

# White Paper on the Road to Overcoming Overload



## Causes of Overload

### State of the Knowledge Worker

*Are You A Knowledge Worker?* If you earn your primary living by processing information into knowledge and applying this knowledge to the world around you, then you are a knowledge worker. Welcome to the overloaded world!

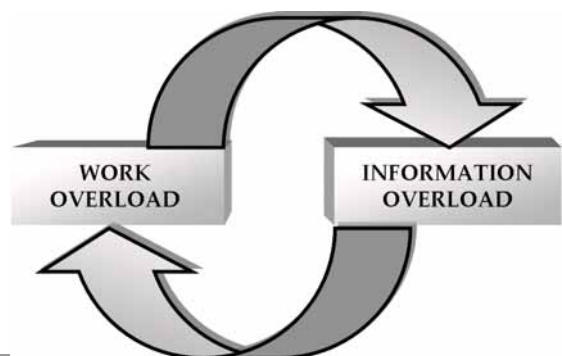
**T**he industrial revolution transformed the manufacturing world and the work processes of those who earned their living making parts and products based on physical labor. The information revolution multiplied the sources of raw material available for knowledge workers without significantly changing the thinking process of those who make their living based on intelligent decision-making choices.

In this section we will examine the present state of the knowledge worker, as well as the balance of supply and demand for talent in the marketplace. Further, we will examine some of the future opportunities and challenges the knowledge worker will face.

#### 1 – What Are The Causes And Symptoms Of Overload?

*What Are The Causes And Symptoms Of Overload?* “Diagnose before you prescribe.” Before you look for ways to reverse the negative impact of work and information overload, it is important to understand its causes. It is helpful to identify your most pressing overload symptoms.

**D**id they lie to us? A few years ago, some economists and sociologists predicted that we would be working less. They told us that we would be working 3 or 4 days a week. They told us that our main problem would be to find enough leisure activities to fill our idle time. What happened to these predictions?



#### Note:

\* This whitepaper is extracted from our book *Overloaded? From overload to balanced living*. See inside the book at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

\* If this page was sent to you by a friend we invite you to subscribe to our e-letter “On The Road To Overcoming Overload.” Please go to <http://www.nomoreoverload.com/request.asp>



[Baha & Margaret Habashy](#)

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Today, people like you are suffering from work overload with no end in sight. In our changing environment the industrialized world has raced to a knowledge-based economy like a train out of control. This race was fuelled by technological achievements that made it easier to create, exchange and accumulate more information than we ever dreamed possible. This, in turn, has created “**information overload**” or should we call it “**work overload**”?

You and I are called “knowledge workers” because our economic value is tied to our ability to process information, make choices and take actions based on the knowledge we create as we process the information we accumulate. In so doing we are expected to share our knowledge with our information exchange partners through a variety of media. Yes, you and I are called “knowledge workers” suffering from work and information overload.

### “Chicken and the Egg” Question

What comes first? Does information create work or does work create information? Does work overload create information overload or is it the other way around? The answer may vary from one person to the other. One common fact is that in our knowledge based economy, work overload and information overload are highly interlinked and interrelated. We cannot solve one problem unless we manage the other. Whether it be in our offices or at home performing simple domestic tasks, the amount of information that we have to deal with is often overwhelming.



The market place is challenging at best. Corporate leaders are driven by the need for growth. Shareholders demand it and market analysts expect it. Added to this, is the fact that corporate management has become very complex. In a diversified, global company like mine, we manage the business based on a variety of views. In matrix management we each have several masters who may have conflicting demands. All of this often creates demands that outstrip available resources. This is a key cause for overload.

**Mr. Jim Wright, Operation Executive**

Today we are plagued by a culture of immediacy. Technology that was supposed to help us has fueled the craving for speed and unrealistic expectations. This seems to drown our need for timely reflection.



**Mr. John McGarry, President and Chief Executive Officer**

### Causes for Work Overload

When sociologists and economists told us that we would be working only three or four days a week and that we would have more leisure time than we could handle, they underestimated “**the law of diminishing returns**”. What is that, you say? Simply put, it means that “**the more we have, the less we are satisfied.**” We want more of what we have and crave what we do not have.

To demonstrate this, consider our growing attraction for bigger and bigger homes. As we move to bigger homes, along comes the need for more and different stuff to fill these bigger homes. Yes, we are victims of our desire to keep up with the Joneses in our bigger and better neighborhood.

Or, please consider the love North Americans have had with the automobile. Instead of one family car, two cars seem to be the norm. And when our kids became teens we wanted three or four cars to meet our growing wants, not needs. We demanded more options and choices in our buying frenzy for bigger, gas guzzling automobiles. Suppliers responded to our desire for more choices. Our car dealerships became auto-malls filled with more brands, models and options than we could imagine.

