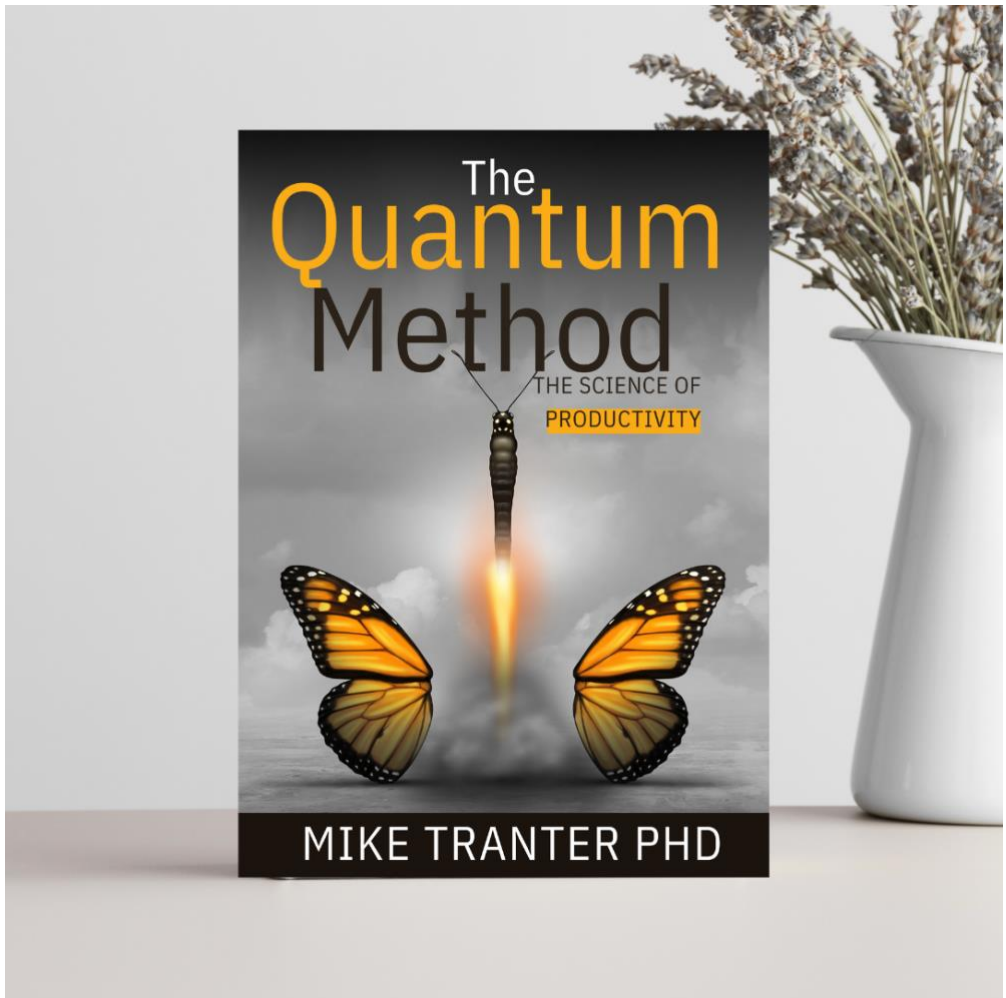


THIS IS A FREE CHAPTER FROM

**THE QUANTUM METHOD: THE SCIENCE OF PRODUCTIVITY**

**MIKE TRANTER PHD**





## 4

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR TIME AND EFFICIENCY

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*Our time here is not infinite. That is the true beauty, because we must make each moment count.*

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**T**ime management is nothing new. Modern time management as we know it became popular in the 1970s with a series of books that would go on to inspire countless more over the years. However, we need to be a little cautious here, because time management alone will not give you everything you are working towards, but it will be advantageous when used appropriately.

In addition to breaking down the components of your goals into more manageable pieces, *The Quantum Method* is also about using your time as effectively as possible. On a basic level, this is a time management system, but as we build up your schedule throughout the chapters you will see that it is much more. The first part of this chapter will explain some of the hurdles you will face when attempting to improve your productivity, things like bad habits and

procrastination, and explain the psychological reason for why we do. The second part of this chapter revolves around improving your own schedule and identifying how inefficient your current schedule is, so that it can be restructured and improved.

