Pro-Time Pilot Study | March, 2019

Charlotte Blank | Charlotte.Blank@maritz.com
Laurel Newman | Laurel.Newman@maritz.com
Employee challenges

- Competing demands for attention
- Periods of high pressure and stress
- Proactive work deprioritized due to urgent demands
Goals of the Pro-Time Initiative

- Reduce employees’ stress levels
- Support employees’ increased focus on proactive work
- Increase on-time deliverables
Behavioral Science:

Task Choice

- **URGENT**
  - Do
    - Do it now
  - Decide
    - Schedule a time to do it

- **NOT URGENT**
  - Delegate
    - Can someone else do it?
  - Delete
    - No need

Important

Not Important
Behavioral Science: Task Choice

“MERE URGENCY EFFECT” (Zhu, Yang, & Hsee, 2018)

- People focus on *urgent* tasks, regardless of importance.

- This effect *increases* the busier we get...
“MERE URGENCY EFFECT” (Zhu, Yang, & Hsee, 2018)

- People focus on urgent tasks with less consideration of whether they’re important.

- *This effect increases the busier we get*...

Busier =

Increased pressure to get things done now,
Decreased ability to think through “importance”
(_Default to: urgent Y or N?)
Behavorial Science:

Divided Attention

- People **accomplish less** when their attention is divided (e.g., “multitasking”)
  - Up to 40% less productive

- **Accuracy/ Quality** of productivity almost always impaired (more errors)

- Increases **stress and anxiety**, feeling overwhelmed

Especially for Complex tasks
How can we:

Make **time** for proactive work (top right corner)?

Focus **full attention** during that time?

**Reduce stress/overwhelm**?
Proactive Time or ‘Pro-time’

Pro-time is time reserved for work that is highly important but not urgent.

- **Do it now** (URGENT and IMPORTANT)
  - Decide
    - Schedule a time to do it
  - Do
    - Do it now
  - Delegate
    - Can someone else do it?
  - Delete
    - No need

- **Pro-active Time** is time reserved for work that is highly important but not urgent.

- **Not URGENT**
  - Not IMPORTANT
  - Important
  - Pro-active Time

- **URGENT**
  - Urgent
  - Not Important
How the Pro-time method works

• Find a day each week to have a 30 min ‘weekly planning’ session
• During weekly planning session,
  – Log in/ complete weekly (5 item) survey
  – Block out two hours each day for Pro-time in the upcoming weeks (2-3 weeks out)
  – Make list of priorities based on importance
  – For each session in the upcoming week, fill in what you will work on in each pro-time block
How the Pro-time method works

• During daily pro-time block (2 hours),
  – Turn off all distractions where possible (e-mail, phone, etc.)
  – Refer to calendar for reminder of specific tasks
  – Try to stay focused on those tasks
Measuring effectiveness of the pilot

6 week duration

Pre Pro-time 25-item survey measuring stress and productivity

5-question weekly check-in survey

Post Pro-time 25-item survey measuring stress and productivity
Surveys are anonymous

• The surveys are unauthenticated anonymous surveys

• In order to track individual progress you will need to use an alias

• Your alias needs to be unrecognizable to us but easily remembered by you
Recall that participants completed a 25 item pre-measure and 25 item post-measure of Productivity and Stress. The 25 items actually contained the 8 facets (with roughly 3 items measuring each), shown below.

- Meeting Deliverables
- Time Management
- Productivity
- Responsiveness to Clients
- Work environment supports focus
- Work related positive emotions
- Work related stress (lower)
- Feelings about workload

- We expected the Pro-time group to improve, relative to controls, on the variables in Green.
- We expected the Pro-time group to decrease or stay the same in Responsiveness to Clients, as client e-mails and calls would be put on hold during the pro-time time blocks.
Data preparation

• Recall Maritz employees were randomly assigned to a “Pro-time” (Treatment) vs. a control group.

• We filtered all participants’ data to include only people who completed both the pre and post measures.
  – For the Tx group, we filtered out anyone who reported not following the pro-time procedure for at least 4 of the 6 weeks.

• After this, there were 22 people in the pro-time group and 24 in the control group.
Data Preparation

• Recall that all participants completed a 25 item pre-measure and 25 item post-measure of Productivity and Stress, which contained the following 8 facets:

  – Meeting Deliverables
  – Time Management
  – Productivity
  – Responsiveness to Clients
  – Work environment supports focus
  – Work related positive emotions
  – Work related stress
  – Feelings about workload
Data Preparation

On the 25 item scale, all necessary items were reverse scored, so higher scores always indicate a better situation (e.g., LOWER stress).

Separate pre-scores and post-scores were created for each person for each of these 8 facets.

A group mean for each of the 8 facets was calculated for each of the 4 groups:
- Control Pre
- Control Post
- Tx Pre
- Tx Post

A change score was computed for each individual (post-pre) for each of the 8 facets.
Two different types of analyses were run to test the differences between these groups:

1. T-tests on the change scores (pre-post) for the two groups, and
2. Regression analyses, with post scores of each facet as the dependent variable, treatment group as the independent variable, controlling for pre-scores on that facet.