Our grocery stores became supermarkets. Our markets became shopping malls and galleries. The growing options list goes on to include everything from movies to home theatres. Our holiday is no longer a visit to Grandma or to Aunt Betty. The options include sport camps, cruises or an all-inclusive experience in some far away resort.

Please do not misunderstand us. There is nothing wrong with this. There is nothing wrong with seeking the best lifestyle we can have, as long as we agree that the price has to be paid. Our growing demand for goods and services means we have to work more to pay for what we want. Our demand generates opportunities for others to work harder so they can pay for their own growing demand. And the song goes on and on.

Manipulative advertising and easy credit fuel our buying desires. The result is that we work harder and harder to pay more and more for what we have and what we crave. No, they did not lie to us when they told us that we would be working less. They underestimated our strong appetite for more of the “good” life. They underestimated the power of the “**law of diminishing returns**”.



Looking strategically at the overload problem, we need to see beyond the symptoms. Here I can identify two causes. The first is my perception of the expectations of others. The second cause is the issue of personal identity and self esteem as well as how I react to the expectations placed upon me. Once we deal with these two underlying causes and take control of them the rest is symptomatic of overload, not necessarily causes.

**Dr. Rick Fenton, Strategist, Futurist**



Becoming a workaholic started with my childhood. As a military man, my father told us that we always had to do more than what is expected, and deliver much more than what was demanded. I grew up a doer and a caretaker.

Later, as a mother I took care of my family, as a branch manger I brought coffee and meals for my staff. This I carried into my sales career with demanding clients and ever growing sales

targets. Whatever the target, I had to beat it. I had to be the best.

I knew I should change, but at my age “It’s hard to teach an old dog new tricks”. Concerns for my high blood pressure were easily overshadowed by customer calls and the attraction of commission checks.

One day, in a business meeting, I collapsed. When I recovered in the hospital doctors told me I had a brain aneurysm and I was lucky to be alive.

Returning from my sick leave I made significant changes and I am glad I did. I had to change. You see my doctor told me, if not careful, the next time he sees me, I could be in a casket.

By the way, while on my four month sick leave I noted something interesting; without me, the lives of those I cared for did not collapse and my business did not suffer much.

**Ms. Nada Pavic, Business Development Manager**

We hope the above has helped you understand some of the key causes for work overload. Now let’s consider some of the causes of information overload.

### Causes for Information Overload

May we suggest that we have two similar health problems in our society? The first problem is the problem of overeating. Food is advertised and glamorized to us; we overeat and carry the consequences. In a similar way, we have become addicted to having too much information.

You see, our minds were created to handle information in a similar way as we handle food. We are expected to take food into our bodies in reasonable quantities. As we digest the food we turn it into energy that is used as we perform our duties and bring value to our society.

Some time ago we used to say, “Information is power”. The truth is that information has no power at all. **Information** in itself has no value until it is digested through the learning process and changed into **knowledge**. Knowledge in itself has little value until it is related to the outside world in a timely and proper manner in what is called **wisdom**. Diagram 1 illustrates what we call the balanced information-processing model. **Information digested**

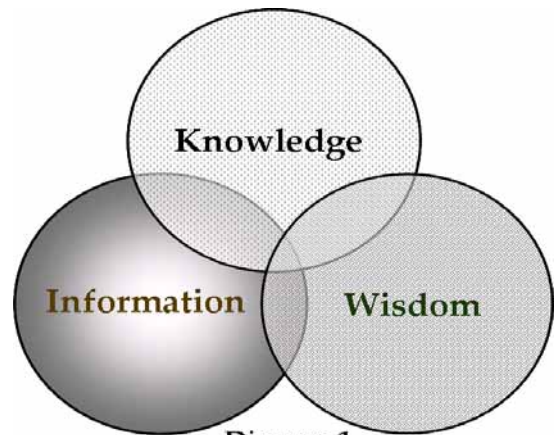


Diagram 1  
Balanced Information Processing Model

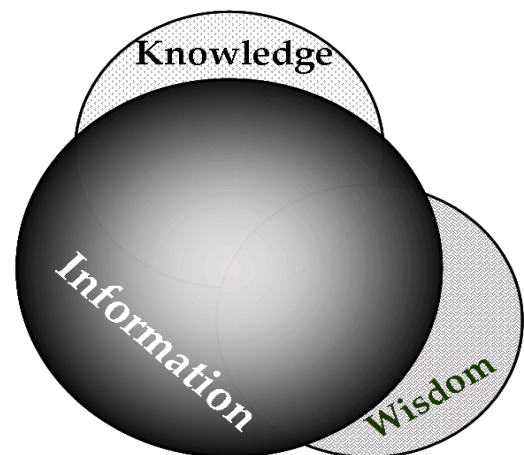


Diagram 2 - OVERLOAD

**through the learning process gains its true value when it is related to the outside world in a proper and timely manner as wisdom.**

In our hurried, knowledge based world, information is thrown at us in large quantities so we do not have time to digest it properly. We tend to act in haste and wisdom falls by the wayside. This is what is called overload. Diagram 2 seeks to illustrate this reality.