In order to build a time management system, it is essential to understand what exactly comprises time management and how it can be evolved and integrated into your schedule to work for you. From data collected in research studies, we know there are three main components to a good time management strategy, all of which are utilised within this book.<sup>14</sup>

1. Structure: We will focus heavily on structuring your tasks around your schedule in a way that significantly boosts your productivity without dramatically adjusting your home or work schedule.
2. Protection: If you have ever had a plan to work on your goals but ended up doing something else, then your original time was not protected from distractions. Here we deal specifically with the biggest distraction of them all, procrastination. We will discuss its causes along with strategies you can use to remove procrastination from your life.
3. Adapting: Flexibility in your plans is inbuilt into this book to allow you to adapt to a demanding and changing schedule while remaining productive. Your plan will be flexible enough so you can change or swap specific tasks at short notice, and you will learn to give yourself feedback on how it works for you. It is also important to update your schedule throughout your journey so that you can build on the things you enjoy and get the best results from.

**“YOU CAN THINK OF TIME AS AN INVESTMENT  
FOR YOUR FUTURE LIFE”**

The overall consensus from over 150 scientific studies is that a well thought-out time management strategy can not only increase productivity, but also boost self-esteem and all-round performance.<sup>14</sup> However, the true benefit of utilising time management comes from understanding how it can work *for* you.

At their core, most time management plans target a process called ‘activity maximisation’. It essentially creates a schedule where the greatest number of tasks are completed in a given time period. This book also incorporates this strategy to find immediate improvements to your productivity. This can have immediate benefits because research shows that when we plan our schedule with a focus on activity maximisation, the probability of completing our tasks significantly increases; specifically, when our schedule includes *when* and *where* we will complete the tasks.<sup>15</sup>

What many plans fail to appreciate is that there is a more important benefit of time management, which is ‘outcome maximisation’. This shifts the focus onto making each task work towards your ultimate goal in some way. Rather than completing lots of items on the to-do lists, each item is only included if it serves a specific and identifiable purpose for the bigger goal. Moving forwards, the following chapters within this book incorporate both the activity and outcome maximisation methods. This is a more profound concept than it might initially appear, because when we tell ourselves what our dream is, it can feel like a huge and overwhelmingly distant ambition. By incorporating outcome maximisation into this book, we can break down the goal into smaller sections and target them individually at different time points.

## **Opportunities wasted**

It is incredible how much time we all waste on our devices every day. I admit, I have also been guilty of this. We all do it. Our phones, social media, YouTube, music, computer games, Reddit, TV and Netflix, all of it! That is fine if we don’t want to work to our potential, but if we’re going to increase our productivity and bring our dreams into a reality, we need to take an uncomfortable look at our bad habits. Think about it for just a moment and I am sure you will be shocked at how much time is spent on things not directed towards reaching your goals.

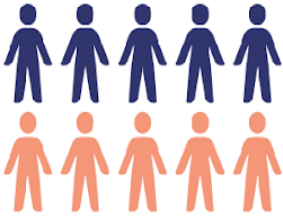
Before we go any further, I want to stress here that these outlets are perfectly fine to use. Of course, they can also be valuable tools to help with your business or social life, but too often, we get distracted by them. It is important to state here that although we will be exploring how much opportunity actually exists in your day, it is also perfectly acceptable to have moments where you need to relax, do something completely opposite to what you might see as productive, and generally de-stress. There is no problem with recognising those instances when you genuinely need to take a break. Taking time to re-centre yourself and remember why you are doing this, are valuable tools, and well worth the investment. The issue is more about the quantity of time we spend doing nothing, and how honest we are with ourselves about our motivation to do the work.

## **Procrastination**

Procrastination is a time thief! It is one of the reasons why we are not where we want to be today and why each of us struggles with achieving our dreams. Of course, there are other factors, but procrastination plays a pivotal role. Essentially, procrastination is the time spent distracting ourselves with other things rather than doing what we should do to achieve the future we want.

