



Umbrella Summary

Time Management

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is time management?

The definition of time management varies across disciplines, researchers, and practitioners. In the context of workplace research, one suggested definition is “behaviours that aim at achieving an effective use of time while performing certain goal-directed activities” (Claessens et al., 2007, p. 262). Another is “a form of decision making used by individuals to structure, protect, and adapt their time to changing conditions” (Aeon & Aguinis, 2017, p. 311).

Most research on time management has used self-report measures; diaries and ratings by others (e.g., supervisors) are used much less frequently. Of the self-report measures, no one measure has risen to the top, and even the most popular ones have notable differences. Though the measures often include many of the behaviors that most of us think of as time management (e.g., organizing, setting goals, prioritizing, delegating), they can also include time-related attitudes, perceptions, and preferences. Though research has been conducted in employment settings, a lot of research has been done in academic settings, so there are many measures that pertain to study habits and other school-related conditions. Finally, many items are outdated due to advancements in technology (e.g., including references to notebooks or appointment books).

A recent attempt to integrate and improve upon the three most popular measures has resulted in a promising measure that assesses four aspects of time management: 1) assessment of time (i.e., self-awareness of time use), 2) planning, 3) monitoring, and 4) sense of control (Burrus, 2019). Examples items for each factor are “When I make a things-to-do list at the beginning of the day, it is forgotten or set aside by the end of the day,” “I break complex, difficult projects down into smaller manageable tasks,” “Could you tell how many useful hours you accomplished last week?” and “I find myself procrastinating on tasks that I don't like but that must be done” (Burrus, 2019).

Why is time management valuable?

Time management is valuable because it has a moderate and positive association with job satisfaction, job performance, and several indicators of employee stress and well-being (Aeon et al., 2021). More specifically, employees who better manage their time are likely to experience higher job satisfaction and receive higher job performance ratings than employees who are less able to manage their time well (Aeon et al., 2021). They are also more likely to

have lower stress, emotional exhaustion (an aspect of burnout), and other types of psychological and physiological stress (Aeon et al., 2021).

Can time management be improved?

Time management tips and resources abound. Advances in technology have resulted in hundreds of software applications across many devices, to improve the efficiency of email, scheduling, tracking, organizing, note taking, prioritizing, and more. Unfortunately, research has not even begun to keep pace with practice, though there are enough studies to identify some patterns. Meta-analytic research on time management has thus far focused mostly on assessing factors that are merely associated with time management, not on causal relationships. However, there are several factors that are seen as having the potential to influence time management behaviors. These factors fall into 3 categories: individual differences, job factors, and training.

For the most part, general demographics don't matter, though women's time management is slightly better than men's (Aeon et al., 2021). Several aspects of personality seem to play a role, with conscientiousness (i.e., a tendency to be organized, responsible, and hardworking) having the most powerful connection to time management (Aeon et al., 2021). Contrary to the hypothesis that time management is only possible in jobs that allow for some discretion in time use, job autonomy is not related to time management, though the number of studies is so far fairly limited. The only other job factor that has been examined in this context is role overload, which is only modestly related to time management, such that greater use of time management is associated with less overload (or more overload is associated with less use of time management; Aeon et al., 2021).

The more practical question is whether people can learn to manage their time better. Time management training options have been popular for many years, and dozens of courses are readily available online. Yet research on the effectiveness of these trainings is woefully limited. Thus far, the evidence shows that participating in training is modestly connected with improved time management behaviors (Aeon et al., 2021).

For child welfare professionals, the ability to make effective use of limited time is critical. New staff receive training and coaching on how to best prioritize tasks, plan their day, meet required timeframes, organize files, adapt to emergencies, and communicate efficiently, among many other tasks. Use of a time management measure could help new staff develop greater self-awareness about their strengths and limitations and allow trainers to evaluate the effectiveness of time management training.

One other factor that has not been well researched but that may affect employees' time management practices is organizational culture. Office or organizational norms may facilitate or hinder employees' tendencies to make effective use of time. To explore this concept, two measures are suggested for consideration: the Time Management Environment (TiME) scale (Burt et al., 2010) and the Time-At-Work survey (Schriber & Gutek, 1987).

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Time management is valuable because it has a moderate and positive association with job satisfaction, job performance, and several indicators of employee stress and well-being.
- ▶ Women are slightly better at time management than men.
- ▶ Several aspects of personality are associated with time management but conscientiousness is most strongly connected.
- ▶ Role overload is only modestly related to time management.
- ▶ Participating in time management training is modestly connected with improved time management behaviors.
- ▶ Use of a time management measure could help new child welfare professionals develop greater self-awareness about their strengths and limitations and allow trainers to evaluate the effectiveness of time management training.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers who would like to assess time management should consider the recently revised measure by Burrus (2019). To explore organizational norms around time management, two measures are suggested for consideration: the Time Management Environment (TiME) scale (Burt et al., 2010) and the Time-At-Work survey (Schriber & Gutek, 1987).

References

- Aeon, B., & Aguinis, H. (2017). It's about time: New perspectives and insights on time management. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 31, 309–330.
- Aeon, B., Faber, A., & Panaccio, A. (2021). Does time management work? A meta-analysis. *PLoS ONE*, 16, e0245066.
- Burrus, A. (2019). *What does time management mean to you? Exploring measures of time management and group differences* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri–St. Louis]. <https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation/886/>
- Burt, C. D. B., Weststrate, A., Brown, C., & Champion, F. (2010). Development of the time management environment (TiME) scale. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 25, 649–668.
- Claessens, B. J. C., van Eerde, W., Rutte, C. G., & Roe, R. A. (2007). A review of the time management literature. *Personnel Review*, 36, 255–276.
- Schriber, J. B., & Gutek, B. A. (1987). Some time dimensions of work: Measurement of an underlying aspect of organization culture. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 72, 642–650.

Author(s)

Megan Paul, PhD, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Suggested Citation

Paul, M. (2021, October 6). *Umbrella summary: Time management*. Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development. <https://www.qic-wd.org/umbrella/time-management>

For general information about Umbrella Summaries, visit <https://www.qic-wd.org/umbrella-summaries-faq>

For more information about the QIC-WD, visit qic-wd.org or contact: Michelle Graef, Project Director, at mgraef1@unl.edu.

This Summary was developed with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant #HHS-2016-ACF-ACYF-CT-1178. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the funder, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the US Department of Health and Human Services.