

# Blocking the Perception of Responsibility for Time Management: Self-Awareness, Communication, Pressure

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**Abstract:** In this article, the problems faced by professional employees with time management are discussed. Through empathic listening method, 10 people working in the professional field were interviewed in depth. The problems of being stuck between work, family and other tasks and not being able to realize themselves were examined. Especially, professionals have a high sense of responsibility which blocks the holistic time management. The importance of what one should do in life as a priority in time management was revealed. When people's priorities and responsibilities other than themselves dominate, time management turns into performance management determined by others. It focuses on how to allocate certain hours of the day from a mathematical perspective. It was understood that time management should be evaluated in psychology and social psychology as well as administrative sciences. Based on the interviews, a 3-step time management model was proposed. The first step is to recognize oneself. It is the determination of what the person wants to do in life by revealing the intrinsic motivation elements. The second step is to communicate around them, convey their demands and share their responsibilities. The third step is to create reasonable pressure on oneself to complete the work (extrinsic motivation). Extrinsic motivation is not separate from intrinsic motivation but complementary.

**Keywords:** Time Management, Self-Awareness, Communication, Pressure

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## 1. Introduction

Time constraint is a common problem for all professionals [13] specially those who are in professional work tempo have to do many things in limited time [25]. They experience dissatisfaction due to not being able to complete their tasks on time and not being able to spare time for their families and themselves [19]. They feel fatigue due to overwork. They cannot tend to the areas that are important to them due to both disturbing work and inefficiency. As a result, there are many professionals who suddenly decide to retire, change locations, leave their current jobs, especially corporate businesses, and return to family businesses [22]. The main reasons for this transition are freedom and flexibility [22]. However, the main purpose of time management is to enable individuals, especially professionals, to use their time efficiently and effectively in different areas (work, private, social) and to get satisfaction from their work [19]. However, time management is seen as an operational efficiency (such

as dealing with important issues first, distancing from stimuli in the environment) from the "business management perspective". When time management is positioned as catching up with work through an efficiency process, it is far from providing holistic satisfaction to the individual. In this article, while investigating the problems faced by professionals in time management, it is tried to propose a time management method that will provide satisfaction.

An important element that is overlooked in time management is the person himself/herself. It examines time management in terms of *operational research* regarding using time efficiently [24]. However, it does not emphasize the responsibility to oneself and how one sees life. The *psychology and socio-psychology of the person* are neglected. Operational efficiency is strengthened by focusing only on decisive stance [24].

The first question to be determined, which is the focal point of the study, is to know oneself, not time. Time management does not emphasize one's responsibility to oneself and how one sees life. Only operational efficiency is

strengthened by emphasizing decisive stance [5]. However, where one sees oneself should be the first step in time management. With the empathic listening method [46-47], a flow was made towards the person's inner thoughts, emotional reactions and guiding principles by asking what goes through his/her mind when he/she is in a time crunch. Recognizing oneself and sharing with others is a process of psychological awareness. Currently, time management works like process management. It focuses on how to allocate certain hours of the day *from a mathematical perspective*. However, when evaluated *from psychology and social psychology dimensions*, it is understood that what is more important than the method is to find the right job, hobby and social environment for oneself.

The second section presents the literature on process management. The third section describes empathy listening to understand the psychological processes experienced by individuals. The fourth section introduces the findings obtained. The conclusion and discussion section discusses the findings and proposes a model based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

## 2. Literature

Lakein [26] argued that time management involves the process of identifying needs, setting goals for the realization of these needs, prioritizing and planning the tasks required to achieve these goals. In order for time management to occur here, there must be a lot of work to be done in a narrow time [15, 39].

It has been argued that the term "time management" is misleading. Time cannot be managed because it is an inaccessible factor. Only the way a person deals with time can be influenced. Time management can be seen as a way of monitoring and controlling time [18]. In this context, it would be more appropriate to talk about self-management in terms of accomplishing multiple tasks in a given time frame.

Time management focuses on the efficiency of managers and the organization. Today, it has become an important management strategy by providing competitive advantage for the organization [40]. In a study on students' academic performance, it is claimed that students who manage time better have higher academic achievement [1].

Professionals spend more of their time on administrative tasks such as paperwork and their work is interrupted as they are more easily accessible through e-mail, pagers, cell phones and other technological advances [19]. In empathy interviews, professionals frequently expressed these problems. As a result, professional burn-out is experienced [34].

