

Getting Things Done: The Science behind Stress-Free Productivity

Heylighen, Francis and Vidal, Clément (2007) *Getting Things Done: The Science behind Stress-Free Productivity*. [Journal (On-line/Unpaginated)]

This is the latest version of this eprint.

Full text available as:



[PDF](#) - Published Version
403Kb

Abstract

Allen (2001) proposed the “Getting Things Done” (GTD) method for personal productivity enhancement, and reduction of the stress caused by information overload. This paper argues that recent insights in psychology and cognitive science support and extend GTD’s recommendations. We first summarize GTD with the help of a flowchart. We then review the theories of situated, embodied and distributed cognition that purport to explain how the brain processes information and plans actions in the real world. The conclusion is that the brain heavily relies on the environment, to function as an external memory, a trigger for actions, and a source of affordances, disturbances and feedback. We then show how these principles are practically implemented in GTD, with its focus on organizing tasks into “actionable” external memories, and on opportunistic, situation-dependent execution. Finally, we propose an extension of GTD to support collaborative work, inspired by the concept of stigmergy.

Item Type: Journal (On-line/Unpaginated)

Additional Information: Heylighen, Francis, and Clément Vidal. 2008. Getting Things Done: The Science behind Stress-Free Productivity. *Long Range Planning* 41, no. 6: 585-605. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2008.09.004>

Keywords: personal productivity, personal information management, time management, task management, praxeology, situated and embodied cognition, stigmergy, information overload.

Subjects: [Psychology > Applied Cognitive Psychology](#)
[Philosophy > Decision Theory](#)

ID Code: 6289

Deposited By: Vidal, Clément

Deposited On: 04 Dec 2008 17:46

Last Modified: 11 Mar 2011 08:57

Available Versions of this Item

- [Getting Things Done: The Science behind Stress-Free Productivity. \(deposited 15 Jan 2008 23:55\)](#)
 - Getting Things Done: The Science behind Stress-Free Productivity. (deposited 04 Dec 2008 17:46) **[Currently Displayed]**

References in Article

Select the SEEK icon to attempt to find the referenced article. If it does not appear to be in cogprints you will be forwarded to the paracite service. Poorly formatted references will probably not work.

Aerts, D. Apostel, L. De Moor, B. Hellemans, S. Maex, E. Van Belle, H. Van der Veken, J. (1994) World views. VUB Press. <http://www.vub.ac.be/CLEA/pub/books/worldviews.pdf> [Seek](#)

Allen, D. (2001) Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity, (Penguin). [Seek](#)

Anderson, D. & Michael, L. 2003: Embodied cognition: A field guide, Artificial Intelligence 149, p. 91—130. [Seek](#)

Benkler, Y. (2002) Coase's penguin, or, Linux and the nature of the firm. The Yale Law Journal, 112, 369—446. [Seek](#)

Bickhard MH, L Terveen (1996) Foundational issues in artificial intelligence and cognitive science, Elsevier Science Publishers. <http://www.lehigh.edu/~mhb0/AIFull.pdf> [Seek](#)

Bonabeau, E. Dorigo, M. Theraulaz, G. (1999) Swarm Intelligence, Oxford University Press. [Seek](#)

Clancey W.J. (1997), Situated Cognition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. [Seek](#)

Clark A. (1997) Being There: Putting the Brain, Body and World Together Again (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA). [Seek](#)

Clark A. (1999): An embodied cognitive science, Trends in Cognitive Science 3:9, p. 45—351. [Seek](#)

Clark A. and Chalmers D. (1998): The Extended Mind, Analysis 58, p. 7-19. [Seek](#)

Covey, S., Merrill A.R. & Merrill R. R. (1994) First Things First (Simon & Schuster) [Seek](#)

Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Nakamura, J. (2002). The concept of flow. In: Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (Eds.). The handbook of positive psychology. Oxford University Press, p. 89 – 105 [Seek](#)

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, Harper Perennial. [Seek](#)

Czerwinski, M. Horvitz, E. Wilhite, S. (2004) A diary study of task switching and interruptions, [Seek](#)

Proc. 2004 conference on Human factors in computing systems (ACM Press, New York), p. 175 – 182. [Seek](#)

Drucker, P. F, (1973). Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices. Harper & Row, New York.