The two sets of analyses yielded the same pattern of results, so t-test results are presented here.
1. Meeting Deliverables

Questionnaire items:

I am happy with the extent to which I have met/made progress on my deliverables.

I am often unable to meet my customers’ expectations on deliverables. (R)*

My customers would say I am great at producing deliverables well and on time.

* Reverse-scored

The difference between these slopes is not significant, t (43) = -0.93, p = .36
2. Time Management

Questionnaire items:

My time at work is used as effectively as it could be.

I have so many things going on at once, I often don’t know what to focus on (R)*

Prioritizing my time is very challenging (R)*

* Reverse-scored

The difference between these slopes is highly significant, $t(44) = -2.58, p = .01^*$
3. Productivity

Questionnaire items:

I am able to accomplish what I need to most days.

I meet almost all of my important deadlines.

Tasks seem to take longer for me to complete than they should (R)*

My productivity is excellent.

* Reverse-scored

The difference between these slopes is highly significant, $t(43) = -3.69, p < .001$***
4. Responsiveness to Clients

Questionnaire items:

My customers would say I am very responsive.

My customers are happy with my responsiveness to their needs.

The difference between these slopes is not significant, t (42) = -1.73, p = .09.
5. Work Environment/ Focus

Questionnaire items:

- Constantly replying to customer concerns prevents me from completing my other work (R)*
- I find it hard to put aside customers’ e-mails and focus on other work (R)*
- I am almost always multitasking at work (R)*

* Reverse-scored

The difference between these slopes **is significant**, $t (40) = -2.45, p = .02^*$
6. Work Positive Emotion

Questionnaire items:

I generally enjoy coming to work each day.

I generally enjoy working with customers.

I am happy with the amount of control I have over my work.

The difference between these slopes is significant, \( t(44) = -2.13, p = .04^* \).
7. Work Related Stress  
(Note: Higher scores = lower stress)

Questionnaire items:

I rarely feel overwhelmed at work.

I feel extremely stressed out most of the time when I’m at work. (R)*

I spend a lot of time “off the clock” worrying about work. (R)*

My workplace is no more stressful than most people’s.

* Reverse-scored

The difference between these slopes is highly significant, t (44) = -3.31, p = .002**.
8. Feelings About Workload

Questionnaire items:

There is too much to do at work and not enough time to complete it (R)*

If I use my time productively I can generally get the work done that I need to.

My workload makes me very anxious most days (R)*.

* Reverse-scored

The difference between these slopes is *highly significant*, $t(44) = -3.91, p < .001^{***}$
Conclusions

• As expected, participants who experienced the pro-time procedure showed significant increases in scores (relative to the control group) on the following variables, with the largest changes indicated by *:

  – Time Management*
  – Productivity*
  – Work environment supports focus
  – Work related positive emotions
  – Work related stress (decrease)*
  – Feelings about workload*

This indicates that the pro-time process has strong potential to increase both productivity and subjective well-being at work, even in a relatively short period of time.
Conclusions, cont.

• As expected, participants in the pro-time group did not differ from control group participants in Customer Responsiveness. This is fortunate, as it shows that pro-time participants were able to improve in the other domains without having to sacrifice client responsiveness.

• Only one hypothesis was not supported: We expected the pro-time group to improve, relative to control, on meeting deliverables. However, the two groups did not differ on this. We suspect this is because the 6 week timeline was not long enough to test this fully, though this is an important question for future research.

• Participants found value in the pro-time method. Of the Pro-time participants who completed the method, 84% said they think the pro-time method should be used broadly across the organization.
Discussion

• One limitation of this study is the small sample size. With only 46 participants it’s possible that those who completed the study were not representative of the total workforce. If this method is rolled out more broadly, leadership should consider whether other populations might differ from the individuals in this sample in their response to the method (an issue of generalizability).

• However, note that small sample sizes make it more difficult to obtain statistically significant results, so the fact that we did so speaks even more strongly to the power of the pro-time method for effecting change in the current sample (internal validity).

• Another limitation of this study is that the dependent measures of stress and productivity were limited to self-report. Ideally, we would have a more objective, data-based measure of productivity, such as client satisfaction scores or % of deadlines met.
Future Directions

• Future research should look more deeply at how pro-time impacts productivity (with a more objective measure than self-report) and deliverables (with a longer time frame than 6 weeks).

• The pro-time procedure itself could be optimized through testing within a particular environment. E.g., How many time blocks per week are best? How long should each one be? Should managers time block for employees to reduce friction, or does the autonomy of self-scheduling increase buy-in?

• We would also like to investigate moderating variables. For example, pro-time might be more important for people who work in fast paced environments, who have open office spaces, or who do creative work.
People have a theory of what their values are based on what they want them to be. If you want to know what someone’s priorities really are, open their calendar and see how they’re spending their time.”

- Matt Miofsky, author and clergyman