Using time effectively and efficiently means planning and utilizing every moment in line with a specific goal. Effective time management is associated with higher performance and lower levels of anxiety [28, 33]; however, it is difficult for individuals to find a balance between their work and daily life [1]. It can cause poor sleeping patterns. Stress levels of individuals increase due to not being able to finish work or

not being able to allocate enough time for personal and social activities while at work [44, 45, 19-47].

The aim of time management is to ensure that people are happy by reaching a point of satisfaction in their work, private and social lives [29, 31]. Employees bring with them needs, desires and experiences that determine their expectations in a work organization. Job satisfaction is related to the extent to which expectations are met [16]. Job satisfaction is the employee's sense of success at work.

In general, it is directly linked to productivity as well as personal well-being. Job satisfaction means doing a job that one enjoys, doing it well and being rewarded for one's efforts. Job satisfaction also refers to enthusiasm and happiness towards one's work. Job satisfaction is a key factor leading to income, career advancement and the realization of other goals that lead to a sense of satisfaction [23, 9]. One of the aims of time management is to increase motivation for work. When two groups of healthcare workers with high and low time management skills were compared, it was found that the motivation of the first group was stronger [4]. Job satisfaction, motivation and time management interact with each other.

Questions such as how and where to start formally in time management have often been researched. [24] suggests that examining time use efficiency involves three basic assumptions: awareness of time, awareness of time fillers, and positive work habits. Similarly, for Macan et al. (1990), the most important aspect of time management is time perception control. Time management techniques such as time awareness, self-regulation, and the development of goals and action plans have been found to reduce people's feelings of anxiety [26].

McCay [32] developed the basis for a time management training program that is still in use today. According to McCay [32], how to plan a day, how to prioritize tasks, and how to handle unexpected tasks are critical elements that need to be taught to people. Lakein [26] introduces the ABCD technique related to urgent and important. He particularly focuses on tasks which are important and but not urgent. Otherwise, the tasks which become urgent paralyze a person's planning. With these and similar ideas, many books and articles have been written to promise more efficiency using less time [11] such as POSEC (Prioritize, Organizing, Streamlining, Economizing and Contributing). Sandberg [44] claims task elimination is more important task listing. Allen [2] suggests dividing the task into the small parts to avoid the information overload. However, the crucial point is to understand which tasks should be performed. Otherwise, we cannot distinguish tasks important and seemingly important.

Effective time strategies are divided into four different principles: (1) short- and long- term goals; (2) setting priorities among responsibilities; (3) planning and organizing activities; and (4) minimizing time-wasting tasks [19].

A milestone of the time management is the development of the pomodoro. technique [14]. The name of the technique comes from the first timer used which was shaped like a tomato (pomodoro in Italian). It uses to break work into

intervals, typically 25 minutes in length, separated by short breaks.

According to Covey et al. [15], ranking responsibilities by importance and urgency is the first step in time management. Balancing multiple existing responsibilities is a common managerial challenge. Covey's Time Management Matrix Technique provides a useful structure for prioritizing responsibilities. Vatan and Özsoy [47] argue that effective time management is not just about organizing work; self-control also plays an important role. In this case, time management is related to self-management and determination [17]. In this respect, time management practice is very limited for an employee who is completely dependent on superiors. The ability to control oneself and one's life creates the opportunity to use time management techniques [20]. In fact, Akatay [3] states that using time efficiently is in one's own hands and it is not others who waste time, but the individual himself/herself. For this, it is especially necessary for the individual to clearly define his/her goals [10].

After determining one's focus, time management methods can be utilized. These include planning for effective use of time, organizing meetings and appointments, using technology, delegating authority to subordinates, and utilizing gaps [24]. In order to manage time well, it is necessary to fight against time traps. One should stay away from events (meetings), people (friends) and stimuli (social media messages) that interrupt time [41]. In systematic work, focus on tasks and priorities instead of constantly looking at the clock.

Personal development is a part of time management [42]. Good use of time is the operation of continuous improvement and development process either personally or in organizations [40].

Effective use of time is important, but it may not be enough on its own. Completing tasks and getting results by using time effectively is also a part of time management [17].

### 3. Research Method

Empathic listening technique was used to get to know 10 professional employees who were experiencing time congestion in time management deeply and to reveal time-related problems [7, 46].

The sampling number was finalized after the similarity of the answers (pattern) received in the interviews was observed. In these interviews, the cause-effect relationships behind the behaviors of the participants were captured. Instead of the number of participants, the main point here is to continue the empathic listening until a trend (pattern) emerges from the users' experiences.