In his excellent book, *The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live within Your Limits*, Dr. Richard Swenson illustrates this overload crisis in an interesting way. We all like our doctors to be well informed and keep up with medical research. Right? Well, the author quotes Dr. Octo Barnett who writes “If the most conscientious physician were to attempt to keep up with the literature by reading two articles per day, in one year this individual would be more than eight hundred years behind.”<sup>i</sup> The reason is that we publish almost half a million medical papers annually.<sup>ii</sup>

Now, wisdom suggests that doctors should spend more time with patients helping them to take control of their own care plan. Regretfully, under time pressures, it is much easier for the doctor to prescribe the latest drug based on the information he or his patient received through the TV or Internet. The result is that in North America we have the most overmedicated and drugged population in the world.

This problem of information glut or information indigestion is not limited to our physician’s office. It is evident in our workplace as well as in our homes. Our minds have become the proverbial INBOX for meaningful and meaningless data. In our homes, children and adults are suffering the consequences of too much TV, video games and loud music. In the workplace, paper, e-mail, phone, and back-to-back meetings have become common causes for information indigestion.

## How Do You Feel Today?



The following table will help you identify some of what are now referred to as “information anxiety symptoms.” Take a moment and mark the symptoms you can relate to and how often you experience these symptoms.

### Information Anxiety Symptoms

Do you relate to these symptoms or feelings? If you do, indicate how often →→→→	Quite Often	Sometimes	Seldom
1. Feeling overwhelmed, flooded or claustrophobic			
2. Forgetfulness, hard to recall details			
3. Difficulty finding information, workspace totally disorganized			

4. Inability to make decisions, procrastinating far more than usual or ever before			
5. Irritability and feeling “edgy” especially with family members and those closest to me			
6. Resentment of voice mail, e-mail, and meetings, especially when the sources are friends or family members			
7. Chronically talking about not keeping up or always saying, “I am very busy.”			
8. Feeling guilty over being behind			
9. Giving time and attention to low priority matters while knowing that you have more important things to do			
10. Thinking others understand all that you do not comprehend			
11. Fear of saying “No” and “I do not know.”			
12. Compromised social and family life			

Examine the items you marked as “Quite often” and mark the top two. Prioritize them as A, B based on the ones which concern you the most or give you the most stress. Later, as we discuss some solutions, thoughts, and tips try to relate them to the critical symptoms you identified.

**Please note:** We are not psychologists or psychiatrists and this is not a clinical diagnostic tool. If you have a feeling of anxiety that persists, you should seek appropriate professional help.



The Overload Gauge

In the following table we provide you with another gauge that has helped many of our workshop participants. We call it “**The Overload Gauge**”. This gauge has two functions:

- A. It will help you **identify and prioritize the causes** for information overload so you can focus on them as you progress in reading this book.
- B. It will provide you with a yardstick to help you gauge your progress as you implement some of the solutions we discuss.

**Please note** that this gauge reflects the various parts of the solution we will discuss later. We call it the **Personal Knowledge Management Framework**. Each section of the gauge has six or seven statements.

1. Indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

2. Add the score for each segment and write your sub-total.
3. Add the total of all segments and write down your overall total.

Now you have a yardstick to guide you. Examine your gauge frequently to track your progress.

### The Overload Gauge

<b>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</b> (5=Totally Agree & 1=Totally Disagree)	<b>I TOTALLY</b> Agree ←→ Disagree
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#### Filtering System

1. I have no <b>control</b> on the amount of voice mail, e-mail, meetings, and interruptions or material I receive.	5	4	3	2	1
2. People place <b>urgent</b> demands on my life.	5	4	3	2	1
3. My roles and responsibilities cover many <b>subjects</b> and are hard to classify.	5	4	3	2	1
4. When invited to attend meetings I am not always clear on what I am expected to <b>be and/or do</b> .	5	4	3	2	1
5. I often give up my <b>personal life</b> in order to keep up with all I have to do.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I do not have clearly documented personal <b>goals</b> that relate to my personal and corporate roles.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I treat all <b>people</b> equally; it is hard for me to define who is more important.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Sub -Total: Filtering System Score→</b>					

