



# The P/A Ratio: What's Yours?

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No matter the environment, the sector or the make-up of the team, there appears to be one universal truth in healthcare. Everyone seems overwhelmingly busy and there are never enough resources.

The healthcare sector is continually being challenged to do more with less, to exceed the expectations of multiple stakeholders while combatting a number of pressures, including population growth with increased longevity. In a resource-constrained environment, it can be easy to suggest that more funding or additional staff is the answer. There is no question both are important determinants of success, yet it is easy to forget the critical role that strong time management can play. This is more than task management; it is recognizing that prioritizing what we do with our time and *how* we do it determines our overall effectiveness.

Whether we like it or not, many of us live and breathe by our calendars. They remind all of us – and sometimes dictate - how we choose to use the finite resource of time. In today's work environments that appear to be more demanding than ever before, in a world of 24/7 connectivity, are we simply overwhelmingly active or are we truly productive? Is every single email that clutters our Inboxes something that must be done right away? Perhaps not, but in a society that thrives on being instantly connected, the demands on our time are increasing and all of this busyness may be impacting our productivity.

Let's stop and take a step back for a moment. Imagine if each member of a 1000 person team committed to doing two truly productive things every day. That means that at the end of each day at least 2000 things would be dealt with, issues resolved, deliverables produced, deadlines met and outcomes achieved. Over the course of a year, that translates into hundreds of thousands of deliverables a year . Almost seems unfathomable, doesn't it?

In many organizations, productivity gains are impacted by activity; busy work that keeps us running from meeting to meeting just trying to catch up. In today's high speed world, how many of us email and text between meetings or now more often than not, continuously - during meetings, while eating, exercising, going to the bathroom, during family time or on occasion waking from sleep to deal with some pressing issue. Do we really believe that all of this activity represents productivity?

If we think about our daily lives as a balance between things that we do that are truly productive versus activities that keep us overwhelming busy with little to show for our efforts, we discover the importance of the P/A ratio. When productivity is greater than activity, a positive momentum builds where people feel motivated and energized. When activity overwhelms productivity, people feel saturated, demoralized and often frustrated with the seemingly endless demands placed on their time. As leaders, part of our role is to explore the practices within organizations that enhance productivity and not drive activity. Do we really need to have a pre-meeting to the meeting followed by a post-meeting debrief??

Healthcare leaders are motivated to make a difference in the system and to improve the lives of individuals and families. As leaders, how do we support team members to slow down and think about productivity versus activity? Perhaps thinking about productivity with a focus on outcomes that make a difference, things that will impact the system and deliver better overall care will motivate leaders and teams to consider that less may, in fact, be more!

Developing leadership capacity with enabling tools and frameworks to assist leaders is one way in which we can manage the paradox of activity versus productivity. At Southlake Regional Health Centre, our culture –*The Southlake Way* – challenges team members to embrace new ways of doing things Yet, how can we help leaders think about how their daily work and that of their teams is actually impacting outcomes? How do we create an environment where leaders stop, think and reflect about the work they are doing, then change their behaviours to create an environment where productivity thrives? How do we create an engaging environment where we are safe to have these types of dialogues?

The good news is that others have done it. Atlassian, an Australian software firm, suggests these issues can be addressed by changing the way we work together, through the utilization of collaboration platforms with action-driven outcome-focused meetings. Google has achieved remarkable results through a simple philosophy of innovation and collaboration while trying to push the boundaries of a traditional workplace.

This is a lofty goal in a constantly demanding, ever-changing resource constrained environment. In the health care sector, the continual change in processes and workflows means teams are continuously developing work arounds adding new processes to older processes. Very busy, activity driven environments do not help foster a disciplined approach to change management,

project management and lean methodology, nor do they help with creativity. As a system, we need to consider how to build these capabilities into our leaders as a basic leadership skillset.

Building leadership capacity to support healthcare leaders has the potential to positively impact productivity, engagement and increase the resilience within organizations. Perhaps we can learn from others how to change our mental models to redefine the way we work together to solve the myriad challenges facing healthcare today. It's our choice. Or, we can fall back in our ways and have a pre-meeting to discuss what will be discussed at the meeting, and then have follow-up meeting to discuss next steps.

It's your choice – how productive will you be today?