Since qualitative studies do not produce statistical information, the number of participants is not decisive. The focus is on revealing the pattern by talking in depth with participants who have intense experiences [35, 36, 37]. However, in a qualitative study, it has been statistically proven that saturation point is reached in *nine to sixteen*

*homogeneous* country, people, and subject [21]. In this study, 10 candidates of professionals (*same status*) from Turkey (*same country*) were deeply interviewed about their experiences of searching for time management obstacles (*same topic*). According to [21], the number of participants needs to be increased as heterogeneous elements emerge (e.g. in a study involving people from countries or students).

The empathic interview focused on the user experience, activity, motivation, and emotions. Due to the nature of the qualitative study, time management was not directly asked, but participants' perceptions of this concept were indirectly revealed through their stories/events [46, 27].

In qualitative research, concrete events and details experienced by people are examined [7]. During the interview, only the participant is asked about his/her experience. For example, in an interview conducted on salespeople on time management, the following questions were asked in the study [22]: What are the skills of an effective salesperson? How would you rank these skills if you were to order them from "highest" to "lowest importance"? And why these skills are important (consequences on individual or firm performance)? In empathic listening, however, these are *interpretation questions* and provide only *superficial information*. In empathic listening, the unstructured model is followed.. In the full structured method, the prepared questions are strictly followed, while in the unstructured interview, the speaker is the guide and the conversation takes shape with his/her guidance [46, 32]. From the narratives of the speakers, micro reflection, time and place, and finding the root are used to go deeper into the subject [48]. We started with a single question: *When was the last time you had a time crunch (going back in time) and where (going back in place)? What was going through your mind?* In empathic listening, one does not try to learn the process as a listener (going beyond operational research) but tries to understand the thoughts and feelings of the speaker by taking them to a specific time and place and aiming to learn the philosophy of thought. The user's thought pattern, emotional reactions, guiding principles and motivations are understood [49]. In addition, it is avoided for the speaker to comment on an experience they have not experienced. Because hypothetically, it cannot be predetermined how the user will behave in real life ([5, 47]. Concrete stories are sought to learn behavioral patterns [30, 6, 48 49]. Insights obtained from user stories are conceptualized by induction.

In empathic listening, people are not approached as socio-economic categories [49]. Demographic assumptions are not made. No biased questions are asked to the user during the interview. Only being a professional employee who has experienced time congestion before and having a story about it is the criterion for being selected for the study. In empathic interviewing, we try to understand the context, causality, and psychological needs of the person. The psychological factor is the main reason for mobilizing the person [50, 51].

The most basic research topic is to determine the factors behind the poor use of time, the reasons behind it and his/her

interaction with his/her environment. After collecting users' insights, findings are obtained through the concepts produced.

The population of the study consisted of people working in professional occupations (academicians, managers, engineers, veterinarians, economists) in Turkey. Participants were from different occupational groups. In an empathy interview, social, economic, demographic and gender are not important unless they are factors affecting behavior. The main thing in qualitative research is to reveal the pattern. The data obtained from the participants were grouped. Patterns were created. Participants' (x1, x2) statements are italicized.

## 4. Findings

As a result of the empathic interviews, it was determined that the employees had serious time management problems. Although some solutions were sought, it was seen that they were far behind the desired results except for minor progress.

### 4.1. Time Management Is a Common Problem

They stated that time management is a very serious problem in their working and private lives. Complaining about making time for themselves: *I wish I could spend more time for myself. If I had time, I would spend time for myself (X1). I haven't rested my head for a long time, I don't have time for many things (X8).* People who are unable to focus due to the interruption of their work: *Work is not completed in the desired time due to reasons such as focusing problems, too much work, limited time (X2). I cannot use time effectively because I am constantly interrupted. The work does not finish in the desired time (X3).* Running to help others but falling behind in their own work: *Since I am an empathetic person, I think that I should listen to my friends immediately when they open their problems and I get distracted and leave my work (X2).* Experiencing inefficiency due to not being able to balance quality and speed: *I prolong the process to do better, and then time is not enough (X5). I can't allocate time to different tasks in my life as I should. I've been having trouble keeping up with my work lately because I don't allocate time to tasks as I should (x6).* Experiencing a time crunch while trying to balance between senior management and subordinates in the company: *I try to use time more properly in order to manage both the staff and the board of directors (X10).*

Time congestion makes people tense and causes stress: *Sudden tasks stress me at first, but later I like them (X4). I get stressed when I postpone things (X4). Leaving some jobs to the last minute causes me to experience time constraints and I get stressed (X6).* They are concerned about the quality of work under stress: *I get upset when my work is not of good quality, and people's reactions increase this boredom (X6) I feel bad when things don't go the way I want. If I don't do it, I get disenchanted (X4).*

