

Managing Information Overload

Charles Lanigan

Presented originally at the Carnegie Library
Noontime Lecture Series, Pittsburgh PA



Overview

P "A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention." --Herbert Simon

P Purpose

- ▶ Describe what information overload is
- ▶ Provide some background
- ▶ Suggest strategies & techniques for managing it



Definitions

P Data vs. Information & Knowledge

P Cognition & Metacognition

P Information Processing Theory



Historical Perspective

- P** A person today reading a single book absorbs something like the equivalent of all information a person in the Middle Ages amassed in a lifetime (but don't quote me)
- P** During the Middle Ages, the Scholastics attempted to categorize all information into consistent taxonomies (hierarchical categories)



Historical Perspective, Cont.

- P The invention of the printing press led to increased literacy, correlated to the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and the 'great leap forward'
- P The Industrial Revolution gave rise to market economy and the modern work environment
- P The Information Revolution put us where we are today



Theoretical Perspective, Cont.

P Information-Processing Theory

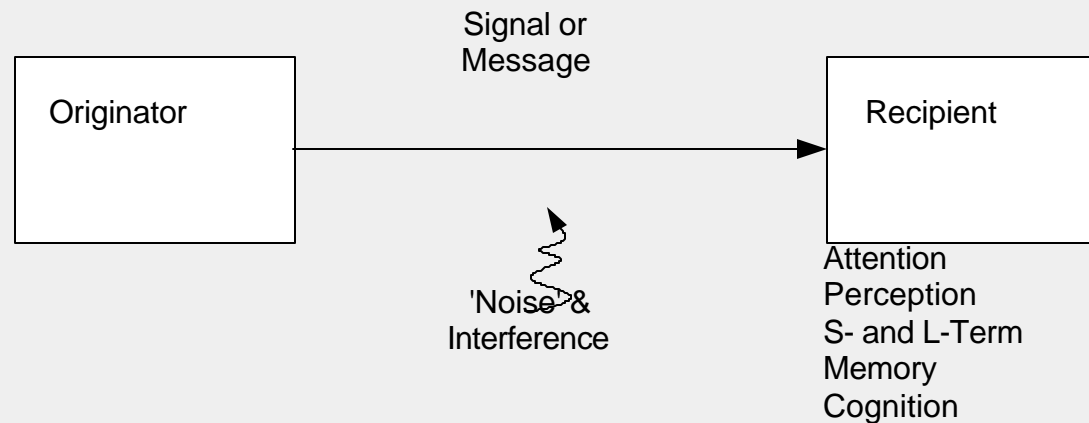
- ▶ In 1948 Dr. Claude E. Shannon, a researcher at Bell Laboratories, proposed that information could be defined as the number of ones and zeros — bits

P Cognition

- ▶ Short-Term Memory = 7 plus or minus 2
- ▶ Limits in Perception & Awareness



Information-Processing Theory



Theoretical Perspective, Cont.

P Multi-Tasking?

- ▶ Research at CMU suggests we task *switch*, with resulting in divided perception and attention.
- ▶ For those who think they get more done by talking on the cellphone while driving and listening to the stock report: There's No Free Lunch
- ▶



Sources of Information Overload

P Television & Radio News & Advertisements

P Cell Phones & Faxes

P The Internet & E-mail

P Sound & Fury Signifying Nothing

- ▶ How do you tell the difference between what's meaningful and useful vs. what's just noise?



The Cost

P Stress

P Accidents

P Burnout



Strategies & Techniques

- P Organize tasks and information logically
- P Focus on one thing at a time: divide and conquer
- P Not all information is created equal. Think in terms of what is accurate, relevant and useful to your purpose
- P Prioritize what you know (or need to know) in terms of important vs. urgent
- P Think in terms of connections among concepts, ideas and facts



Strategies & Techniques, Cont.

P Practice Personal Actions & Strategies to Minimize Information Overload

- ▶ Practice mindfulness & selective attentiveness
- ▶ Use the Tools available to you
 - E-mail Filters
 - Free or Low Cost Web-based Sites that Consolidate Your E-mail, File Management & Calendar
- ▶ Just say 'No'



Strategies & Techniques, Cont.

(Ways to Minimize Information Overload for Others)

- ▶ Write and communicate clearly
- ▶ Know your audience
- ▶ Know your message & purpose
- ▶ Practice chunking of information (to accommodate short-term memory limits)
- ▶ Use white (negative) space



Summary & Conclusion

P Practice mindfulness

P Value your time & attentiveness



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P Books:

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