It is important to understand your own level of procrastination in order to improve productivity and your quality of life. Procrastination has been linked to stress, depression, and excessive anxiety,<sup>16,17</sup> contributing to lower productivity. We need to address procrastination if we want to improve productivity to new levels.

## Time scarcity



50% of us experience time-scarcity; not enough time in the



15% of adults struggle with procrastination!<sup>19</sup>



This more than doubles amongst university students!<sup>20</sup>

*Time scarcity is likely something that we have all noticed but not become aware of in such a detailed way. Hopefully by identifying it in our daily lives, we can learn to manage it better.*

## Why do we procrastinate if we know it is harmful to our progress?

If we want to overcome procrastination, an excellent place to start is by appreciating why our brain procrastinates in the first place. It has been suggested that procrastination had an evolutionary benefit for us as human beings, as it may have evolved as a by-product of another character trait — impulsivity.<sup>21</sup> Impulsive behaviour probably benefitted us throughout human history when we needed to adapt quickly to changing environments without the need for long-term planning. However, in modern society, acting impulsively can have its drawbacks. When we act impulsively, we do things that are not aligned with our goals, and when we do this often, it is procrastination. Essentially, multiple

impulsive decisions made over time culminate in procrastination. To improve our productivity, we need to think about how our actions will contribute to our ultimate success, and recognising when procrastination and impulsivity are detrimental. When we fail to overcome our impulsive behaviours and act on them, we find ourselves doing things in the moment rather than focusing on our current task. Procrastination may have originally been a way to focus on short-term goals by ignoring long-term goals. Even though they may have had evolutionary benefits, when we live with the desire to improve our performance and productivity to attain long-term goals, procrastination is our enemy.

Current research on the causes and effects of procrastination has identified several reasons for it, such as fear of failure, low self-confidence, inadequate planning, and perfectionism.<sup>22</sup> However, planning alone may not be enough to overcome procrastination, because the act of planning itself, when used excessively, can often be used as a tactic to tell ourselves we are working when we are not. The key is to acknowledge that procrastination is an issue, one that is fairly normal, but not allow it to creep into our schedule.

## **Overcoming procrastination**

As a means to overcome procrastination, we need to shift our focus to the process of improving productivity, that is, identifying areas within your schedule where you can improve productivity and how to utilise devices and technology to improve further. When we focus on *how* to pursue our goals, we use scientifically proven methods to reduce the fear of failure by changing our focus from the bigger objective, and therefore, unknown potential consequences, to a much more micro-level view of whatever task is ahead of us today.<sup>23</sup> In other words, when the feeling of wanting to procrastinate occurs, we have already laid out the blueprint of how we will work. It is now a case of following through with your pre-structured plan, rather than finding yourself in a situation where you have time and a general list of tasks but no real sense of how or why you will complete them.

The *why* is also crucial in defeating excessive procrastination. Temporal-motivation theory<sup>24</sup> was developed by two psychologists, Piers Steel and Cornelius

König, to explain how time is a big motivator. The theory suggests that procrastination may also correlate with a person's goal setting ability. This means when our *why* is not clearly defined, we tend to procrastinate more. This makes sense because if we know what needs to be done but don't have the value of those tasks (the *why*), then distractions and procrastination can feel as (or more) valuable than the tasks themselves. If we can vividly picture the end result of our dream, and understand that our actions will lead us there, it can reinforce the reasons why we need to stay focused and procrastinate less. This effect becomes even more powerful if we can attach an emotional context to it. For example, will improving your productivity, and therefore reducing procrastination, improve your financial stability in the future and help support your family or loved ones? Why do you have your goals, and why is it essential to strip away any residual procrastination?

