

From Activity to Effectiveness: Turning Multiple Ambitions into Focused and Transferable Results

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Being busy does not necessarily mean being effective. What do I need to change in how I choose priorities, make decisions, and organise my work?

I am used to being active, but activity does not always produce meaningful results. The idea for this experiment started during a hike with a friend. We discussed tracking our time in detail, including both work and personal activities, to see where it actually went. As the new academic year was beginning, I decided to use this idea as a self-awareness exercise.

I chose Peter F. Drucker's *The Effective Executive* as the theoretical basis for the experiment. Drucker argues that effectiveness can be learned through specific practices. These include recording actual time use, focusing on contribution, setting priorities, and concentrating on one important task at a time (Drucker, 2006).

The experiment lasted five weeks. During the first three weeks, I tracked my normal behaviour without intentionally changing how I worked. During the following two weeks, I defined an expected outcome before each professional work block. After the block, I recorded what had actually been produced and whether the result was usable. The purpose was to explore whether defining outcomes in advance would help me finish more work and create results that I or someone else could understand, use, or continue.

Part 1: What My Time Showed

During the first three weeks, I tracked work, studies, sport, travel, self-care, and personal life. I assigned each entry to a project or category and briefly described the activity. I did not record the intended contribution or the result of each block. Detailed weekly data are included in the appendix.

Indicator	Baseline result	What it showed
Total tracked time	279:26:44	An average of 93:09 per week, including work and personal life
Avera	20:57:12	7.50% of all tracked time

YMP community and coordination	24:21:34	8.72% of all tracked time
Pajas	22:30:00	A stable 7:30 each week
Life	99:24:42	35.57%, although the category was too broad for detailed interpretation
Athlete	37:41:29	13.49% of all tracked time
Professional project switches	63	An average of 3 switches per tracked day

To estimate project switching, I reconstructed the order of professional activities and counted a switch whenever one professional context was followed by another. I excluded personal life, sport, and travel. I counted 25 switches in the first week, 18 in the second, and 20 in the third. The frequency was not extreme, but it showed that my attention was divided among several projects.

Tracking in real time gave me a more realistic picture of where my time went. It also made me more conscious of the empty spaces between activities. When the timer was running, I was less likely to delay the start of the next task. At the same time, tracking everything created pressure to make every part of the day measurable and productive. This was useful for a short experiment, but it would be unhealthy as a permanent approach to personal life.

The most important limitation was that I recorded activity rather than contribution. The data showed time spent in meetings, coordination, preparation, and project work, but they did not show what these activities produced. I could see that I was busy, but I could not evaluate whether the work was complete, useful, or understandable to another person.

Drucker presents recording time as the first step towards effectiveness, rather than its final measure (Drucker, 2006, p. 35). His question, "What can I contribute?", moves attention from completing activities to creating results that matter to the organisation (Drucker, 2006, p. 52). This distinction became the basis of the second part of my experiment.

Part 2: From Tracking Time to Finishing Work

For the following two weeks, I added three questions to each professional work block:

1. **Expected outcome:** What should exist when I finish this block?
2. **Actual outcome:** What did I actually produce?
3. **Usable outcome:** Can I or another person understand it, use it, or continue the work without an additional explanation?

I considered a result usable when it had value beyond the work session itself. It could be a completed document, a recorded decision, a sent message, a structured analysis, or meeting notes with clear actions. If I had worked on something but had not created a result that could be used independently, I marked it as not yet usable.

During this phase, I stopped systematically tracking non-work activities because they were not central to my research question. A few sport and self-care entries remained in Toggl, but they were incomplete. Therefore, total tracked time and work-life balance cannot be compared across all five weeks. The comparison below includes only professional and project-related time.

Professional area	Intervention week 1	Intervention week 2
Avera	5.8 h	14.7 h
Business Leader, Averi	13.0 h	13.8 h
Pajas	7.5 h	7.5 h
Personal, Proakatemia	10.0 h	0.5 h
Averi Learning Journey	5.3 h	1.0 h
YMP	3.0 h	4.1 h
Averi Team Operations	3.0 h	2.5 h
Final Camp	0.5 h	0 h
Thesis	1.0 h	0 h
Community Hours, Proakatemia	0 h	5.5 h
Approximate professional and project time	49.1 h	49.6 h

The total amount of professional time remained almost unchanged, but its allocation shifted. Avera increased from 5.8 to 14.7 hours after receiving too little attention in the first intervention week. The Business Leader role remained at approximately 13 to 14 hours. The experiment did not reduce my workload. Its main effect was to make the purpose and endpoint of individual work blocks clearer.

Defining the expected outcome changed how I started a task. Instead of writing that I would "work on Avera" or "do Business Leader tasks", I decided what should be finished by the end of the block. This gave the work a clearer direction and reduced the number of situations in which I had worked for a long time without anything complete to show for it.

The question of usability strengthened this effect. I began asking whether another person could continue from my work if I shared it in its current form. This encouraged me to document decisions, complete drafts, and make the next step visible. It also helped me distinguish progress from a finished result.

Other blocks produced clearer results. I completed a reflective text about Switzerland that was ready for feedback and a final check. I prepared a list of twenty potential internship

companies. The Avera team contacted more than ten companies. A grant application for an Avera Learning Journey to Africa reached a complete draft and was handed to another person for feedback and the motivational letter. These outcomes could be used or continued without restarting the work.

This experience made Drucker's idea of contribution practical for me. Recording time showed where my effort went, while defining outcomes forced me to ask what would change because of that effort (Drucker, 2006, p. 52). It also exposed the difference between completing my part and creating something that is genuinely ready for the next person.