#### Input System

8. By end of day, my <b>e-mail</b> in box usually has more than 10 items.	5	4	3	2	1
9. At the end of most days I have <b>voice mail</b> to which I should have responded.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I feel guilty if I have not responded to my <b>calls</b> .	5	4	3	2	1
11. On an average 70% of the time I spend in <b>meetings</b> is unproductive.	5	4	3	2	1
12. I find taking notes in <b>meetings</b> stressful.	5	4	3	2	1
13. I get too many unscheduled meetings or <b>interruptions</b> per day.	5	4	3	2	1

14. My in basket usually has <b>papers</b> that are more than 48 hours old.	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Sub –Total: Input Systems Score→</b>					

**Filing System**

15. I feel I need more <b>workspace</b> .	5	4	3	2	1
16. More than 70% of my <b>desk</b> is often covered by papers.	5	4	3	2	1
17. On an average it takes me more than one minute to find an important document in my <b>paper files</b> .	5	4	3	2	1
18. On an average it takes my boss or my associates more than three minutes to find an important document in my <b>filing system</b> .	5	4	3	2	1
19. On an average it would take me more than 30 seconds to find an item in my <b>electronic or e-mail files</b> .	5	4	3	2	1
20. I am often at least one week behind on my <b>reading</b> .	5	4	3	2	1
<b>Sub –Total: Filing Systems Score→</b>					
<b>TOTAL ALL SEGMENTS SCORE→</b>					

As you examine your answer to the Overload Gauge, note the segment of the gauge where you rated the highest score. Later, as you read more of the solutions provided ask yourself, “**How will this help me improve my Overload Gauge score?**” Our hope is that you will have a tool to help you prioritize the area most needing your attention.

**Summary**

- ✓ Our growing appetite for more of the good life has created work overload.
- ✓ In our hurried world, information is thrown at us at in high volumes. We do not digest it properly and wisdom is often sacrificed in the process. This has created information overload.
- ✓ Using the survey provided, examine your information anxiety symptoms. Look for ways to relieve these symptoms as you read this book.
- ✓ Use the Overload Gauge to help you focus as you develop personalized solutions and periodically monitor your progress.

**For more information visit our web site for the [Effectiveness and Overload Gauge](#)**

## 2 – What Does The Future Hold?

*Will The Future Workplace Bring More Life Balance Or More Overload?* Examining economic, social, and technological trends, you will be challenged by the opportunities the future brings. The future offers opportunities for progress and improved effectiveness. More balance and improvement will happen for those who choose to make appropriate changes.



Complaining is not something I enjoy. I tried to keep my concerns to myself as I observed my husband’s deteriorating health and his irritability with me and with the children. I could understand the pressures he was facing and did not want to add to his concerns.

Caring for the children, professional and community activities kept me busy so I had no time for complaining. There was always the hope of a better tomorrow. With every promotion or job change, we hoped that things would improve as routine would be established and work demands would slow down. I was told that in the beginning there would be more work but things would surely get better as time goes by. That was a faint promise, if I ever heard one.

I thought life would get easier when the children got older. That was a dream. Only those who have had teenagers would truly understand why things became harder. With teenage mood swings and a tired, irritable husband, life was going from tough to tougher.

One thing I learned was that life is like a garden patch. Left to its natural state it will always deteriorate. Unless specific actions are taken to make things better, circumstances will always get worse. Based on our experience, the future can get better for those who are committed to choices that bring about balance in life.

During those days I tried to keep my sense of humor and I certainly related to the old woman who after many years of marriage was asked if she ever considered divorce. “Divorce? No,” she replied. “Murder? Yes!”

**Margaret Habashy, Author**

**W**hat does the future hold? Will things get better? Will work overload and information overload be a thing of the past? To answer this question we should consider the basic economics of supply and demand for both work and information in the marketplace.

## Supply And Demand Economics: Work

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the law of diminishing returns created the need for each of us to work more and more. Our collective demands created the opportunities that helped fuel economic growth. Economic growth provided more work opportunities for those who had to work to fulfill their growing personal expectations.

Further, globalization began to offer poorer nations the products and services once only available to privileged, affluent societies. This continues to increase the demand for the products and services offered in the industrialized world.

