



Productivity solutions for the modern workplace



21st Century Productivity

“

I do not believe you can do today's job with yesterday's methods and be in business tomorrow.

”

Nelson Jackson

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About the author

Dermot Crowley is the founder of Adapt Training Solutions, and is one of Australia's most recognised thought leaders on personal productivity.

His combined passion for productivity and technology led him to start Adapt in 2002, with a clear focus on helping busy executives manage their time, priorities and email in today's modern workplace.

Since then Dermot has developed a practical, relevant methodology for working more productively in the modern workplace, using technology as an implementation platform. His productivity programs focus on the technologies participants already use, such as MS Outlook, Lotus Notes, smartphones and tablets.

Dermot is a powerful speaker, trainer and coach. He splits his time between delivering keynotes at conferences, coaching senior clients and running training within his client organisations. Dermot works with some of Australia's most successful businesses, helping them leverage the effectiveness of their people, as well as the power of their technology.



21st Century Productivity

We are still applying 20th century methodologies to 21st century technologies.

Our ability to manage our time and attention dictates the results we deliver, as well as the balance we achieve in our busy lives. But in today's modern workplace, many are struggling to keep on top of the deluge and create any sense of balance.

Over the last decade a range of powerful and exciting electronic tools have been developed and deployed to many workers to help improve productivity. We have electronic scheduling systems, handheld devices and the ability to communicate to anyone, anywhere at any time. Yet we still struggle to stay organised and focused.

I believe a large part of the problem is that we are using 21st century technologies, but still using 20th century methodologies. Our mindsets have not evolved as fast as the technology. Until we adapt the way we work by fully utilising the technology already at our disposal, we will always struggle to stay organised, effective and balanced.

21st Century Productivity

The workplace has seen significant change since the last century. Our core organising tools have moved from paper-based to electronic. Primary forms of communication have shifted from face to face and phone to email and instant messaging.

Our work environments have transitioned to open plan and 'hot desks' in many cases, and the markets that we work in have expanded to create a 24/7 flow of communication. Organisational structures have flattened and morphed into collaborative organisms. These changes place a new set of demands on our time and attention, and need new strategies and systems to stay organised.

20 th Century Workplace	21 st Century Workplace
Paper-based diaries	Electronic scheduling systems
Face to face communication	Email communications
Offices & cubicles	Open plan
Local markets	Global markets
Workplace collaboration	Virtual collaboration

Leveraged Technology

Productivity in today's fast, email-driven workplace relies on us combining the power of our technology with effective productivity methods.

While most workers today would use electronic calendars to organise meetings and scheduled activities, the same cannot be said for how most of us manage our tasks and priorities. In fact, research has shown that the average worker uses between 8 and 10 different tools to organise their actions, with many of these tools being paper-based.

Our ability to focus, work proactively and to prioritise our time relies on having good systems in place to organise our work.

Tools like MS Outlook and Lotus Notes have been purpose-built to facilitate a 21st century approach to organisation, yet most of us have not learned to leverage our technology and get the most from it.

Integrated Productivity

Adopting an integrated system for managing your workload, and applying it to an integrated set of tools gives you the edge in today's complex workplace.

Once we have our technology in place, we need to ensure we use the right methodology. There are three core components that work interdependently to support increased productivity.

1. Actions

To manage our time effectively we need to use on central tool that enables the focused and proactive management of all our commitments and priorities.