Taking both of these factors together, time management interventions have been shown to have significant benefits in reducing procrastination, and this is why the methods within this book can be helpful to anyone who struggles with procrastination.<sup>25</sup>

Self-confidence has also been identified as a trigger for procrastination. Having confidence in yourself and your ability to achieve your dreams is not an easy feat. It can take a long time for that belief to set in, and doubt can be a lifelong struggle, even with success. If, at any point in your journey, you find yourself unsure whether you are capable of reaching your goals, then do not worry. Decades of studies into human behaviour tell us that people draw from their personal experience and unique transferable skills that have helped them in similar situations. In other words, you already have the skills you need to accomplish your dream, even if you do not realise it yet. Remember, you have every right to feel confident in your abilities. If you didn't have what it takes, you wouldn't be reading this book. You would not have decided to take a chance on yourself and start your journey towards your dream. Having more confidence in yourself (even if you have to fake it for a while) will have a direct influence on your level of achievement by raising your standards and limiting procrastination.<sup>26</sup>



## **How to start**

Here is what I would like to ask you to do. Feel free to do this as much or as little as you want, but I would suggest investing some time and effort into this assessment as it will feed into many of the other chapters in the book, especially when we come to finding the right times when you will work on your different daily tasks.

The first step is to break up your day into three segments. This will depend on your own schedule for precise timings, but it will look something like this:

1. The morning from waking up–12 pm
2. Afternoon from 12–5 pm
3. Evening from 5 pm–sleep

Think of them like three miniature days in one, because we can structure each of them independently. A great feature of doing this is that on days where you don't quite manage to get everything done, say, in the morning, you still have two more attempts (afternoon and evening). It doesn't feel like the day is lost because it didn't go to plan in the morning. You get three attempts to have a productive day. William Durant, the 20th-century creator of General Motors, said it best when he exclaimed that we should “forget past mistakes, forget failures. Forget everything except what you are going to do now and do it!” So, if there are moments in your day where you feel like you didn't work on something you had planned, then it is OK. I encourage you to think of this quotation and move past it towards the next great thing you will do.

## **Time inefficiency**

Firstly, what is time inefficiency? Let's look at it this way: are you very productive until lunchtime, and then the afternoon lag comes and you find yourself scrolling through your phone more and more? Are there multiple breaks of five minutes

in the morning and then an evening of time-wasting? This will be important to understand, but as mentioned earlier, it is not about removing all of this time, it is about finding a healthier balance that fits into your own life and goals. Here, we only need to have a general overview of how much time is being lost. So, total up the time in each segment of the day, to give you an understanding of the total time that is wasted. Make notes on your phone or journal with estimates of how much time you could have been working on your tasks.

Examining your day in this way is a useful exercise at this stage because it produces a clear-cut example of how much time really exists in your day. This does not mean that we will look to remove any shred of time you spend relaxing, of course not, because relaxing and allowing yourself time to take the pressure off is also important, but at this early stage in your journey, we need to see just how much time is there in the first place.

### **Building on what you know**

For the next seven days (make sure to include weekends), note down any time you spend doing something that wastes your time, or to put it a better way, uses your time inefficiently. You could write this down in a journal or anything you have with you on a daily basis. There are mobile phone applications that work really well for this. If you spend 5 minutes on YouTube, or a few minutes checking your social media feed, then write it down. Perhaps it could be 45 minutes listening to the radio on your daily commute or sitting in a car for an hour waiting for your child to finish their after-school activities. Whatever it is, make sure you write it in your journal. If you are unsure if it needs to be written down, note it anyway, and you can always change it at a later date.

**“GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR DOING THIS. IT IS  
COURAGEOUS AND CHALLENGING”.**

This is done for a week rather than a single day, because each day will be different depending on your schedule. For example, Mondays may be particularly busy for you, whereas Wednesday and Thursday evenings may be when you have free time and have an opportunity to work on your goals. Once you have your week of timings written out, double-check the time inefficiency items on the list to make sure you are comfortable that everything is included.

## **Time to cut**

When you feel ready, you can use what you have learned. Start the next day by cutting this time by 50%. This means that you can still have moments of distractions, but they are limited to around half the time you would normally have. Over the following months, we can reduce this even further, although I would limit this to a maximum of 80% reduction, because you don't want to burn yourself out, and as mentioned earlier, having time to relax during the day is recommended. So, if during the day you spend one hour on irrelevant things that use up your productive time, look to reduce that by around 30 minutes. When you catch yourself on your phone, social media, or whatever it is that distracts you, acknowledge it and start a new task from the list of 'easy tasks' you have created.