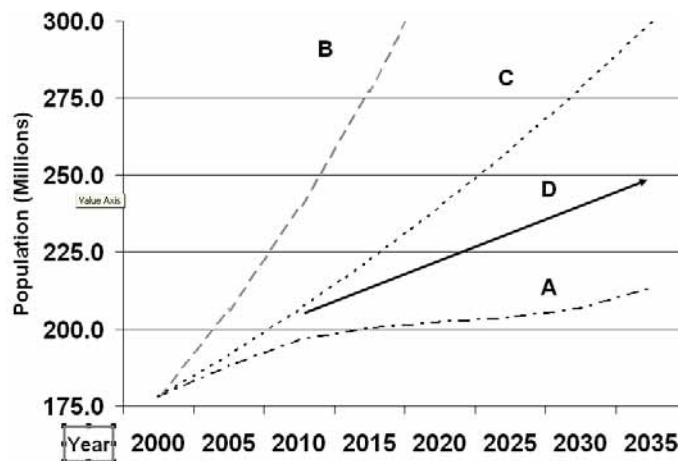
Basic economics tell us that there is a strong relationship between **supply and demand** for labor in the marketplace. The year 2000 US census data provides a good indication of labor growth projections over the coming years. It is safe to assume that the US projection represents similar patterns in a majority of the industrialized world. With this in view, the following table and its related graph provide us with an interesting picture:

(A) Provides the US population projection for people ages 16 – 64 between the years 2000 and 2035.<sup>iii</sup> This population is expected to grow from 178 million in the year 2000 to 213.3 million in 2035.

(B) Uses the year 2000 as a base point representing the demand for work in the marketplace. It also assumes that the economy will grow because of increasing demand and population growth by a compound average of **3%** per year. This is what is called the average GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Now you see that GDP growth results in increased need for more workers from 178 million in the year 2000 to 500.8 million in 2035.

(C) Suggests **our hope** for productivity improvement as well as structural changes to the economy. Structural changes will see some work being transferred to parts of the world where there is a greater supply of

WORKING POPULATION SUPPLY AND DEMAND PROJECTIONS			
Year	(A) Population Projection (ages 16-64)	(B) Population Demand = Year 2000 + 3% for GDP Growth	(C) Population Demand Discounted by 50%
2000	178.0	178.0	178.0
2005	188.1	206.3	191.7
2010	196.6	239.2	206.5
2015	200.5	277.3	222.5
2020	202.5	321.4	239.7
2025	203.7	372.6	258.2
2030	206.9	432.0	278.2
2035	213.3	500.8	299.7



workers. This is what is often referred to as “outsourcing”. Based on this hope we suggest discounting the growth work force demand by 50%. Should this happen, the demand for workers will be less severe. Regretfully, this still leaves us with a significant shortfall.

Now you see the delta or gap between the supply (A) and the modified demand (C) for workers in the marketplace. Basic economics tell us that when the demand exceeds the supply, this presents increased pressures on those in the supply line. Granted, those of us in the workplace at that time will be able to ask for more money and get it. However, if you intend to be in the workplace at that time you will be facing an ever-increasing pressure to produce in response to the growing demand that will exist in the marketplace.

This supply and demand problem was confirmed in a July 2002 report by the Organization of Economic Development and Cooperation, which warned that in the coming ten years the industrialized world would face a significant shortage of skilled labor.<sup>iv</sup> As an example The Financial Post confirmed that a skilled help shortage is hitting Canada. In their December 2002 poll two-thirds of Canadian executives reported that they were having difficulty recruiting skilled labor for their companies.<sup>v</sup>

**We added Line (D)** to illustrate what we believe is the only solution to this dilemma. We believe that if any of us want to reduce the impact of this crisis of work overload we must raise our value proposition and contribution by:

1. Focusing on higher value roles, goals, and activities
2. Delegating lower value roles, goals, and activities to others who will fill the gap and grow through a proper delegation process.

### **Attitudes of Young People**

What do the young people say? Opinion surveys and studies suggest that a significant percentage of our young people do not want to work as hard as their parents have. Yes, most of them want the good life that has been provided by their workaholic parents but they are not willing to pay the price it demands. Many of our children have observed the negative impact that long work hours have had on their parents’ health and family life and have decided that it is not worth it. Will that translate into lower demand for products and services? Maybe. One thing for sure, if the coming generation refuses to work the long hours their parents have, the supply of skilled labor will be reduced.

My gauge of success is slowly changing and money is becoming of decreased significance to me. I realize that I may not be the poster child for my generation, but there is definitely an overwhelming trend that shares my views. I would far rather be happy and enjoy what I do and make less money as a result of that, than be wealthy and overloaded with work.



Don't get me wrong. I'm not opposed to making money; just the opposite, I think it's great, but I'm not willing to sell my life and soul in the pursuit of it. I want work to be a part of my life, not the entirety of it. I want to enjoy my life, all different parts of it. And if the current viewpoints of my generation continue, you may just see a major shift in our culture's life priorities. Then again, maybe you won't!

**Noel Habashy, University Admission Counselor**

## Supply And Demand Economics: Information

As we referenced earlier, technology has made creation, collection, and distribution of information much easier than ever before. The cost of technology is on a constant decline. More and more people have access to communication and information gathering tools. Let us quickly consider the following forms of information input and media.