2. Inputs

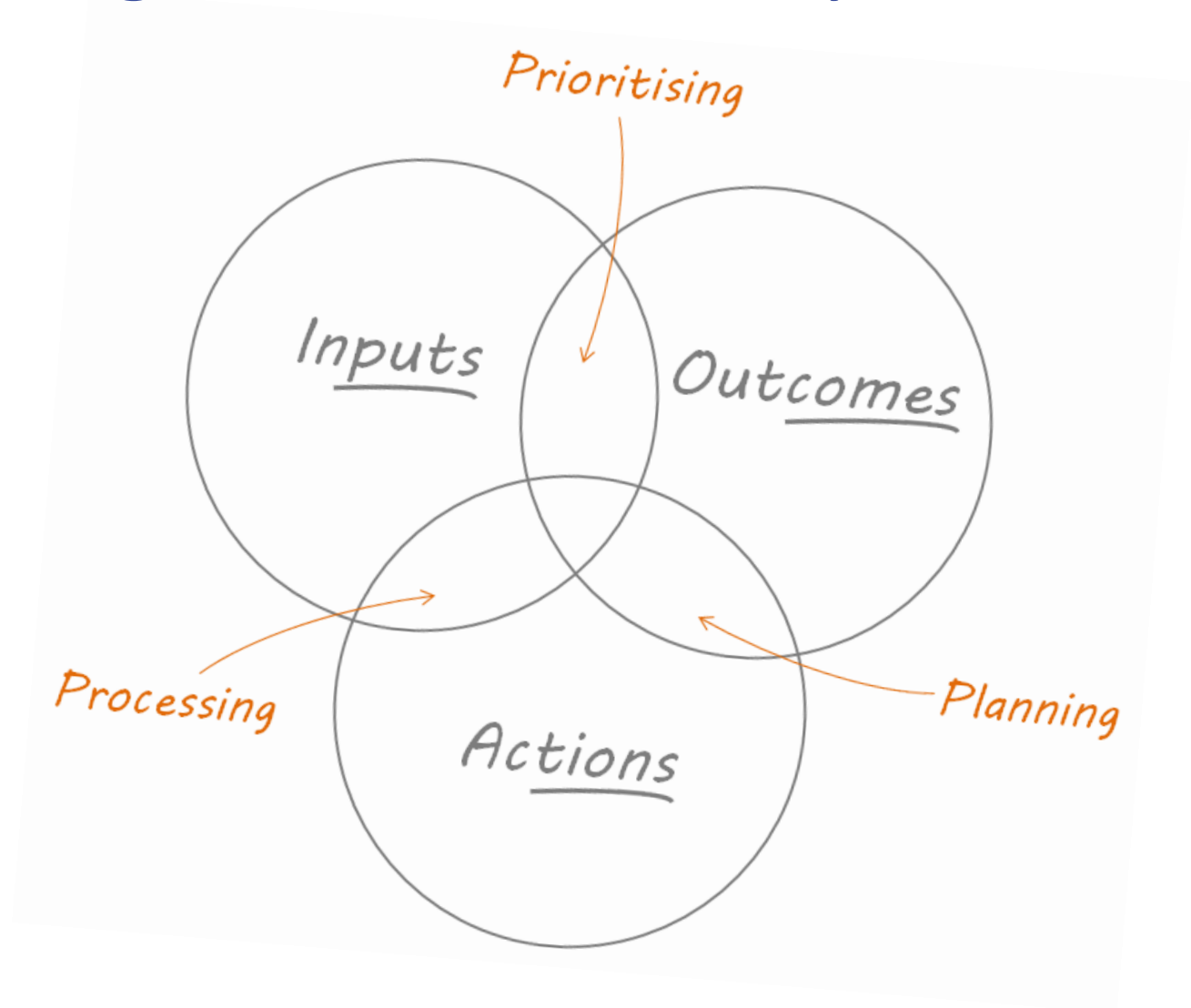
We need to maintain control of our incoming work and communications so that we reduce distraction and have a clear focus on what really needs our attention.

3. Outcomes

To achieve our objectives, we need to create alignment between our outcomes (what we need to achieve) and our actions (what we do on a daily basis).

Integrated Productivity

The integrated productivity model combines three critical components of productivity into one system, and uses the keystone habits of processing, planning and prioritising to drive the system.



Productivity Habits

Most of the choices we make each day may feel like the products of well-considered decision making, but they're not. They're habits.

Charles Duhigg

Maximising our productivity relies on the disciplined application of a set of productivity habits or practices. Whilst there are many habits that increase our effectiveness, there are three keystone habits that have a direct and dramatic impact on productivity.

The three keystone productive habits are:

1. **Processing** – Checking incoming work proactively and making good priority decisions about what needs our attention.
2. **Planning** – Taking time out to plan rather than do. Time spent planning will not only increase the amount you get done, it will increase the quality of your choices.
3. **Prioritising** – Evaluating the importance and urgency of your work and deciding on what is truly the best use of your time.

