

"The Costs and Benefits of Multi-tasking"
mit Levent Yilmaz (Goethe Universität)

Abstract:

We use a unique data set from a call center to investigate the individual productivity effects of multi-tasking. Our data set contains daily performance data of 477 agents over a period of 19 months. Individual productivity is measured by the duration of calls (shorter calls being better) and sales quota. We show that multi-tasking decreases individual productivity significantly, both in a statistical and economic sense. We examine possible channels through which multi-tasking may decrease individual productivity, and argue that the channel that is most likely to be responsible is blurred performance measurement because of multi-tasking. We also suggest a strategic reason why firms may employ multi-tasking although individual productivity suffers.