# Plan Your Time

What the Research Says About Time Management, Planning and Feeling in Control

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2026 Edition | Free chapters 1 to 3

# Chapter 1: Can Training Change How You Manage Time?

Time management courses are a big business, so a fair first question is whether training changes anything. One field experiment set out to test it.

### WHAT THEY DID

The study tested the effect of time-management training on 56 employees at an Australian manufacturing company. Half attended a three-day training program and half did not. The employees had been randomly assigned to the two conditions (Orpen, 1994).

### WHAT THEY FOUND

The trained group rated their own management of time significantly higher after the program than the group that did not attend. The diary entries of the trained people over a two-week period after the program were also rated by three superiors as showing significantly better time management than the diary entries of the untrained group. The author concludes that, given random assignment, appropriate training can cause employees to improve how they manage their time at work.

### WHAT TO TAKE FROM THIS

Both the people themselves and three outside raters saw a difference. That is stronger than self-report alone. The result says time management is a skill that can change after teaching, not only a trait you either have or lack.

### LIMITS

The abstract does not describe what the three-day program contained, so the result cannot tell you which technique mattered. It covers two weeks of diaries, not months. It was one company, and the abstract gives no effect size. It does not say that trained people got more work done or earned more; the next chapters show that this is where other studies disagree.

## HABITS TO TRY

These are practical suggestions, not findings from the study.

Keep a short diary of how you spend each working day for two weeks.

Ask someone who sees your work to read it and name one thing that looks well managed and one that does not.

Treat time management as a skill you practise, not a mood.

Write down what you would want to be different in a month.

## A WORKED EXAMPLE (INVENTED FOR PRACTICE)

A bookkeeper keeps a diary for two weeks. She sees that every Tuesday afternoon vanishes into email. She blocks Tuesday for one task and asks a colleague to read the diary again two weeks later. It is her own check, not a study result.

## PRACTICE EXERCISE

For one week, write one line at the end of each day: what took the most time, and what you meant to do instead.

## KEY POINTS

In a random-assignment field experiment with 56 employees, a three-day time-management program led to higher self-ratings and better diary ratings by three superiors. The abstract gives no effect size or program details.

# Chapter 2: When Training Did Not Change Behaviour

Chapter 1 reported a clear gain. Another field study of time-management training, two years later, found much less. Good evidence includes the studies that did not work.

### WHAT THEY DID

This quasi-experimental field study looked at the effects of a time-management training program on 44 employees. It measured their self-reports of time-management behaviour, control over their time, job satisfaction and stress responses, and their supervisors' ratings of job performance. Some employees received the training and others did not (Macan, 1996). A quasi-experiment is a study where people are not assigned to groups purely by chance.

### WHAT THEY FOUND

Contrary to expectations, the trained people did not report more frequent use of time-management behaviours, more job satisfaction or less job-induced tension, compared with those not trained. Job performance did not change significantly after training. Perceived control over time did increase 4 to 5 months after training, approaching the level held by the no-training group. The author concludes that, in general, the assertions made about time management were not supported.

### WHAT TO TAKE FROM THIS

Time-management training is not a guaranteed fix. In this study it moved little that was measured. That does not cancel Chapter 1; it sits beside it. The two studies used different designs, different companies and different measures, and the abstracts do not explain the gap.

### LIMITS

Only 44 employees took part, and they were not randomly assigned. The abstract does not describe the program. The odd detail that perceived control approached the level of the untrained group is reported as the authors wrote it, and we cannot explain it further. One study is not a verdict on all training.

## HABITS TO TRY

These are practical suggestions, not findings from the study.

Judge any course by what changes in your own week, not by the promise.

Pick one measure before you start, such as hours of uninterrupted work, and check it after a month.

Ask whether a technique fits your job, not just the course.

Expect that some training will do little.

Give a new habit more than a few weeks before you decide.

## A WORKED EXAMPLE (INVENTED FOR PRACTICE)

A manager attends a one-day course and feels motivated. Before it, he wrote down one number: how many hours a week he had without meetings. Four weeks on the number has not moved. He changes how he books his calendar. It is his own test, not a study result.

## PRACTICE EXERCISE

Choose one number that would show time management working for you. Write it down today and check it in four weeks.

## KEY POINTS

A quasi-experimental study of 44 employees found no more time-management behaviour, job satisfaction or lower tension after training, and no significant change in supervisor-rated performance. Perceived control rose 4 to 5 months after training.

# Chapter 3: Feeling in Control Without Doing More

Chapter 2 found little change. A later experiment with a stricter design found a split result: more control and less stress, but no change in output.

### WHAT THEY DID

The study examined the effects of time-management training, which was based on psychological theory and research, on perceived control of time, perceived stress and performance at work. The authors randomly assigned 71 employees to a training group (35 people) or a waiting-list control group (36 people) (Hafner and Stock, 2010).

### WHAT THEY FOUND

As the authors predicted, time-management training led to an increase in perceived control of time and a decrease in perceived stress. Training had no impact on the different performance indicators. The authors also explored which techniques people used and found useful. Participants judged the taught techniques as useful, but there were large differences in how much each technique was actually used.

### WHAT TO TAKE FROM THIS

Feeling more in control of your time and less stressed is a result worth having, even if the work output does not rise. But do not buy time management on the promise of doing more work. In this study it did not do that. And knowing a technique is useful is different from using it: people differed a lot in what they actually did.

### LIMITS

The abstract does not list the performance indicators or the size of the changes, and it does not say how long the effects lasted. Control and stress were self-reported. The control group was on a waiting list, so it was due to be trained later. The abstract does not name the techniques.

## HABITS TO TRY

These are practical suggestions, not findings from the study.

Pick two techniques, not ten, and use them for a month.

Each week, mark which ones you actually used.

Rate your sense of control over your week from 1 to 5, each Friday.

Drop a technique you never use.

Do not judge success by work output alone.

## A WORKED EXAMPLE (INVENTED FOR PRACTICE)

An engineer learns five techniques. A month later his Friday control rating has gone from 2 to 4, but he only used two of the five. He keeps those two and drops the rest. It is his own record, not a study result.

## PRACTICE EXERCISE

Rate your sense of control over your week from 1 to 5 on three Fridays in a row, and note which technique you used most.

## KEY POINTS

In an experiment with 71 employees, assigned at random to training (35) or a waiting list (36), training raised perceived control of time and lowered perceived stress. It had no impact on performance indicators, and use of the taught techniques varied widely.

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