Heading

# Get to the Next Level with taskmind!

Dr. Christoph Steindl and Christian Federspiel, founders of Catalysts, makers of taskmind

**D**o you sometimes wonder why you and your team don't get more done? Why, even with good co-ordination, don't your people achieve what they've promised?

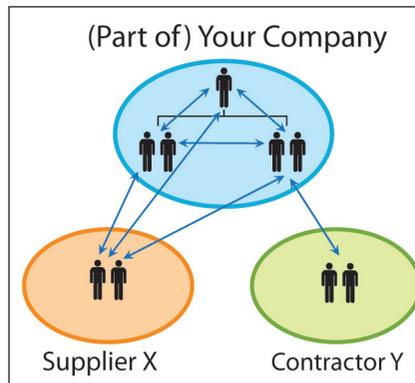
Similar answers to these questions will be found in most organisations: **ad hoc tasks** (like writing emails, answering phone calls, clerical tasks, etc) **consume a substantial amount of the working time available - as much as 30-50% in the case of a knowledge worker.** A large part of time at work is therefore **wasted on small tasks of questionable priority.** Most teams waste a lot of their potential. But how would the brave new world of an agile office look?

Carina is a mid-level manager in a large organisation. Her conclusion from the strategy meeting is, once again, change is the only constant. The most important thing now is that her entire team must respond quickly to the change and implement the right steps. The tool supporting change in her organisation is taskmind. taskmind helps people get the right things done in a turbulent environment.

## Teamwork is a key competency

**Tasks get more and more complex.** Results must be delivered in less time at lower cost without sacrificing quality; hence the tendency towards specialisation. Instead of one person doing the entire task, **teams of specialists collaborate.** These teams of specialists are often just virtual teams, with members in different organisations, such as at suppliers or contractors. Hence collaboration has to take place **across organisational boundaries** (see figure 1). Unfortunately, **that also increases uncertainty and risk.**

For Carina it is important that each team member (whether internal or external):



**Figure 1: Collaboration across boundaries**

- really understands the **common goal** and what his or her **individual contribution** is for reaching that goal
- knows **what has to be done, by when, and with what priority,** and
- adheres to the **agreements** and meets the **promised delivery dates.**

If not, Carina and her team will not be able to deliver results reliably. **Efficient collaboration within teams and across boundaries of teams and organisations is a critical success factor** for Carina. That's where taskmind comes in. Without a proper tool, teamwork won't happen at least not on the many ad hoc tasks.

## Benefits of a task management system

A task management system like taskmind enables efficient teamwork through:

- **Transparency**  
Every authorised person can see all the tasks that have to be performed, together with their status and progress.
- **Completeness and centralisation**  
All tasks are captured and available from a central location. Tasks are not split among several tools (emails,

mobile phone, sticky notes) where they can easily fall into oblivion.

- **Self-organisation**

With all tasks captured, each person can grab a task if he or she has the time, or if that task is more important than the tasks he/she would otherwise work on.

- **Documentation**

The inputs of a task are well documented, as are the discussions that lead to decisions, and the flow of work - everything accessible directly from the task.

- **Monitoring and tracking**

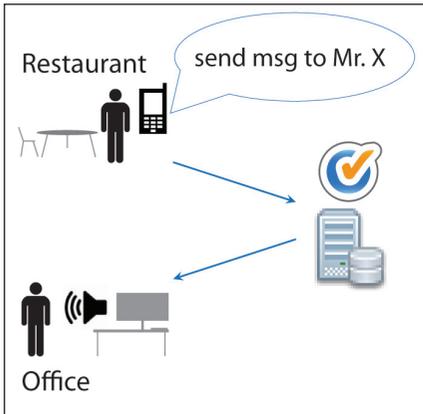
Every action (like when a person accepts or finishes a task) is documented and can be analysed retrospectively.

But such benefits only exist if the task management system is both **accessible everywhere and faster than pencil and paper.** Otherwise it won't be used ubiquitously.

