

Time's a thief? Urgent vs Important

Time feels like it speeds up around this time of the year, doesn't it? With festivals like Divali and Eid just past, and Christmas festivities to come, we all look forward to celebrating in this, the darkest time of the year.

And in the meantime, there are all those projects to be finished before the deadline of the holiday season. Sometimes we can feel hounded by time itself – there's just not enough of it between now and the end of the year!



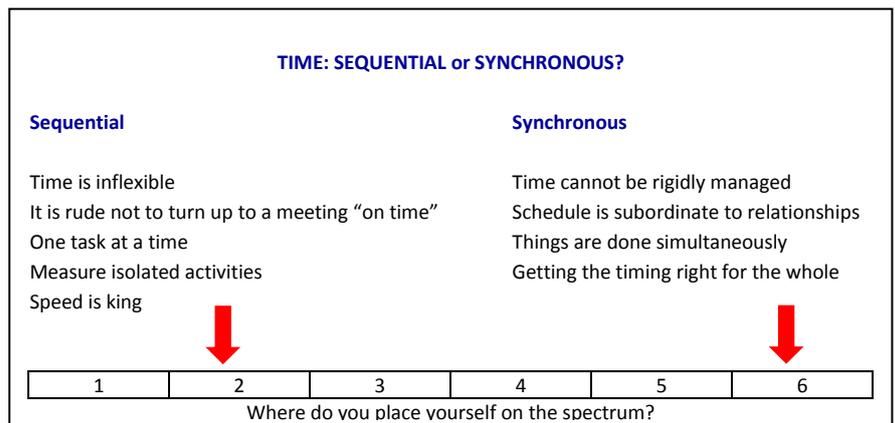
I reckon that how we view "time" is pretty key in our approach to leadership.

One thing to be aware of, for example, is that your colleagues may have a rather different sense of time to you. (Being a Brit married to a Swiss, I notice that there are some cross cultural issues around time to manage, very close to home!)

[Fons Trompenaars](#) has researched this cross culturally varied sense of time. We use his work in our Inclusive Leadership workshops quite a bit.

As he puts it: those with a "sequential" approach to time, see being late as just plain rude. Those with a "synchronous" sense of time see relationships as more important. (E.g., if they are involved with an important conversation with a client they may be a little late back to the staff meeting.)

Surfacing these differences and talking about them with colleagues is an important aspect of leadership today.



There is, however, a different kind of confusion around how we view time – and this time it's internal to each of us. I have noticed that in my work with leaders, whether in my coaching practice or in leadership development work, when thinking about time, some of us confuse the **urgent** and the **important**.

In the absence of overarching aims it is hard to distinguish between the two. At its' worst **everything** feels urgent, and we can get stuck in a spiral of busyness, leading to burnout and exhaustion. And how productive a use of our time is this busyness anyway?

The risk is that we can feel that the last few recessionary years have lent a further sense of crisis and urgency to our approach in leading our organisations.

So, as we regain perspective and choose to step out of a sense of "crisis management", it is high time to pull back and start to view the time horizon as wider now.



Ask yourself "What is really *important* for our organisation's future health and wealth?" "What conversations are we not yet having in the leadership team?"

Then perhaps making sure that you book that time for the important away day early in the New Year to work on the team/organisation's 5 year vision, values and strategy (as opposed to being lost in what we should achieve in the next 5 minutes, or 5 days).

I would suggest that a key leadership skill is being able to step back and *mindfully choose* where you will focus your energies – on what is most important, rather than always being hounded by the urgent.

That way we can encourage our colleagues to hold a longer timeframe in mind in planning for the organisation's healthy longevity, and when making key decisions, we can take account of that wider perspective, not feeling rushed into moment by moment decisions that may look good in the short term but will not leave the legacy we want to, for the longer term.

Best wishes for the coming weeks leading up to the holiday season, and a joyful and restful time over the break.

Warmly,

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This year, instead of sending Christmas cards we will be making a donation to two charities:

CRISIS – The national charity for single homeless people, and

RICE – Research Institute for the Care of Older People in Bath