Do Less, not More

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5 Questions

1. Empirical evidence?
2. Why (causal mechanisms, ie benefits)?
3. What required?
4. How do it, practically?
5. Downsides?
Hypothesis

• All else equal, people who do less, not more, are more likely to achieve extraordinary results than those who do not
• do less: do a few things, and strive to excel in them
• extraordinary results: top 10% in domain or achieved a remarkable result in non-defined domain
• Plausible alternative: People who do multiple things (hedge) do better
# Empirical Evidence

## Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Collinearity Statistics</th>
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</table>

a. Dependent Variable: PerformanceSum
Figure 1. Fully Connected Model with Hours Worked as Outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect Variable</th>
<th>Cause Variable</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>C. R.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<td>-0.067</td>
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Trap: Spreading too thin

Why output of 1 > output of 5?
Trap: Complexity

# steps to get work done
# check-points
# sign-offs required
# people on board
# layers in org chart
# departments
# sales offices
# bureaucrats

Volume
Price
#new accounts
% new products
% small accounts
Why beneficial?

Do Less
- All-in
- Choice Risk Up
- Execution Risk Down
- Concentrate
- Simplify

Do More
- Hedge
- Choice Risk Down
- Execution Risk Up
- Spread-too-thin
- Complexity

Execution > Choice
What is required for a do-less approach to succeed?

1. Choose fewest things possible
   - Occam’s Razor

2. Choose really, really well
   - Otherwise huge risk

3. Absolutely master those few things
   - Otherwise hedging better; otherwise execution risk
Jiro Dreams of Sushi

**Jiro the person**
- hard working
- life commitment
- disciplined
- obsessed
- into details
- mega-perfectionist

**Do-less scope**
- one restaurant
- very small (12)
- only sushi
- few pieces (15-20)
- only best fish
- best rice

+ 

= massive, life-long dedication to exceptional
Jiro Doesn’t Dream of Sushi...

Jiro the person
- hard working
- life commitment
- disciplined
- obsessed
- into details
- mega-perfectionist

Do-more scope
- 10 restaurants
- all large
- Japan, Paris, Vegas…
- sushi+tapas+French
- standard menu
- ok ingredients

= Food empire, a la Gordon Ramsey
(but probably not truly best in anything)
Joe Bloke Dreams of Sushi

Joe the potato couch
Get’s in at 10am…
fun job
relaxes
hands-off

Do less scope
one restaurant
very small (12)
only sushi
few pieces (15-20)

+ 

= mediocre
Downsides to do-less approach

• Sometimes Hedging more beneficial than focus (choice risk is bigger than execution risk)

• Specialization gone too far (creates collaboration problem)

• Tunnel vision, becomes rigid (no change)
What’s preventing people from doing less (focusing and simplifying)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spreading too thin</td>
<td>1,047</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much work</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Management/Organization</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Problem (e.g. attention)</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Prioritization</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractions through office layout</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions by other people</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What key factors make it difficult for you to focus and simplify your work?
How become better at “doing less, not more” (focusing and simplifying)?
1. Subtract

An army major conducted an experiment in a small town named Kufa. The major had analyzed videotapes of riots and had found that violence was often preceded by a crowd of Iraqis gathering in a plaza and, over the course of hours, growing in size. Food vendors would show up, as well as spectators. Then, someone would throw a rock or a bottle.

When the major met with Kufa’s mayor, he made an odd request: Could they keep food vendors out of the plazas? Sure, the mayor said. A few weeks later, a small crowd gathered near the Great Mosque of Kufa. It grew in size. Some people started chanting angry slogans. At dusk, the crowd started getting restless and hungry. People looked for the kebab sellers normally filling the plaza, but there were none to be found. The spectators left. The chanters became dispirited. By 8 p.m., everyone was gone.
"Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."

Antoine Saint-Exupery
2. Force the To-Do List

Divide your to-do-list into “must have’s” and “nice to have’s” and ditch the nice part

Ask a colleague play devil’s advocate to push you to cut things

Create a stop-doing list

Ask your boss to rank the top 3 priorities in your work
3. Learn to say NO

- Never
- Postpone (Jobs did)
- Delegate
- Push back against boss
4. Obliterate distractions & interruptions

- Force yourself off electronics
- Hide in your cubicle
- Politely say “get lost”
- Cut down on hallway chit-chat
Exercise

Building Effective Habits
5 Areas: Do Less

- **Do a few things only.** List max 3 priorities, only do must have’s, say no.
- **Dedicate time and energy to those things.** Time spent on them, energy spent on them, emotional investment, etc.
- **Simplify work.** Cut out steps, content, features, etc.
- **Simplify communication.** Shorten e-mails, reduce slides in preso, get to the point in chatting, etc.
- **Avoid distractions.** Turn off phone in meetings, work in a quiet place, skip a seminar, etc.
Today’s Mission ……

Today, **say no** to one activity (work or otherwise) that you would enjoy doing and that will take at least one hour, then instead use that our to work on your key priority.

Over the next two days, List and rank your top 6 priorities. Then cross out the bottom three. Make a plan to spend at least 50% of your time on the **top 3 priorities**.

Download the “self-control” app, enter your most **distracting websites**, find 90 minutes of one chunk over the next two days, turn it on, and work exclusively on your top priority.