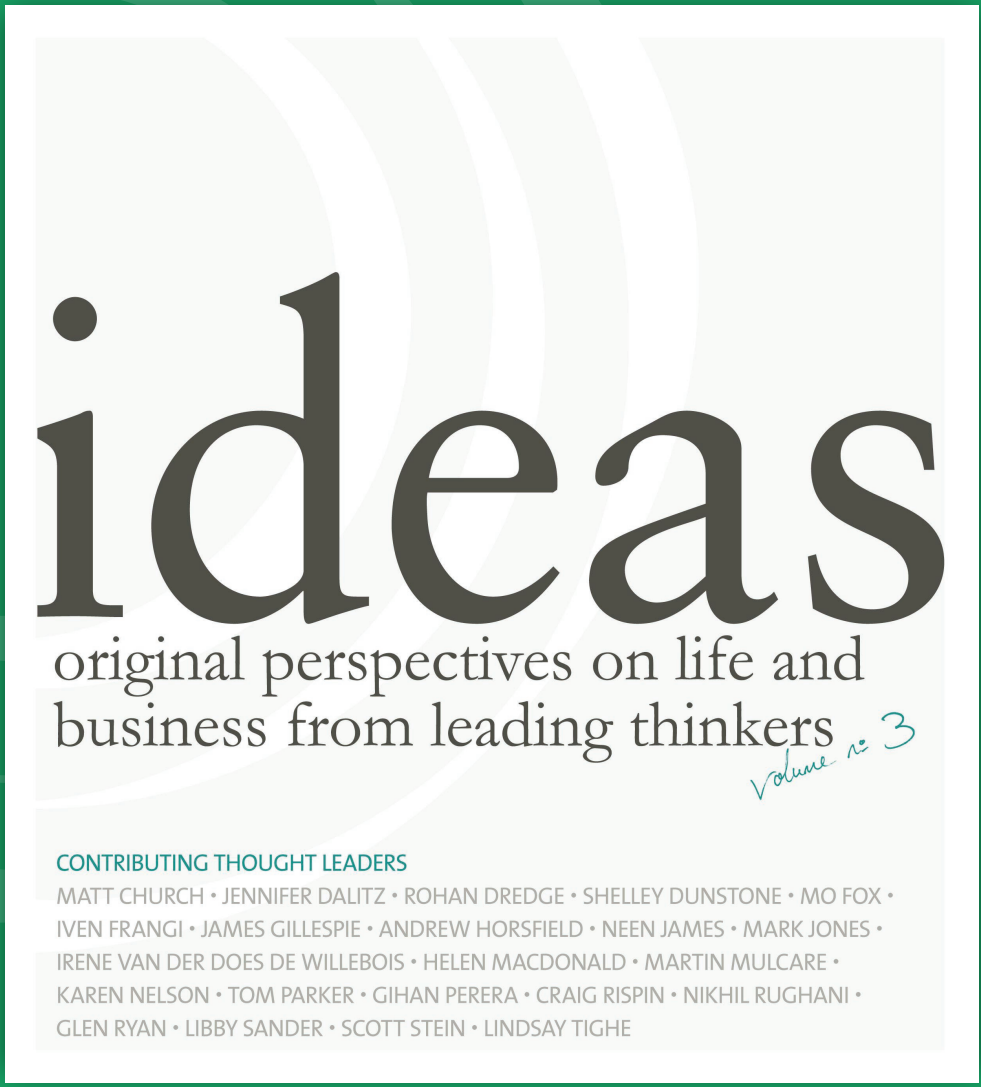


MATT CHURCH • JENNIFER DALITZ • ROHAN DREDGE • SHELLEY DUNSTONE • MO FOX • IVEN FRANGI • JAMES GILLESPIE • ANDREW HORSFIELD • NEEN JAMES • MARK JONES • IRENE VAN DER DOES DE WILLEBOIS • HELEN MACDONALD • MARTIN MULCARE • KAREN NELSON • TOM PARKER • GIHAN PERERA • CRAIG RISPIN • NIKHIL RUGHANI • GLEN RYAN • LIBBY SANDER • SCOTT STEIN • LINDSAY TIGHE

"A mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions"

