

Why we Waste so much Time & Effort in the Workplace

By David Brewster

Why we Waste so much Time & Effort in the Workplace

David Brewster
dbrewster@business simplification.com.au

Business Simplification <http://www.businesssimplification.com.au>

It is amazing how much wasted effort goes on in the modern workplace. People at all levels regularly perform unnecessary tasks on paper, on computers and even manually. Why? Paradoxically it is because we all have a strong preference for doing things the easy way, even if it is less efficient. We tend to follow the 'path of least resistance'.

In nature, the 'path of least resistance' explains why rivers wind their way across the landscape, rather than take a straighter, shorter route. Water flowing down the river simply follows the easiest path available to it. The water doesn't care that it is taking the long way home. The ENERGY of the river simply follows the path of least resistance.

The path of least resistance affects our behaviour in the same way, but with a twist. Rather than minimise just the expense of energy at any given moment, we tend to give preference to minimising our level of THOUGHT.

So we accumulate piles of papers rather than continuously sorting, acting and filing. We under-use our software rather than pause to look up the help file and learn a quicker way. We persist with out-dated forms or procedures rather than take stock of their current relevance. We keep doing things ourselves because its easier than training someone else and risking a mistake.

In short, we build bends into our own information rivers which enable us to work more easily on any one part of a process, even if the overall effort required is more than it need be.

The problem in changing this situation is that it is counter-intuitive to do something the 'hard way' – even in the short term – when an 'easy way' is already at hand. It requires concerted effort to change a habit – in the same way that it requires a flood to break the banks of a river and forge a new, more efficient, direction.

On the other hand, the principle of the 'path of least resistance' means that once a new process is successfully established, it is almost impossible to find the old one again. The banks of the river, once broken, will never be the same again.

Ask yourself how the path of least resistance applies to your workplace? You will find plenty of examples if you look hard enough. As you get busier, are you simply going to widen the windy river – or be smart and build a pipeline?

© David Brewster, June 2002

<http://www.BusinessSimplification.com.au> ; <mailto:feedback@businesssimplification.com.au>

This article is available on the web at <http://www.businesssimplification.com.au/articles/issue10.htm>

Try our 'Path of Least Resistance' test at

<http://www.businesssimplification.com.au/actions/leastresistance.htm>

[Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.](#)

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)