The experiment was influenced by an unexpected change because I became the Business Leader of Averi at the beginning of the intervention. The role introduced people-oriented work that had not been part of my original plan, including one-to-one discussions, defining the role, understanding individual needs, and deciding how to support different projects.

At first, my definition of a usable result favoured visible outputs such as documents, applications, and company lists. Leadership work challenged this definition. A conversation can create clarity, trust, alignment, or a better decision without immediately producing a finished document. My one-to-one sessions revealed information about team members' satisfaction, project involvement, missing customer hours, and development needs. When these insights were documented and translated into priorities and follow-up actions, they became usable leadership inputs.

I therefore expanded my definition of a usable outcome. It does not always have to be a finished file, but it should create evidence, clarity, a decision, or an action that affects what happens next. This recognises the value of people-oriented work without assuming that every meeting or conversation is automatically effective.

The new role also exposed a weakness in my prioritisation. Responsibility towards other people felt urgent, so it took time from goals that were personally important to me. I completed meaningful work, but not everything I had planned. I want to be available to the team without losing my own direction because of the team.

Drucker describes concentration as doing first things first and one thing at a time (Drucker, 2006, p. 100). He also argues that an existing activity should be removed before a new one is added (Drucker, 2006, p. 107). I added the Business Leader role without deciding what would receive less time. The problem was not a lack of effort. I had not created clear enough boundaries around the new responsibility.

The experiment also showed that my ability to produce good work depends on context. When I am tired from training, socially exhausted, or sitting at a shared team table, it is difficult to decide what meaningful task to begin. Defining outcomes in advance reduced this decision-making burden because I did not have to invent the direction of the work when my energy was already low.

However, an expected outcome cannot compensate for unsuitable working conditions. Creative and analytical work requires periods when I can work alone and concentrate. Shared environments are more suitable for collaboration, discussion, and tasks that benefit

from interaction. I need to plan both what I will complete and the conditions under which I am most likely to complete it well.

This was a short self-experiment, and its findings have limits. My behaviour changed because I knew I was tracking it. The judgement of usability was subjective and was not recorded with equal consistency for every work block. The Business Leader role changed my workload during the intervention, which made direct comparison with the baseline difficult. I also did not reconstruct project-switching data for the second phase. I therefore cannot claim that the intervention caused a measurable increase in productivity.

What I can conclude is that the method changed how I approached work. It clarified what completion meant, made unfinished work more visible, and encouraged me to leave results that another person could use. These changes were more valuable than the number of hours itself.

Conclusion

The most useful lesson was to plan what should be finished, rather than only what I intend to work on. Before an important work block, I will continue to define its expected outcome. After the block, I will check what was actually produced and whether it is understandable and usable.

At the weekly level, I need to choose a small number of outcomes that deserve protected attention and decide what I will not prioritise. This is especially important in the Business Leader role, where responsibility towards other people can easily expand into constant availability. Supporting the team requires clear contributions and boundaries.

I will also schedule creative and analytical work for periods when I can work alone and concentrate, while using collaborative settings for work that benefits from interaction. The experiment showed me that effectiveness is not about filling every available hour. It is about using limited time to create results that can be completed, understood, and continued.

References

Drucker, P. F. (2006). *The effective executive: The definitive guide to getting the right things done*. HarperBusiness.

Appendix: Detailed Baseline Data

Baseline Week 1

Category	Duration	Workspace	Percentage
Athlete	11:24:20	Me	11.46%
Avera	3:24:51	Proakatemia	3.43%
Community Hours	3:50:00	Proakatemia	3.85%

Community	2:38:17	YMP	2.65%
Coordination	4:53:13	YMP	4.91%
Life	40:58:22	Me	41.16%
Medicine	0:38:44	Other	0.65%
Pajas	7:30:00	Proakatemia	7.53%
Personal	11:18:09	Proakatemia	11.35%
Averi Team Operations	7:54:56	Proakatemia	7.95%
Travel	2:31:29	Me	2.54%
Without project	2:30:00	Other	2.51%
Total	99:32:21		100%

Baseline Week 2

Category	Duration	Workspace	Percentage
Athlete	15:03:30	Me	17.97%
Avera	8:24:07	Proakatemia	10.02%
Coordination	9:16:57	YMP	11.08%
Life	27:33:17	Me	32.88%
Life Organisation	4:23:33	Me	5.24%
Averi Learning Journey	2:02:51	Proakatemia	2.44%
Pajas	7:30:00	Proakatemia	8.95%
Personal	1:20:05	Proakatemia	1.59%
Averi Team Operations	3:09:29	Proakatemia	3.77%
Thesis	1:01:34	Proakatemia	1.22%
Travel	3:18:20	Me	3.94%
Without project	0:45:00	Other	0.89%
Total	83:48:43		100%

Baseline Week 3

Category	Duration	Workspace	Percentage
Athlete	11:13:39	Me	11.68%
Avera	9:08:14	Proakatemia	9.51%
Community	1:20:00	YMP	1.39%
Coordination	6:13:07	YMP	6.47%
Life	30:53:03	Me	32.14%
Life Organisation	4:46:27	Me	4.97%
Averi Learning Journey	1:30:00	Proakatemia	1.56%
Pajas	7:30:00	Proakatemia	7.80%
Personal	11:37:37	Proakatemia	12.10%
Self-care	2:00:34	Me	2.09%
Social	1:30:00	Me	1.56%
Averi Team Operations	4:20:00	Proakatemia	4.51%
Travel	4:02:59	Me	4.21%
Total	96:05:40		100%