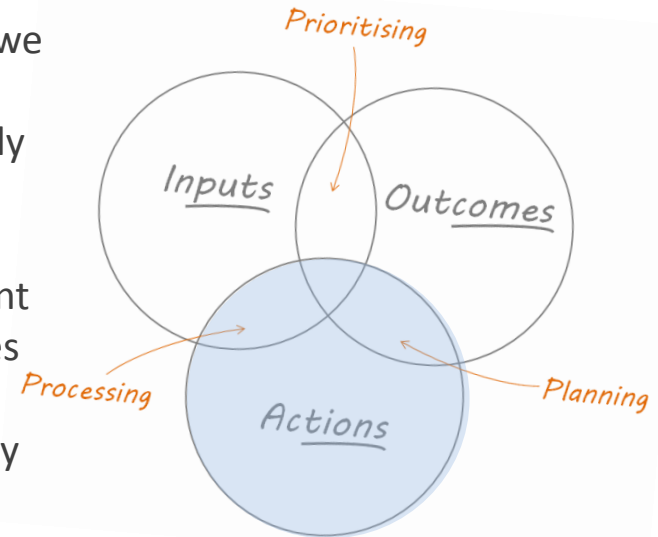
Managing Actions

Centralise all of your activities (meetings and tasks) into one tool to create visibility and focus.

We have so much to do, and so little time. Working longer hours is not the answer – we need to organise what we need to do in a way that helps us to focus, work proactively and manage competing priorities flexibly.

Setting up a centralised action management system in Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes makes most sense as this is where a lot of your work arrives via email, and is probably where you already manage your meetings and appointments. Using the same system to manage your tasks and priorities makes sense as this give you a complete picture of all your commitments.

Both MS Outlook and Lotus Notes have powerful task management systems built into them, but unfortunately they are rarely used by the average worker. However it is not a huge leap to make. You have probably already centralised all of your meetings into this tool – you just need to centralise the other half of your work as well!



Managing Actions

Three essential strategies for managing actions

1. Focus your day with a plan

We need to cut through the noise and babble of the modern workplace and get focused. A daily plan creates focus and sets your intent. Each day, review your meetings, establish your discretionary time and identify your priorities for the day. Plan your work and work your plan!

2. Proactively schedule your work

Your real priorities will get actioned in a timely way when you get into the habit of scheduling what you need to do in your system. Schedule your meetings in your calendar, and schedule the start date for your tasks in your task management system. Date activate work for the appropriate time.

3. Manage your changing priorities

Sticking to your plan is easy if nothing in your day changes, but new stuff always comes in, and we end up not getting everything done. So be prepared to manage the change. Make active decisions about what you have not completed, and reschedule incomplete work. Measure new priorities against existing work and decide which is more important.

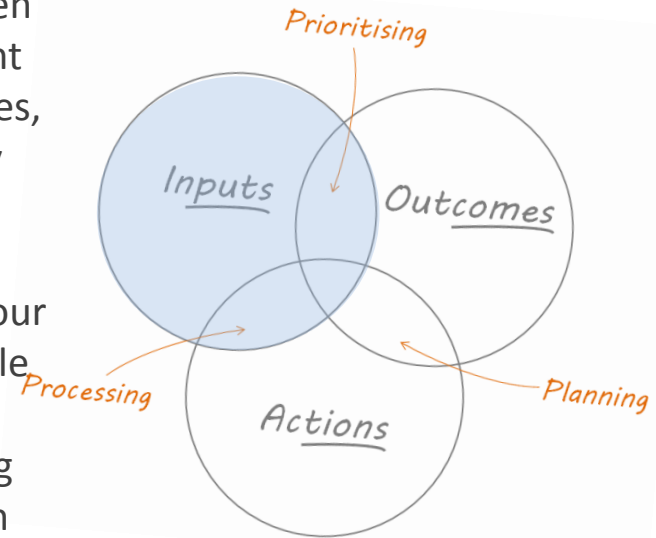
Managing Inputs

Adopting an inbox zero mindset is a powerful way of reducing the feeling of overwhelm, and of ensuring nothing slips through the cracks.

Trying to focus on our important work when we are also being bombarded by a constant deluge of emails, phone calls, text messages, instant messages and interruptions is daily struggle.

We need a change of mindset to manage our inputs effectively. For instance, most people use their inbox as an action management system, and let the emails pile up, awaiting their attention. Piles in your inbox, piles on your desk or piles in your head lead to a reactive work-style.

Changing to an 'inbox zero' mindset can radically improve your approach to email management and the impact that email has on your work style. Aim to process your emails down to zero at least once per week, and take advantage of the tools built into Outlook and Lotus Notes to manage email actions and information. And it is not just email. We need to apply this thinking to all forms of incoming work, however it arrives.