Let's look at an example. When Carina and her colleagues have lunch together, often enough someone has a good idea that shouldn't be lost. Carina simply wants to record the idea with her smart phone (see figure 2). In other cases she wants to assign the task to a colleague in the office directly from the smart phone. Since taskmind is an online system, the task is immediately visible to her colleague and when she gets back to the office, the task may already be finished.

That way tasks are recorded faster than one could write them with pencil and paper. Tasks also get delivered to the right person faster than one could deliver the piece of paper with the task noted on it. And it's easy to keep track of one's own tasks and the tasks that have been assigned to other people.

With a system like taskmind, **each person saves a couple of hours a week**



**Figure 2: Always at hand - always online**

(compared to emails, phone calls, sticky notes). Ideas don't get lost; tasks get done.

**From tasks to chains of tasks**

"What is worth doing is also worth doing fast" - but not all tasks are equally urgent. When a certain sequence of tasks is overdue, each and every task in such a critical chain should be performed as quickly as possible. No time must be wasted, since every delay means delay of the entire chain.

taskmind supports those kinds of situation with the **relay racer metaphor for critical chains**. Once the critical chain is defined, the system notifies the person in charge of the first task. Any delays are tracked, made visible and escalated to the project manager.

Experience shows that dramatic improvements can be achieved by implementation of Critical Chain ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical\\_Chain\\_Project\\_Management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_Chain_Project_Management)). **Typical tasks in a service organisation have a "touch time" of only 15%**, ie, even if it takes 10 days overall to solve a problem for a client, the actual effort is only 1.5 days (see figure 3). With the relay racer metaphor, delays will be vaporised.

**No more autopilot**

No one wants to abolish autopilots

for aircraft, but in the office, working in autopilot mode is undesirable: open an email, read it, answer it; open an email, read it, answer it, and so on.

A lot of time gets wasted, and since many of those emails don't require immediate attention, **priority should instead be given to: 1) the most overdue critical chain; 2) the project with the highest priority; 3) the task with the highest priority.**

Every person should know what his or her most valuable contribution is. In autopilot mode a lot of potential is wasted. **With a proper prioritisation scheme important work gets done much quicker.**

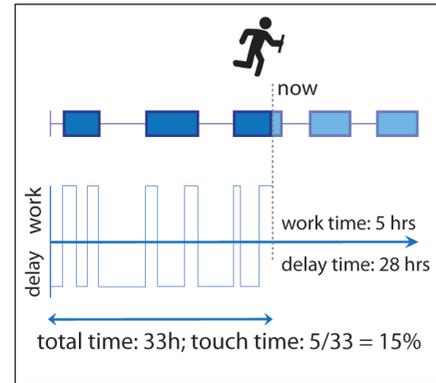
**The times they are a changing...**

Usually not all details are known ahead of time: tasks get changed, new tasks are identified and need to be integrated into plans, tasks are pulled ahead or delayed, etc. If ad hoc tasks make their way into the task management system they must be quickly and easily captured and changed. If this were to be burdensome some users would simply ignore the system. With taskmind, changes take a matter of seconds. And notifications about the changes are delivered to the appropriate people within seconds.

However, **once there is an agreement** between the requester of a task and the person who has agreed to work on the task, that **task cannot be changed arbitrarily**. If there is a major change in the task description, the due date, or the priority, the person may no longer be able to deliver the results as originally promised. Hence, the agreement is broken and the two must re-negotiate the task. People can rely on agreements not changing unilaterally.

**More agile knowledge workers**

Agile principles and techniques have been adopted widely in software



**Figure 3: Remove unnecessary delays**

development teams. **The next wave is the adoption of agile principles and techniques outside the IT department.** A lot of time knowledge workers time currently gets wasted. With the appropriate change in the mindset and the appropriate tool, customer requests can be handled much quicker and teamwork can become the standard mode of operation even for clerical tasks.

**www.taskmind.net** is a powerful task management solution. It has been available in a **free Community Edition** since early 2009, in a Professional Edition (SaaS, Software as a Service; hosted server), and in an Enterprise Edition (dedicated server in the customer's intranet). It will help you get to the next level. ■



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