



Leaders need to master time to amp up productivity

SUN, SEP 25, 2022 - 3:02 PM **UPDATED SUN, SEP 25, 2022 - 4:51 PM**

KUMARAN RAJARAM



Work expands to fill the time allocated to it, says Parkinson's Law. A self-imposed strategy of putting self-timed constraints on everything you do, even if there is no real need to do so, can be a "push" factor to focus on your work instead of procrastinating. PHOTO: PIXABAY

HIGH performance teams with strong track records are often swamped with work, facing multiple assignments and many deadlines. For project managers leading such teams, one essential skill is effective time and energy management. Three strategies are vital: (a) prioritise your priorities, (b) manage your energy with a laser focus, and (c) deal with procrastination.

Prioritise your priorities

For project managers, it is important to be aware of the limited and valuable time at hand and how resources need to be carefully and mindfully deployed to achieve the outcomes. The ability of the project manager to have this done will reflect in the team's work

satisfaction, morale and commitment that they show in the projects they are assigned. This has a spillover effect in the quality and efficiency of the project outcomes to be attained.

Understand that 20 per cent of your activities account for 80 per cent of your success, so give this 20 per cent of tasks your highest priority. You will have to manage multiple projects with varying complex demands and deadlines. Evaluate these tasks carefully with a clear plan acknowledging the constraints, so that you may deploy the right amount of resources to attain the deliverables accordingly.

Zero in on the high-ticket items or tasks at hand. First, focus and prioritise action items of high value. High value could mean urgent tasks that need to be done and delivered immediately, or tasks that require much effort and time to achieve accuracy, precision and detail.

Some guiding pointers to reflect on: First, what would have the most positive impact? Second, resist the temptation to clear the not-so-vital, smaller tasks first. Third, make it a habitual practice to remind yourself to start with what is the most crucial. This will again enable you to manage both your and the team's energy and focus to deliver quality outcomes efficiently.

Think about the time-saver questions to focus on the right tasks at hand. Which task do I need to address first today to stand me in a good stead tomorrow? Which task would get me into trouble or cause a negative effect if I do not get it done? What do my boss, clients and colleagues need most from me right now? Why is the top task I have identified as the most important task that I have to do now?

SEE ALSO

[Business travel budgets rising as firms use 2019 as spending benchmark: CWT](#)

Stay updated with BT newsletters

SIGN UP

By signing up, you agree to our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms and Conditions](#).



Your feedback is important to us

Tell us what you think. Email us at btuserfeedback@sph.com.sg

Managing your energy with a laser focus mindset

The second strategy is managing your energy with a laser focus mindset. As Alexander Graham Bell said: "Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The Sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus."

For maximum efficiency, one must fully focus on the task at hand and limit multitasking. Focus 100 per cent on a single task at any one time. This means you are to direct your entire attention and all your energy on the task in front of you.

The commonly held belief that we can multitask and do multiple tasks effectively is contrary to research evidence that shows that we are not able to effectively focus on more than one thing at any one time.

For unimportant activities, by all means multitask so that you do not end up spending too much time on them. If you have requests to be involved in ad hoc activities that do not need really require your presence, delegate so that you are able to focus on the prioritised task at hand instead of trying to juggle everything by yourself.

Create a prioritised to-do list that will then serve as a guiding scaffolded framework in executing tasks efficiently by limiting multitasking. Next, use time blocks to manage energy and time more productively. For example, set a specific number of hours for the team to spend on a project to see it through, and the next few hours as the next block for another project. Time blocks enable you to dedicate the specific hours with full focus to address what is required before moving on to the next on the list.

Finally, have a self-awareness check to review what has been planned, and to examine if there is a need to re-align as new commitments come in daily.

Deal with procrastination

The third strategy is deal with procrastination. Two strategies are key: (a) tighten the deadline and (b) create the to-do list.

A tight deadline, for example an artificial deadline which is much earlier than the original deadline, enables you to come out of the procrastination state and gets you to perform the task at hand, by putting positive pressure to explore the situation and act creatively. Indeed, having a much-compressed time phase to complete the task could potentially make you perform much better, which makes you more productive. An earlier deadline also allows time for a thorough review that only enhances the quality and rigour of work produced.

Work expands to fill the time allocated to it, says Parkinson's Law. A self-imposed strategy of putting self-timed constraints on everything you do, even if there is no real need to do so, can be a "push" factor to focus on your work instead of procrastinating.

The second strategy to overcome procrastination is to create a to-do list. Make a list with checkboxes and stipulated deadlines beside each item. This enables you to monitor your tasks and work towards having the checkboxes ticked off diligently. The unchecked boxes are actions to focus on. This helps you to keep a close track on key tasks and serves as a continuous reminder to get things done without unnecessary delay, as the list gets longer

progressively. Such an organised and structured approach would allow you to manage concurrent projects by carefully observing the respective deliverables and milestones accurately.

Also understand that distraction is your enemy. Distractions comes in many forms, for example, request for other commitments when you are already overwhelmed with tasks at hand; an urge to participate in social media platforms and share your views which is not of urgency or importance; personal phone calls which could be better managed during a busy period; invitations for other departmental parties or recreational activities which could be done in an appropriate time. Be disciplined in addressing and working around distractions.

Managing high-performance teams can be blissful. But it boils down to the ability to be mindful in managing energy within the limited time stipulated for the projects or tasks at hand.

The writer is Senior Lecturer at the Division of Leadership, Management & Organisation at Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Business School