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

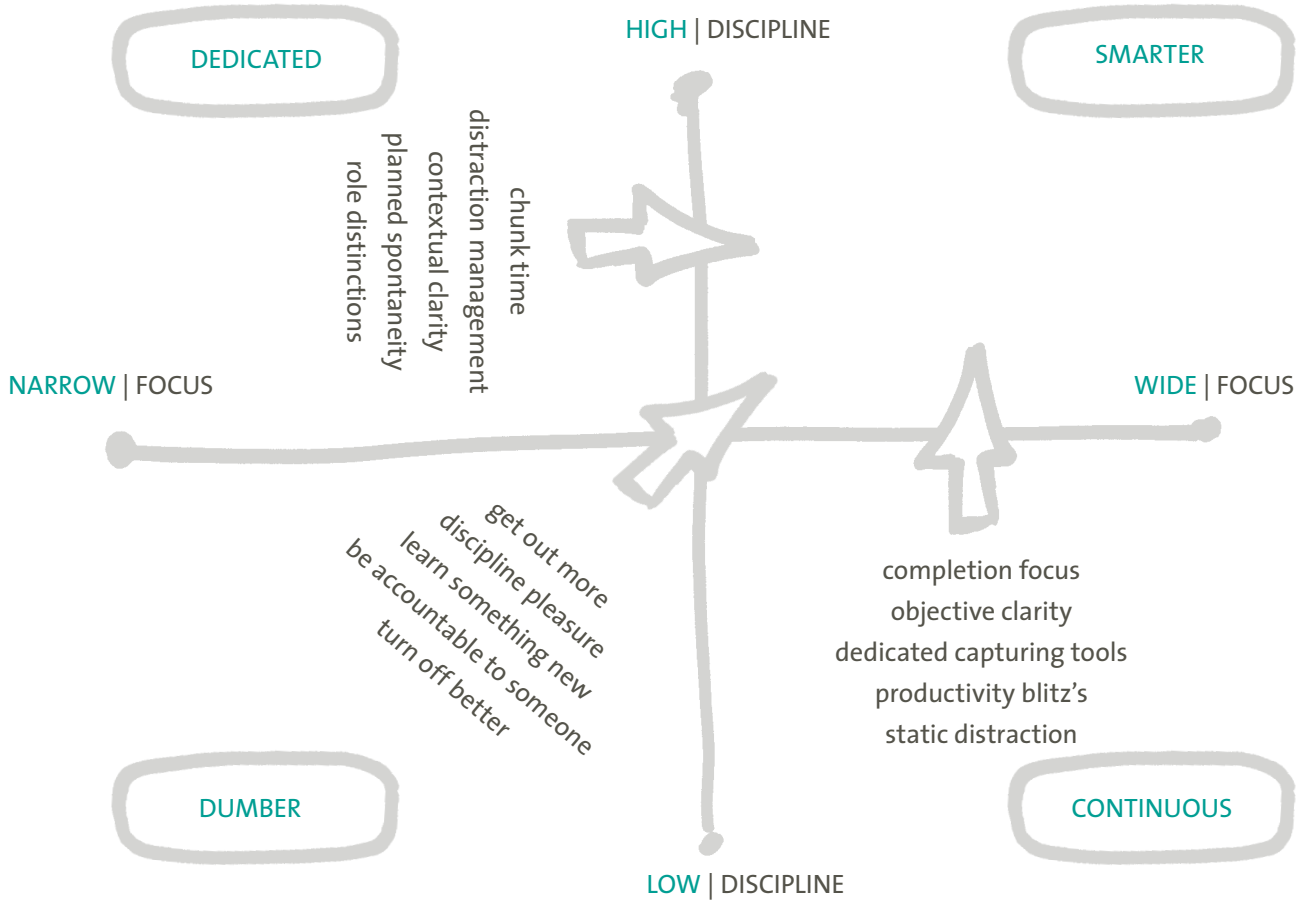
smart

“Most personal effectiveness programs are designed by disciplined, organised people in an attempt to get us to do what they want.”

One person’s ‘smart’ may be another person’s ‘dumb’. Recognise your personal productivity platform and use this awareness to increase your personal effectiveness.

work smarter not harder
MATT CHURCH

WORK SMARTER



I have a confession to make. I became fed up with time management/personal effectiveness programs that made me feel lazy and useless. I have a history of attending those programs and nodding agreeably to all they say, yet I knew that deep down inside there was always something fundamentally missing for me.

So I went in search of a different way of looking at personal effectiveness and productivity and that's when I cracked it! I can now sleep comfortably at night knowing that I am a highly effective person even though I don't use the highly disciplined approach advocated in most personal effectiveness programs.

This article is written with the hope that it will set a few people free, who, like me, have several books on the go at once, work better in noisy places than sterile offices and lurch from one project to the next following the feel-good energy.

At the same time, I want to reassure everyone that regardless of who you are – even if you like to-do lists and have a spotless desk – you can work smarter if you simply understand your *personal productivity platform*.

YOUR PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY PLATFORM

Attempts to categorise people do not always work all the time. In this model I acknowledge that the boundaries between the two main categories are blurred. The main objective is not to label who you are but to make the most of where you are at.

LOWER LEFT – DUMB

We all have times when we are not very productive: those moments of 'dumbness' are a part of life. Knowing when you are in a productivity funk is one of the smartest things you can do. For some people this can happen daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. Without gainful employment for a few months say, it is easy to get into a rut and not work at your 'smartest'. The first quadrant – the 'dumb' quadrant – is not a label but rather an acknowledgement that you are not doing your best regardless of your personal platform.

