

MATCH YOUR PRODUCTIVITY APPROACH TO THE WAY YOU WORK

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Within weeks of starting my first job out of college, I was sent to the in-house time management training program. I dutifully attended the class and used the planner as instructed. But as the weeks went by, I noticed that my productivity hadn't improved. And I wasn't the only one. As I looked around at my colleagues, I noticed that many of them were really struggling with the system.

The reason is simple: there is no one-size-fits-all approach to productivity. Time management programs focus almost entirely on how to plan and exercise control over the minutes, hours, and days you spend on specific tasks or activities. That might work for some people, in some jobs. But for others, who think, learn, communicate, and execute differently, and deal with multifaceted and dynamic responsibilities, it probably won't.

Instead, we need to personalize productivity—to employ work strategies that align with our own cognitive styles and to plan and allocate effort in a way that suits our strengths and preferences.

Ironically, most of us do this unconsciously. After all, these are habitual patterns of perceiving, processing, and managing information that guide our behavior. However, because we're inundated with "proven" programs, tips and tools—backed by a bevy of consultants, academics, and practitioners—we often go against our natural instincts.

This assessment—based on research in psychology and management—is designed to help you identify and embrace your personal productivity style. Are you a prioritizer? A planner? An arranger? Or a visualizer? Once you know, you'll be able to more effectively manage your work and home life and achieve your goals much more efficiently.

Let me give you an example. Prioritizers prefer logical, analytical, fact-based, critical, and realistic thinking. To increase their efficiency, they might time how long it takes to complete certain tasks in order to more accurately plan and segment their days and weeks. This approach—a well-known best practice—would probably also work well for Planners, who process information in an organized, sequential, and detailed way. But it would stifle Visualizers, who are more holistic, intuitive and integrative thinkers and therefore energized (and made more efficient) by task variety and schedule flexibility. Arrangers, who are more expressive and emotional, would also benefit from a looser time management policy, which allows them to consider their energy levels and attention span capacity, then plan work accordingly, in real time.

The latest app, prioritization plan, or e-mail sorting strategy will not work if it runs counter to the way you think and process information. Your productivity strategies must be customized for you—not for someone else—because your life is waiting.



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Carson Tate is an expert on workplace productivity and the author of *WORK SIMPLY: Embracing the Power of Your Personal Productivity Style* (Penguin, 2014).