- **E-mail:** E-mail has become a prevalent tool for personal and corporate communication. Internet cafes and e-mail service rooms are springing up in the most remote parts of the world. The volume of worldwide e-mail has increased by 2000% between 1998 and 2003. This is expected to double over the coming few years.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Phone:** With the availability of low cost cell phones and voice over IP, phone subscriptions are exploding. This will multiply meaningful and meaningless chatter on the airwaves. Phone messaging options provide additional communication tools that need to be maintained and serviced frequently.
- **Meetings:** Meetings form a critical part of our information exchange platform. A common complaint among our clients is "We have too many meetings." Studies show that today's managers spend an average of forty percent of their time in meetings. A survey of our clients shows that this amount can go as high as ninety percent.<sup>vii</sup> The emerging popularity of video and phone conferencing is creating a new set of challenges.
- **Paper:** Our dream of the paperless office is fast evaporating and the profits of paper mills grow as the demand for paper explodes. "According to David Shenk, author of *Data Smog*, paper consumption per capita in the United States tripled between 1940 and 1980, and tripled again between 1980 and 1990."<sup>viii</sup> An article in the National Post in 2001 quoted a study finding that the use of e-mail has increased paper consumption by 40%.<sup>ix</sup>
- **Content:** Recent studies by many reputable organizations including University of California at Berkley suggest that the amount of data or content available will double every three to five years.<sup>x</sup> This means that, as a knowledge worker, the amount of information to be processed

will continue to increase. This will result in an unprecedented need for mental processing capacity.

- **Always on:** Instant messaging products like IBM SameTime and Instant Messenger from Microsoft are feeding our demands for faster communication exchange. As these products become married to mobile wireless devices and pocket organizers the “**always available**”, “**always on**” expectations will become more of the norm for many in the workplace.



As a futurist, I see two emerging developments that will exasperate the work and information overload problem. The first one is what I call “**PDAitis**”. The growing use of PDA or Personal Digital Assistance will reduce the latency of our demand expectation to zero. The expectations of time to respond will be reduced significantly, placing more urgency and higher demand on all of us.

The second factor that gives me concern is the notion of constantly identifiable presence. Emerging technologies will make it possible for people to identify your point of presence at any given time and thus maintain a persistent demand. In a way, you can run but you cannot hide.

Unless we adjust culturally to these factors, I will remain very concerned about what the future holds in relationship to the overload problem.

**Dr. Rick Fenton, Strategist, Futurist**

**So you ask, what does the future hold?** If we look at the basic data we can only predict that the future holds more work overload and information overload. But we believe that the future holds a promise of significant change. The future can offer great improvement for you, if you take personal ownership of the overload crisis and make appropriate changes. As illustrated in line **(D)** of the graph we presented earlier, such changes will help you raise your value contribution by focusing on higher value **roles, goals, and activities**. That is the hope we have and the experience of many of the good people we will introduce throughout this book. This is the objective of the thoughts, tools and tips we will provide in the following chapters.



Technology has had a very positive impact on our lives. Over the coming years I expect we'll see significant advancement in information and communication technologies that will have a considerable impact on connectivity and mobility. From a technological prospective this appears to be very helpful. On the flip side, such advancements will allow us to be accessible 24/7. This will call for better personal mechanisms allowing us to differentiate between work life and personal life. I am sure that most of us have not yet developed these mechanisms.

Today, most of us think of work even when we're not working, whether we are holidaying, walking on a beach on a Saturday morning, or buying groceries. In the future you will not only be tempted by your uncontrolled thoughts, your beach walk will be

invaded by those who can reach you through your mobile, interactive device.

Those of us who do not learn now to set personal control mechanisms will be on a slippery slope that will certainly impact negatively on our quality of life.

**Ms. Andrea Seymour, Vice President and Chief Information Officer**

### Summary

- ✓ Economic growth will provide opportunities for work growth that exceed the available supply for talent. Over time, this gap will result in increased workload pressures.
- ✓ We can only bridge the gap between supply and demand by focusing on higher value roles, goals, and activities.
- ✓ Technological advancement and increased information resources could aggravate the information overload problem.
- ✓ Those who choose to focus on higher value roles, goals, and activities can wisely prioritize reducing their exposure to the causes of overload while at the same time improving the value they contribute to society.

### Improvement Indicators

*What Indicators Provide Hope For Change?* Emerging social and economic indicators provide hope for positive change. Some of these trends will require painful adjustments. For the most part such adjustments will bring an improved future for those who anticipate them, understand them, and wisely respond to them.

There are many factors that give us hope for improvement. Let us examine some of them.