Managing Inputs

Three essential strategies for managing inputs

1. Reduce the noise

We receive way too much noise into our inboxes each day. External noise in the form of marketing emails and internal noise in the form of CC's and Reply All's. Get off newsletter lists and groups, set up rules for informational emails, and discuss email protocols with your team.

2. Centralise all work and information

Make MS Outlook or Lotus Notes your one consolidated source of truth for all your actions and information. These systems have been designed for this purpose, which means there really is a place for everything.

3. Simplify your filing system

We all need to keep emails to refer back to them. But the research shows that we only refer back to less than 5% of the emails we keep. So why do we spend so much time organising this information in complex filing systems? Set up a simple filing system and learn to search for what you need when you need it.

“ Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning and focused effort. ”

Paul J Meyer

Managing Outcomes

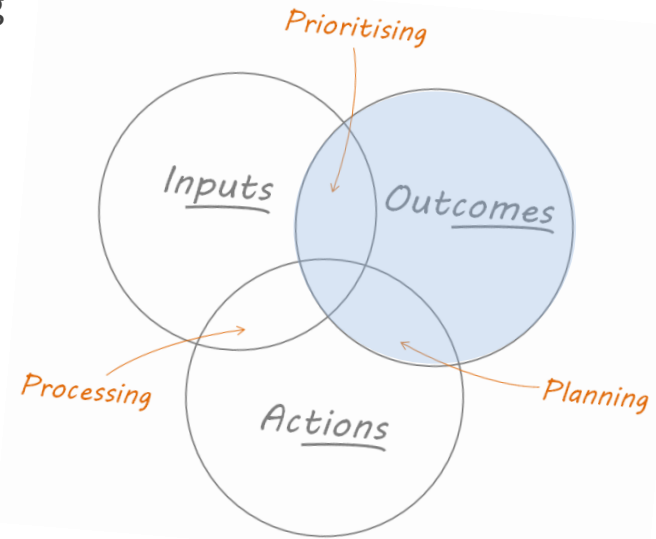
What we spend our time on each day should be directly connected to what we are trying to achieve.

Unfortunately sometimes too many emails and meetings can get in the way of the really important work.

We all have a purpose – a reason for doing the work we do. Our work is usually measured against a set of goals and objectives, and the things we spend our time on directly impacts what we achieve.

Yet, so often we let what is most urgent drive how we spend our days, not necessarily what is most important. To be truly effective we need to create some balance between the reactive and the proactive. Planning is the key to creating this balance.

Taking time out to plan feels hard when we are so busy. But a little time spent planning will yield big results. You will not only get more done in your week, you will ensure you are getting the right stuff done. Time is your most limited and precious resource – make sure you spend it wisely! The most successful people generally make time to plan on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.



Managing Outcomes

Three essential strategies for managing outcomes

1. Paint your own big picture

You probably have a performance plan in place for your role. But how central is that to your day-to-day planning? Are you clear about your big picture? It is very hard to prioritise your time if you are not. Make some time to think about your key responsibilities, your objectives and your projects.

2. Protect time in your schedule for the rocks

We often mean to work on important priorities, but if they are not yet urgent, we just keep meaning! When it comes to crunch time, it is often hard to find some space in your busy schedule. As Stephen Covey suggested in his bestseller *First Things First* (Simon & Schuster 1994), build the *rocks* into your schedule before it fills up with *sand*.

3. Recognise the signs of procrastination

We all procrastinate, but we often don't realise that we are doing it until the work becomes urgent. We procrastinate because things are complex, hard, distasteful, long or boring. Spot the procrastination, work out the reason, and then apply an appropriate strategy to get you moving.

What are you going to do differently?

Next steps

So, as the saying goes, ‘What got you here will not get you where you want to go’. We need to reboot our systems and come up with a new way of working in this modern, busy, urgent, global and email-driven workplace.

Leveraging the power of our technology is the starting point. Applying a system to that technology which integrates how you manage your actions, inputs and outcomes will then set you up for success.

Think about the actions that you can take today to work more productively in the 21st century workplace.

Adapt Training Solutions

Adapt Training Solutions is dedicated to helping modern workers harness technology to boost productivity. We work with every level of business, from your most senior executives to your newest team members, to create a culture of productivity and sustained improvement.

Helping the individual to improve their productivity in isolation can only have limited benefit if those around them aren't also working smarter, so we offer solutions ranging from organisation-wide education through to individual training and support.

Go to our website or call us for more information on our innovative productivity training and coaching solutions.

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