This may feel like a big change, but it has been shown that during our time spent at work, only 60% is spent doing things that would be deemed productive (probably best not to mention this to your manager).<sup>27</sup> If we apply this statistic to our home life and free time, we can easily see how there is room for improvement. If you want to be more productive in your profession and are motivated by career advancement, then keep this statistic in your mind as you aim to cut time inefficiencies in your day.

These timings will change as you move closer towards your goals and become more familiar with the process. You will need to assess them often at first to find the right balance for you. So don't worry too much if it feels unnatural right now; it will be a dramatic change to your schedule that takes time to adjust to, but it will become easier over time. As you learn to integrate *The Quantum Method* into your life, you will begin to identify areas of your day that could be segmented

differently, and you will be free to make those adjustments to your own schedule.

It is worth noting that you may not get the balance perfectly right during the first week of working with 50% less time inefficiency. It will require constant monitoring and feedback from yourself. This can be achieved more easily now we have broken the day into thirds because you can use each segment separately, and any time you catch yourself wasting time, stop yourself and have a task at hand for you to work on, preferably an easy-category task. Over the course of the next few weeks, you will find it easier to reduce your time inefficiencies. You will be amazed by how much you can improve your productivity with this one technique alone.

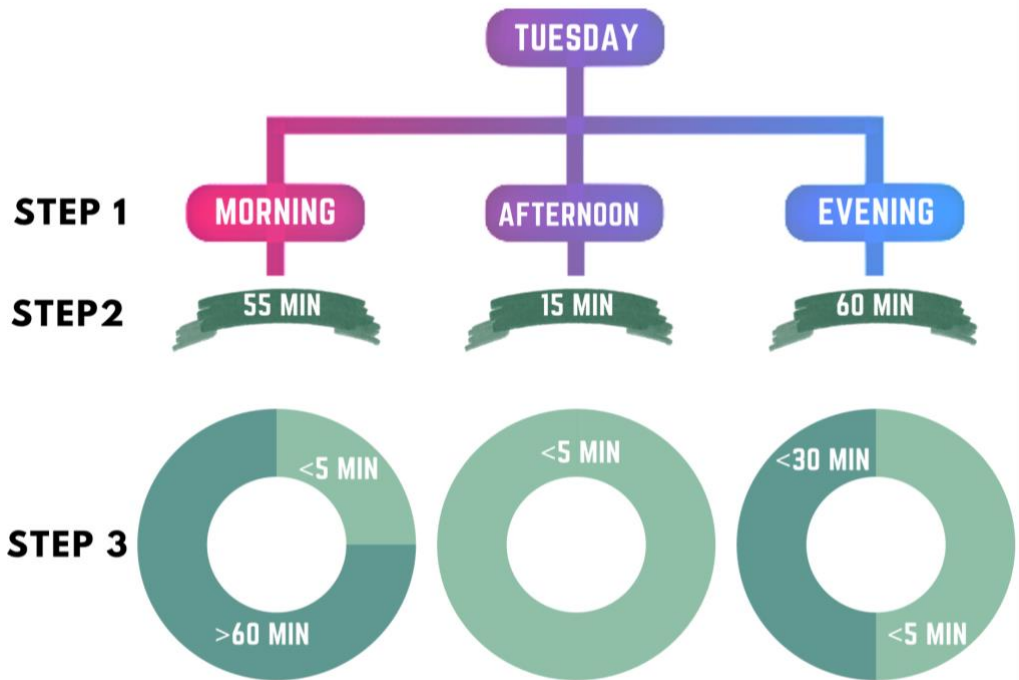
## **How to use it**

The two steps discussed are enough to help you to become aware of the extra time throughout the day that you probably didn't realise you had. We will build upon this idea later in the book as we discuss different devices that you can use to work on your tasks in different situations you encounter.

Now that you are aware of the time that is wasted, eventually, you will need to fill it with the easy, medium, and hard tasks you have already listed. For now, it is enough to only tag those times with the tasks you could do. So, if you have ten minutes at lunch time when you typically use social media, you can find an appropriate task to perform instead. Once you have steps 1 and 2 written out, try to get creative with what you could be doing instead. This way, when you catch yourself wasting that time, you already know what you could be doing instead, and can begin working on that task.