### 4.2. Time Management Fails Due to Priorities and Responsibility

It is understood that the most important constraint in time management stems from setting priorities. *Since I care about what people think, I sacrifice myself (X5). There are those who see their priorities in the family and especially in their children: The order of priority is my child, my family and my job. The most important thing in life is my child that I brought into the world. Since I have to take care of the child, I put my own work in the second plan (X1). I make sacrifices for the people I love (X1). I immediately sacrifice myself (X8).* There are also those who prioritize work: *If the work is important, I do it (X1) I don't put things off because it is a system that must go on without a hitch (X10) It is important to act responsibly, especially with regard to work (X3).*

The key word in priority is "responsibility": *I care about being aware of the efforts your family has given you and acting responsibly (X1). Caring about my work makes me feel more responsible. I have a high sense of responsibility (X10). If no result is obtained from a job, excuses do not bring results. As a result, that work has not been done. And I take the responsibility on myself (X3). I feel conscientious responsibility (X8). Sometimes I want to postpone or avoid work, but then I feel bad. I think negatively and do not take action (X5). I feel troubled when I cannot start work (X4).*

When they avoid responsibility and work and postpone work, they feel bad: *I think negatively and do not act (X5). I get stressed when I postpone work (X4). When I can't start work, it causes me trouble (X4). Leaving some tasks to the last-minute causes me to experience time constraints and I get stressed (X6).* With responsibility, people suppress their own needs: *Although sometimes I get annoyed about not finding time, I don't pay much attention to it (X1).*

### 4.3. Solution Methods

Some of the participants tried various time management methods, some by groping, some by reading and seeing.

They try to remain calm in times of stress: *Since I have learned how to increase my efficiency, I do my work in a calm way. This calmness allows me to use time more effectively (X9).* They turn off stimuli: *when I am going to do the work, I don't let anything else interrupt me (X3).* First, a general framework is drawn: *it is necessary to look at the situation from a distance (X9). They order them in order of importance: I put things in order of importance: I put the most difficult tasks first (X10).* They try to plan: *Trying to be planned and being able to achieve this makes my work easier. If I make a plan and do not follow it, I get bored (X2). I am a planned person. I prefer to prepare in advance (X4). Since my responsibility has increased, I try to be more organized (X9). I am as organized as I can be in housework (X10). Since I do not plan properly, there is no quality work (X6).* However, due to priorities and preferences, plans do not work out as desired: *When my focus changes, things have to be postponed (X3).*

#### 4.4. New Approach: Self-Awareness, Communication, Pressure

In the analysis of the findings, there are 3 steps that a person should follow in time management.

First, he needs to review the priorities, responsibilities and preferences that are blocking him. *For people to be happy, they should care about themselves and make time for their goals. Happy people are at peace with themselves and their environment.* It is seen that those who fail and get tired of their time management arrive at the same point - my own priorities and preferences: *I don't like clock rules, I like to be free. I don't want my freedom to be restricted (X10) I would like to wake up on my own, not because I have to (X7). I care about having a good time. I like to be alone (X9).* Especially with marriage, responsibilities have increased: *My responsibilities increased with marriage. I cannot find time for myself because of my choices (X1). Because I am married, I do not neglect my responsibilities at home (X10).*

The second step is to communicate with those around them about what they want to achieve and to share responsibilities. In this way, one can spend time on the things one wants to focus on. Many of the participants were unable to express their wishes and complained about the lack of understanding of those around them: *I used to have time only for myself, but as my responsibilities have increased, I no longer have time for myself. I wish my husband was more responsible. My husband does not share my responsibilities at home with me (X1). Household chores also take a lot of time, and there is no one to leave the children with. I feel sad because I am not understood. I feel worthless X8. People shift their responsibilities to others (X9).*

The third step is to make oneself feel the pressure to finish and succeed in all areas (work, social, private, sports, etc.) to a reasonable extent: *I am more planned while preparing for the exam (X1). I was not a very planned person, but I was aware of my responsibilities (X10). If I have a job that is not in a hurry, I usually act relaxed. If I don't have an exam to study for, I act relaxed (X1). When I don't feel pressure, I don't mind working (X2). I postpone some work that I consider unimportant (X1). But we should not forget the balance here: Feeling stuck makes you make mistakes (X10).*

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

All participants stated that *time constraint* was a major problem for them and that they were seriously disturbed by the lack of time. Those who tried to implement time management techniques complained that their days were interrupted by work and family commitments. The main reason for time management techniques not working is *responsibility*.