I can now sleep comfortably at night knowing that I am a highly effective person even though I don't use the highly disciplined approach advocated in most personal effectiveness programs.

UPPER LEFT – DEDICATED

The second quadrant is the domain of the dedicated person: highly disciplined, committed, reliable and on time. These people manage the detail of their lives brilliantly. They know the exact number of words required for the annual report, when it is due and the format required. They read emails in detail and carefully consider their responses before they reply.

Indications that you are a dedicated person

1. An email from a dedicated person is often thorough and contains more than one action item.
2. A dedicated person will read one book at a time and they only read when they have the time or the right head-space. Holiday reading is often their catch up time.
3. A dedicated person will choose one TV show to watch and settle in a chair five minutes before it starts with a drink and nibbles ready to go.
4. When a dedicated person says the report will be in on Monday at 10am, you can bet that it was 80% complete on Friday and they perfectly managed their time to complete it by the deadline.
5. A dedicated person finds it hard to return to deep thought after an interruption.

You can work smarter if you simply understand your *personal productivity platform*.

LOWER RIGHT – CONTINUOUS

A person in this quadrant will respond to an email that's from a dedicated person by answering the easiest or most important question and ignoring the rest. They are easily distracted and often go walkabout. They have several books on the go at one time and often don't complete them because they get bored.

Indications that you are a continuous person

1. A continuous person hates deadlines yet their best work happens in the final moments before the project is due. People often see them as being under pressure at the last minute.
2. Continuous people seem to do nothing for days and all of a sudden have a productivity blitz and deliver high-value work in the final moments.
3. A continuous person watches three TV shows at once – they flick through the channels hoping that one will deliver on the entertainment promise.
4. The mind of a continuous person rarely switches off. They are always thinking, although they might not be aware of it.
5. They know that by taking a walk, 'sleeping on it' or going to a movie, their creative wash cycle might just 'figure it out'.

UPPER RIGHT – WORKING SMARTER

This final quadrant is the sweet spot for all of us. It's the 'Smart' quadrant – the one where continuous people deliver on their commitments and dedicated people become aware of the big picture.

> The main objective is not to label who you are but to make the most of where you are at.

SUMMARY

To a dedicated, disciplined person, some of us look like unproductive, lazy good-for-nothings. They might be right but they may also be seeing someone who has a different personal productivity platform. This is not an excuse for laziness but rather a guidance system that allows all people, regardless of their style, to work together. Work smarter, not harder!

ACTION ITEMS

Getting out of the 'Dumb' quadrant

The 'Dumb' quadrant is a place that we all visit when we hit a funk. In this place we are 'less smart' about our time or work.

Discipline pleasure	Start setting little rules around what you do in your downtime, e.g., there is no TV or a shower until you have done some sit ups.
Get out more	New perspectives help you break out of your rut by giving you the inspiration to shift back into your preferred mode of either Dedicated or Continuous.
Learn something new	Learning something new is a simple way to rapidly get out of a 'doing' rut.
Be accountable to someone	Declare a goal to a friend, coach or boss to help you follow through on your commitment. There's nothing quite like peer pressure and living in integrity. Put signs and targets on your wall such as 'Exercise every day for the next ten days.'
Turn off better	When we are in a rut we 'numb out' and are happy to wind down with whatever is at hand. Try recording the TV shows you really want to watch and play them back rather than channel surfing and watching rubbish.

How 'Dedicated' people work smarter

Role distinctions	Be familiar with the different hats you wear and your role when wearing each hat. Don't blend your roles.
Chunk time	Plan your days in blocks of time and stop what you're doing when time is up. Discipline yourself to do the tasks in the time allocated.
Distraction management	Learn to say "no" and have some 'conversational scripts' on hand to stop people interrupting you. In an open plan office try to do something that signals 'do not interrupt me', such as wearing headphones that may not even be plugged into anything!
Contextual clarity	Always keep an eye on the big picture. Ask yourself, "is this the best use of my time?" Track the critical path of each project and do the big tasks first.
Planned spontaneity	Dedicate chunks of time in your day to unplanned activity. Use this for both your business and personal life.

How 'Continuous' people work smarter

Capture better	Have dedicated journals for all your notes and avoid loose bits of paper. For example, have one for ideas and one for meetings.
Objective clarity	Focus on the outcome of the meeting or project. Ask the question "What do we need to achieve here today?"
Completion focus	Spend your time getting things to the next stage rather than starting new projects. Consider a project list where you simply list all your current projects and dates for when you want them completed. Become aware of sequence and advance each project like the 'pucks' on a shuffleboard game.
Productivity blitz	Immerse yourself totally in an activity and don't stop until it's done – a continuous single-minded focus. "Today I clean my desk." or "This afternoon I prepare that presentation."
Static distraction	Use noise and crowded places as a way of focusing on a task. Non-specific noise helps a continuous person do more.