- **First:** The overload problem and the need for more life balance are gaining more visibility in the media. Radio and TV personalities are dealing with it more frequently. Healthcare professionals are focusing on this subject and warning us about the negative impacts we face. At the same time politicians are finding it favorable to introduce more family friendly legislation.
- **Second:** As referenced earlier, the younger generation, our children in their teens and twenties, are beginning to rebel against our overworked culture. Having seen the negative impact it has had on their growing years many of them are saying, “I do not want this.” While this will reduce the supply of talent in the market place, this may temper our excessive appetite for products and services.
- **Third:** Corporate leaders who traditionally focused on the demand line and ways to grow market share are beginning to see the negative impact work overload is having on the overall

productivity. Rational business leaders cannot help but note the growing cost of stress-induced diseases in the workplace.

- **Fourth:** Business leaders are beginning to see the value of encouraging their people to be proactive, bringing ideas that would make them more effective in what they do. Managers are encouraged to empower people to make choices that help them be more productive. This has opened the door to initiatives such as flex work hours and job sharing. This provides more life balance, as well as improved productivity and effectiveness.
- **Fifth:** Economic restructuring is accelerating the movement of work to markets where the supply for talent is more readily available. In the past, we accepted such migration in certain manufacturing sectors. Over the coming years we will see this happening among knowledge workers. Some will be threatened as they see professional work migrating to places like India and Eastern Europe. Others will see it as a reason for focusing on higher value roles, goals, and activities.
- **Sixth:** Individuals are taking ownership of the overload problem. This, we believe, is the most important factor. This is the factor that gives us the greatest hope for change. Today more and more individuals realize that making work/life balance a priority is a critical personal choice that demands their attention. Today, we see more individuals making appropriate choices that help them improve effectiveness and reverse the negative impact of work and information overload.

Up until recently money used to be the key motivator for extra work. Today a large percentage of new hires are asking for more life balance as a condition of employment. In their excellent book, *Values Shift*, John B. Izzo, Ph.D., and Pam Withers highlight that a majority of us would rather have more personal time than a pay increase. “When one thousand working adults were asked whether they would rather earn high salaries or earn “enough” doing work that makes the world a better place, 86 percent chose the latter. This is in sharp contrast to a decade or two ago, as confirmed by the results of a survey (previously mentioned in Chapter 2) of graduating MBAs taken ten years apart. The Class of 1989 defined their primary measure of success as power, prestige, and money. The class of 1991 cited successful relationships, a balanced life, and leisure time. Even more recently, respondents responded marriage, health, and ethics!”<sup>xi</sup>



Employers need to realize that there is significant gain in helping their employees have interests outside the workplace. By encouraging an environment where employees work to live, not live to work, you will create an atmosphere of trust that leads to higher value from the time spent at work. I believe that having “avocation” leads to energy and success in your vocation. The more you are able to refresh yourself outside the workplace, the more successful you will be in the workplace.

**Mr. John McGarry, President and Chief Executive Officer**

It is interesting to observe that the cycles of business overload seem to go concurrently with the cycles of personal overload, and this leads me to strongly believe that you cannot isolate business issues from what goes on in an employee's personal life. Employers and managers need to be aware of this fact and must work towards creating a flexible culture where employees are empowered to make choices and take actions.



In our organization we have created a very open and flexible culture - a culture that empowers managers to make their staff more accountable for personal performance. While I have a national HR responsibility in a large organization, I favor a decentralized management style that delegates roles and oversight to regional and functional managers and individual contributors. When you empower people to do what they believe is best, you receive more value in return than if you burden them with too many policies and procedures.

**Ms. Grace Cunningham, Manager, Human Resources**



As a leader, it is important to me to encourage work life balance because I want working with me individuals whose life priorities go beyond the workplace and reflect sensitivity to the needs of the community and the people around them. Such an individual has the potential of becoming an outstanding leader and has the ability to grow in the business and outside the business world.

**Mr. John Ramdeen, Finance Executive, Global Services**

Based on our experience with the many clients we served, we firmly believe that motivated individuals empowered to tailor creative solutions in a manner that brings higher value to their corporations and their society can solve the overload problem. As business leaders empower their people to change, individuals will look for ideas and personalized tools that can make them become more effective and gain improved work/life balance.

This is the objective of the **Personal Knowledge Management Framework**.

## Personal Knowledge Management Framework

*What is the Personal Knowledge Management Framework?* This framework is a solution you can tailor to your own personal needs. We call it a framework because it is made of simple frames representing logical topics. These frames can be modified in response to your particular needs and changing environments.

**T**he Personal Knowledge Management Framework is a tool to help motivated individuals tailor their own solutions to the work and information overload problem. Illustrated in Diagram 3 this framework is based on our “**Overcoming Work and Information Overload**” workshop.