[Seek](#)

Gershenson C. & F. Heylighen (2004). How can we think the complex? in: Richardson, K. (ed.) Managing the Complex Vol. 1 (Institute for the Study of Coherence and Emergence/Information Age Publishing) [Seek](#)

Gibson, J.J. (1986). The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception. Hillsdale (NJ): Lawrence Erlbaum. [Seek](#)

Grassé P.-P. (1959). La Reconstruction du nid et les Coordinations Inter-Individuelles chez *Bellicositermes Natalensis* et *Cubitermes* sp. La théorie de la Stigmergie. *Insectes Sociaux*, 6:41-84. [Seek](#)

Heylighen F. & Joslyn C. (2001): Cybernetics and Second Order Cybernetics, in: R.A. Meyers (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Physical Science & Technology* (3rd ed.), Vol. 4 , (Academic Press, New York), p. 155-170. [Seek](#)

Heylighen F. (1999): Collective Intelligence and its Implementation on the Web, *Computational and Mathematical Theory of Organizations* 5(3), p. 253-280. [Seek](#)

Heylighen F. (2007). Why is Open Source Development so Successful? Stigmergic organization and the economics of information, in: B. Lutterbeck, M. Baerwolff & R. A. Gehring (eds.), *Open Source Jahrbuch 2007*, Lehmanns Media, 2007, p. 165-180. [Seek](#)

<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/Papers/OpenSourceStigmergy.pdf> [Seek](#)

Hollan, J., Hutchins, E. and Kirsh, D. (2000): Distributed cognition, *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction* 7:2, p. 74—196. [Seek](#)

Hutchins E (1995): *Cognition in the Wild* (MIT Press). [Seek](#)

Kirsh, D. (1996) Adapting the Environment Instead of Oneself. *Adaptive Behavior*, Vol 4, No. 3/4, 415-452. [Seek](#)

Kirsh, D. (2000): A few thoughts on cognitive overload, *Intellectica* 1:30, p. 19—51. [Seek](#)

Luger, G. (1994). *Cognitive science: the science of intelligent systems*. San Diego: Academic Press. [Seek](#)

Miller, G.A. (1956): The magical number seven, plus or minus two, *Psychological Review* 63:2, p. 81-97. [Seek](#)

Norman, D.A. (1999). Affordances, conventions and design, *Interactions* 6 (3) pp. 38 – 43. [Seek](#)

Parunak, H. V. D. (2006) A survey of environments and mechanisms for human-human stigmergy, in: *Environments for Multi-Agent Systems II*, (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol. 3830, Springer Berlin), p. 163-186. [Seek](#)

Powers, W. T. (1973) *Behavior: the Control of Perception*. Aldine, Chicago. [Seek](#)

Shenk D. (1997): Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut (Harper, San Francisco). [Seek](#)

Simon H.A. (1997) Models of Bounded Rationality, MIT Press. [Seek](#)

Simon, H.A. (1971): Designing organizations for an information-rich world, in: Computers, Communications and the Public Interest, Martin Greenberger, ed., The Johns Hopkins Press. [Seek](#)

Suchman L. A. (1990): Plans and situated action, Cambridge University Press [Seek](#)

Susi, T. & Ziemke, T. (2001). Social Cognition, Artefacts, and Stigmergy. Cognitive Systems Research, 2(4), 273-290. [Seek](#)

Thagard P. (2005) Mind, Introduction to Cognitive Science. (2nd ed.) (Bradford Books) [Seek](#)

Wikipedia contributors. (2007) Getting Things Done. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getting_Things_Done . (accessed on 6 November, 2007). [Seek](#)

Metadata

- [ASCII Citation](#)
- [BibTeX](#)
- [DIDL](#)
- [Dublin Core](#)
- [EP3 XML](#)
- [EPrints Application Profile \(experimental\)](#)
- [EndNote](#)
- [Eprints Application Profile](#)
- [HTML Citation](#)
- [ID Plus Text Citation](#)
- [JSON](#)
- [METS](#)
- [MODS](#)
- [OAI-ORE Resource Map \(Atom Format\)](#)
- [OAI-ORE Resource Map \(RDF Format\)](#)
- [OpenURL ContextObject](#)
- [OpenURL ContextObject in Span](#)
- [RDF+N-Triples](#)
- [RDF+N3](#)
- [RDF+XML](#)
- [Refer](#)
- [Reference Manager](#)
- [Search Data Dump](#)
- [Simple Metadata](#)
- [YAML](#)

Repository Staff Only: [item control page](#)