Use the diagram of time inefficiency to help you. The more critical areas are steps 1 and 2, but they can be analysed further if you want to dive deeper, as shown in the diagram on the next page.

## Example of time efficiency



*It is incredible how much time each day we lose. Once we identify this time we can begin to mark out segments that we can use to become more productive.*

### Inefficiency schedule

For those of you who want to go a little deeper and extract even more time from your day, there is a way to do it. Once you have your inefficiency schedule, as I like to call it, you will need to break down each segment into estimates of time, which is shown in step 3 of the diagram. This means that each time you do something, like using social media, you should try to have an idea of how long you will spend doing it. For example, are most of your inefficiencies around five minutes? Or are they longer, maybe 30 minutes or more? Are they varied or

dependent on the day of the week? You do not need to be exact here, but it should give you an idea of the types of free time you will have in each part of your day, once we clean up some of these inefficiencies. We will use those time slots to give an even clearer idea as to which productive task can be substituted for these moments. A useful function of smartphones is the ability to look at daily screen time. Your phone will even break down the total screen time into specific apps, making it easier to gather this information. A simple look into the phone settings may yield valuable data for you.

If you are someone who finds themselves struggling to use your new time effectively, then don't worry. It can take time to learn to 'switch on' to boost productivity when there are only short windows of time throughout the day. It has been reported<sup>28</sup> that it can take people up to one hour to 'ramp up' to take on a productive task. The very thought of it can be daunting and we often need time to adjust. This is fine to begin with, but as we go through this book, we will learn to switch easily into productive mode whenever we need to and reduce procrastination to zero. Let other people take one hour, and while they are wasting time, you are getting your tasks done, taking one step closer to your dream. Keep this in mind the next time you have a short time window you have worked hard to identify in your schedule, and make sure to fill it with productive tasks that are going to benefit your long-term goals.

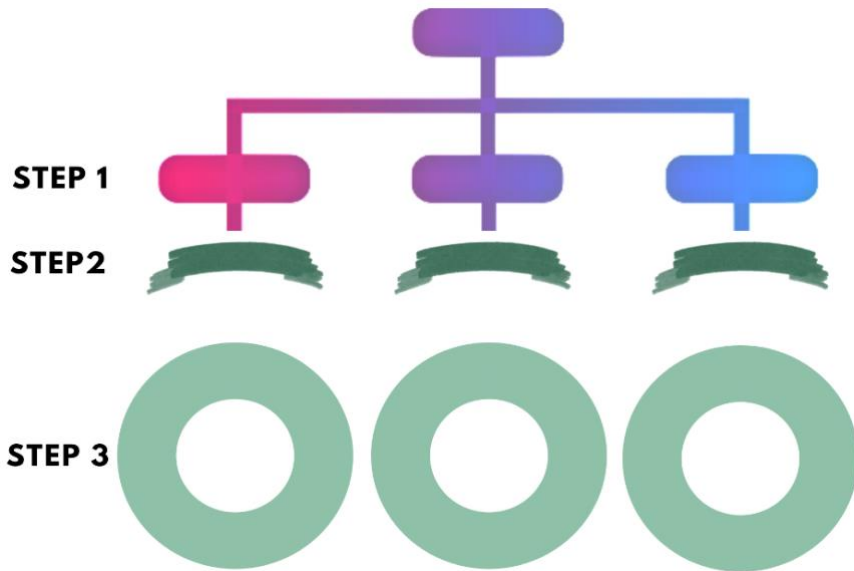
Remember to give yourself credit for doing this. It will feel like a drastic change to your daily habits, but it is incredibly inspiring when someone actively changes and improves their lives. It is courageous and challenging, and it already says a lot about your strength of character that you are willing to do it.

## THE OVERVIEW

We all spend a lot of time throughout the week doing nothing. At least, nothing productive that is going to help us to reach our goals. By identifying how often we do this, we can find moments in the week to work within, thereby increasing productivity without changing your normal schedule.

## The next steps

1. Draw out your own diagram using step 1 to break down your day into three parts, and step 2 to identify the total time wasted in each part. You can use the template below as a guide.



2. Then, begin to fill each of those times with more productive tasks in an effort to reduce your time inefficiency by at least 50%.