Professionals have a *high sense of responsibility*. However, from a psychological point of view, where one sees oneself in the *order of priorities (intrinsic motivation)* should be the first step in time management. A professional should undervalue his responsibilities to his/her business and even his/her family. It is not selfishness but creates a work-life

balance. After discovering one's intrinsic motivation and thus one's priorities, one needs to be in *touch* with *one's environment* in order to shape responsibilities. *External motivation* is also needed to finish the work on time (Figure 1). Motivation is defined as a guiding force that directs an individual to perform a certain action and helps to maintain the continuity of this action [12, 43]. It can also be understood as an effective force to bring about an action or event. Sandberg [44] and Allen [2] pointed out task elimination, but the intrinsic motivation will lead professionals decide which ones should eliminate.

One needs to know oneself. Decisive stance starts with the awareness of this. The belief in sacrificing oneself for other people or organizations makes time management and job satisfaction dysfunctional. Basically, the missing element in time management is that the person does not make an effort to know himself/herself and avoids sharing his/her wishes with his/her environment.

As this study emphasizes, *motivation can be handled in two ways according to its source: intrinsic and extrinsic*. For intrinsic motivation, the job itself motivates the individual; for extrinsic motivation, the environment motivates that individual. Extrinsic motivation refers to being motivated by rewards from the environment. Employee motivation can be increased by external rewards such as bonuses, promotions, work incentives and appreciation. However, while external factors play an important role in increasing a person's motivation, external factors cannot provide the necessary motivation without intrinsic factors [9].

When a person recognizes himself/herself, his/her intrinsic motivations emerge. Decisive stance starts with the awareness of this [20]. Having the belief of sacrificing oneself for a person or an organization makes time management dysfunctional. In this respect, the obstacle between time management and the person is his/her beliefs, motivations and understanding of responsibility. When he/she deactivates the blockage he/she has built himself/herself, he/she will be able to flow. High performance in only one subject (e.g. work) does not mean that one is successful in time management and enjoys life. Time management involves a balance between work, social and private lives. Moreover, prioritizing oneself (or seeing oneself as important) does not arise out of selfishness or procrastination, but as a need to give meaning to life.

The progress of the planned program will be determined by the person's communication with those around him/her. He/she needs to reveal his/her expectations to others. Instead of complaining about the indifference of those around him/her, he/she should start a communication process with those around him/her based on his/her expectations.

The participants interviewed about time management stated that an element of pressure was beneficial for them to finish the work. Here, it is understood that supporting intrinsic motivation (the work they want to do) with extrinsic motivation (a driving force) yields positive results. According to Pink (2009), creative work is based on intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation reduces creativity [8]. It is

believed that intrinsic motivation is valid for creativity and extrinsic motivation is valid for routine work [38]. However, according to the findings, *intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are needed in all kinds of jobs. Putting pressure on oneself by creating a sense of urgency will bring success.* This helps to overcome *procrastination*. If we give an example on learning a foreign language: Here, the person must first state why he/she wants to learn this language (intrinsic motivation).

Attending a course, undergraduate or graduate program, hiring a tutor, taking an exam, being rewarded (extrinsic motivation) will provide an environment that will pressure the person to learn. On the other hand, if one's intrinsic motivation is high but extrinsic motivation is weak, one will enter a vicious cycle of starting and stopping foreign language learning. Due to dropping out, one's life will be full of unfinished work. This will cause dissatisfaction.

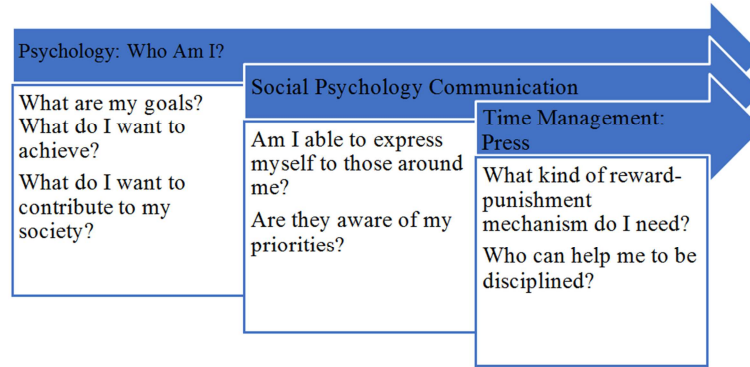


Figure 1. Three Step Time Management.

## Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

This study was prepared in accordance with the rules of scientific research and publication ethics.

## Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics Committee Approval for this study was obtained with the decision of Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University dated 25. 02. 2022 and numbered E-88012460-050.01.04-151337 Annex-2.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for the authors or third parties arising from the study.

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