

TIME, ATTENTION AND PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness and Prioritisation

Drucker · Covey · Allen · Eisenhower

PAPER 01 / 02

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

This paper opens the Time, Attention and Personal Effectiveness series in Furtherance's reference library. It covers the classic discipline of personal effectiveness – managing time, choosing priorities, and getting the right things done. The question it answers: what distinguishes effectiveness from mere busyness, and how is it learned?

Drucker defines effectiveness as a learnable discipline; Covey grounds it in principles and the urgent-important distinction; Allen builds a trusted system for execution; the Eisenhower matrix distils prioritisation to its essence.

Peter Drucker *The Effective Executive, 1966**Effectiveness as a discipline***CORE THESIS**

Effectiveness can be **learned**. Executives become effective through a handful of habits: managing their time, focusing outward on **contribution**, building on **strengths**, concentrating on the few things that matter, and making sound decisions. Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things.

FRAMEWORK

Habit of effectiveness	Meaning
Know your time	Record and manage where time actually goes
Focus on contribution	Aim at outward results, not effort
Build on strengths	Deploy what people do well
First things first	Concentrate on the vital few
Effective decisions	Decide on the right things, well

METHODOLOGY

Distilled management wisdom from decades of executive observation.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The foundational text on executive effectiveness. The critique: it is timeless but general, offering principles more than procedure.

Stephen Covey *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989**Principles and priorities***CORE THESIS**

Effectiveness flows from **character and principles**, not techniques. Growth runs from dependence to independence to interdependence, and the key to priorities is to **put first things first** – giving time to what is important before it becomes urgent.

FRAMEWORK

Idea	Meaning
Be proactive	Act within your circle of influence
Begin with the end in mind	Work from a clear sense of purpose
Put first things first	Prioritise the important over the merely urgent
Sharpen the saw	Renew capability so performance is sustainable

METHODOLOGY

A principle-centred framework for personal and interpersonal effectiveness.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Hugely influential in popularising principle-based effectiveness. The critique: the register is aphoristic and self-help.

David Allen *Getting Things Done, 2001*

A trusted system for execution

CORE THESIS

Your **mind is for having ideas, not holding them**. Capture every commitment into a trusted external system and process it into concrete **next actions**, freeing attention and achieving a calm, focused “mind like water.”

FRAMEWORK

Step	Meaning
Capture	Collect everything on your mind into one place
Clarify	Decide the next action for each item
Organise	Sort actions by project and context
Reflect	Review regularly – the weekly review
Engage	Act with a clear, trusted picture of the whole

METHODOLOGY

A practical, workflow-based personal productivity system.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The definitive personal-productivity method. The critique: the system carries overhead and can become an end in itself if over-tended.

The Eisenhower Matrix *Urgent / important prioritisation*

The prioritisation heuristic

CORE THESIS

Separate the **urgent** from the **important**. The enduring observation – that what is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important – yields a simple matrix for deciding what to do, schedule, delegate or drop.

FRAMEWORK

Quadrant	Action
Important and urgent	Do it now
Important, not urgent	Schedule it – the quadrant of effectiveness
Urgent, not important	Delegate it
Neither	Drop it

METHODOLOGY

A prioritisation heuristic, popularised alongside the effectiveness literature.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The most durable prioritisation tool in management. The critique: it is a heuristic, not a system, and the memorable maxim is only attributed to Eisenhower, not documented from him.

Synthesis

Contribution	Focus	Key idea	Register
Drucker	Effectiveness	Contribution; first things first	Foundational
Covey	Principles	Important before urgent	Principle-centred
Allen	Execution	Capture; next actions	System
Eisenhower	Prioritisation	Urgent vs important	Heuristic

FOR THE OPERATOR

The classic discipline turns busyness into effectiveness – doing the right things and focusing on contribution (Drucker), putting the important before the urgent on principle (Covey), executing through a trusted system (Allen), and prioritising with the urgent-important matrix (Eisenhower). For the operator: protect time for what is important before it becomes urgent, run a trusted system so attention is spent on judgement rather than remembering, and concentrate on the vital few. The final paper turns to focus itself – deep work, flow and the modern crisis of attention.