*Why do we call it a framework?*

- We call it a framework because it is illustrated in a small collection of frames. Each frame represents a topic that contributes to the solution you create.
- We call it a framework because it is not a rigged system that you must follow or a program that you have to keep. It is a structure that can help you select the frames that are likely to bring you the greatest value at the time when they can be most useful to you.
- We call it a framework because it is a modifiable structure or a set of “Lego” blocks that you can modify to suit your needs.

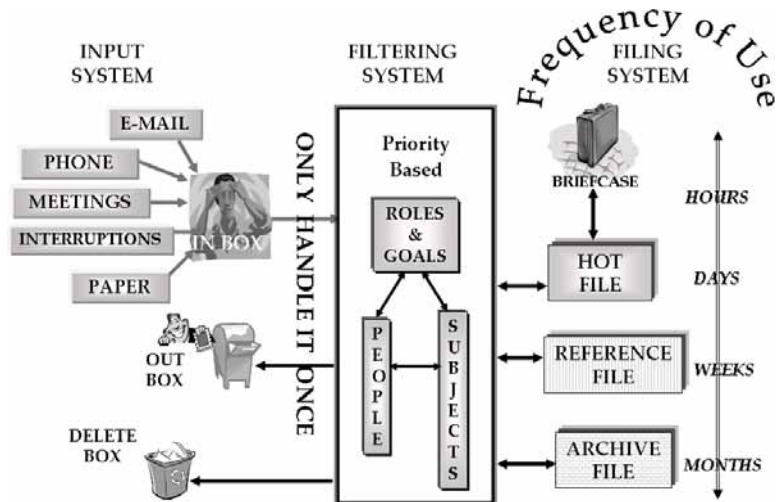


Diagram 3: Personal Knowledge Management Framework

When our son was small he loved “Lego”. He enjoyed the packaging and the success of building what the company illustrated but his greatest sense of achievement came when he created his own design. Please consider the **Personal Knowledge Management Framework** as your own set of “Lego” blocks. We will provide you with many thoughts and tips that will help you get started. Use the templates that we offer to move faster in developing and building your own solution. Do not hesitate to modify and tailor our thoughts, tips and templates to fit your particular need.

You may notice in Diagram 3 that the framework is made of three sections:

- **Section One is the Filtering system.** We have relied on ageless wisdom to provide common sense principles to help you filter wisely.
- **Section Two is the Input system.** Here we have provided practical thoughts and tips to help you manage the floodgates of information and demands placed on your life.
- **Section Three is the Filing system.** Information is valuable only when we can apply it to the outside world in a timely and proper manner. This filing structure will help you reduce information clutter and file information so you can find it when you need it. This easy to use filing system is based on a long established approach used by successful libraries world wide.

### Summary

- ✓ The Personal Knowledge Management Framework is not a system or a program; it is a tool to be tailored by and fitted to personal use.

- ✓ The Personal Knowledge Management Framework is made of simple frames representing individual topics in three groups:
  - The Filtering System provides commonsense principles to help you filter wisely.
  - The Input System provides thoughts or tips to help you manage the sources of overload.
  - The Filing System provides a filing system to reduce information clutter and help you find what you need when you need it.

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<sup>i</sup> Richard A. Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live within Your Limits* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress, 1998), page 135.

<sup>ii</sup> Francis Narin, “Tech-Line Background Paper 3. Research Background.”

<http://www.chiresearch.com/docs/tlbp.pdf> (17 July 2004).

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.census.gov> (11 June 2004). (Several tables are used for U.S. Census Bureau population figures.)

<sup>iv</sup> Eric Beauchesne, “Skilled labor shortage nearing, study says,” *National Post*, 10 July 2002, section A, page 3.

<sup>v</sup> Tony Seskus, “Skilled Help Shortage Hits Canada,” *National Post*, 30 December 2002, section FP, page 1.

<sup>vi</sup> “How Much Information? 2003.” <http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/execsum.htm#summary> (11 June 2004).

<sup>vii</sup> Wayne J. Hunicke, “Improving the Quality of Your Meetings.” <http://www.advantagemgmt.com/resource/meetings.html> (5 July 2004).

<sup>viii</sup> Richard A. Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live within Your Limits* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress, 1998), page 138.

<sup>ix</sup> “E-Mail Leads Workers To Use 40% More Paper, Study Says,” *National Post*, 19 November 2001, section D, page 1.

<sup>x</sup> “How Much Information? 2003” <http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/execsum.htm#summary> (11 June 2004).

<sup>xi</sup> John B. Izzo and Pam Withers, *Values Shift: The New Work Ethic and What It Means for Business* (Toronto: Prentice Hall Canada), page 79.