

The Effectiveness of Time Blocking and To-Do Lists in Managing Employee Workload at Assessment Center

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in response to employees' difficulties in managing increasing and dynamic workloads, particularly multiple tasks, overlapping deadlines, meetings, and unexpected work demands. The study aimed to examine the practical usefulness of a handbook integrating time blocking and to-do list techniques in supporting employees' workload management. A one-group pretest-posttest design was employed with four employees of the Assessment Center Unit selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a 15-item workload management scale, supported by observations, semi-structured interviews, and handbook records. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, while qualitative data were analyzed descriptively. The findings showed an increase in mean workload management scores from 54.50 to 57.75, with all participants demonstrating individual improvements; however, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test indicated that the difference between pretest and posttest scores was not statistically significant ($p = .066$). Qualitative findings indicated that the handbook helped participants organize tasks, determine priorities, record deadlines, allocate working time, and monitor task completion. The findings also showed that time blocking needed to be applied flexibly due to unexpected tasks and changes in work priorities. Overall, the handbook provides preliminary evidence of practical usefulness as a structured tool for supporting workload organization. However, the small sample size, absence of a control group, and short intervention period limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger samples, controlled designs, objective performance indicators, and longer follow-up periods.

Introduction

The increasingly complex work environment requires employees to complete multiple tasks effectively, on time, and in accordance with organizational targets (Kodden, 2020). Rapid technological development, accelerated information flow, and increasing productivity demands have compelled employees to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously within limited time (Masri & Rakiman,

2025). Consequently, workload management has become an essential competency that enables employees to allocate resources efficiently, prioritize tasks appropriately, and achieve organizational objectives. Conversely, ineffective workload management may lead to task accumulation, missed deadlines, declining work quality, and reduced organizational performance.

Workload refers to the amount of physical and psychological demands that employees must complete within a certain period according to their capabilities (Delima, 2018). Likewise, the Regulation of the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs No. 12 of 2008 defines workload as the amount of work assigned to a position or organizational unit, serving as a basis for effective human resource management. Therefore, workload management encompasses not only the quantity of work but also an individual's ability to prioritize tasks, allocate time efficiently, and maintain work effectiveness.

In practice, increasing job demands are often not accompanied by adequate workload management skills. Employees may encounter multiple tasks with overlapping deadlines, making it difficult to establish priorities, organize schedules, and monitor work progress. As a result, tasks may be completed reactively according to urgency rather than through systematic planning. This condition reflects a discrepancy between the actual situation (*das sein*), in which employees experience limitations in managing work demands, and the ideal condition (*das sollen*), in which employees are expected to manage their work systematically and efficiently. Such discrepancies may increase work-related stress (Marisa & Utami, 2021), particularly when employees face sustained and overlapping work demands.

The Assessment Center Unit at PT Bukit Asam (Persero) Tbk was specifically selected as the setting for this study because its work characteristics involve multiple interdependent activities that must often be managed concurrently within predetermined timeframes. Employees are responsible for preparing assessment materials, managing assessment data, compiling and editing assessment reports, supporting feedback activities, coordinating assessment-related schedules, and completing administrative tasks. These responsibilities may occur simultaneously and require employees to shift attention between different tasks while maintaining accuracy and meeting established deadlines. In addition, the unit's work is characterized by meetings, Zoom sessions, changes in task priorities, and unexpected assignments that may arise during the workday. This combination of concurrent responsibilities and unpredictable work demands creates a specific need for systematic task prioritization and flexible time allocation. Therefore, the Assessment Center Unit provides a relevant workplace context for examining a

practical workload-management intervention based on time blocking and to-do list techniques.

The relevance of this setting was further identified through preliminary observations and discussions conducted prior to the intervention with an employee of the Assessment Center Unit. The preliminary findings indicated several practical difficulties in workload management, including task accumulation, difficulties in determining task priorities, concurrent responsibilities, and overlapping deadlines. These conditions indicated that the workload management issue was not solely related to the amount of work assigned but also to how employees organized, prioritized, scheduled, and monitored multiple responsibilities. The findings therefore provided a contextual basis for selecting the Assessment Center Unit and indicated the need for a practical strategy to help employees manage multiple work demands systematically.

This phenomenon can be explained using the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2017). The JD-R Model suggests that every occupation consists of job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to physical and psychological aspects of work requiring sustained effort, whereas job resources represent organizational or personal resources that help employees achieve work goals, reduce the negative impact of job demands, and stimulate personal growth and work engagement. When job demands exceed available resources, employees are more likely to experience stress, exhaustion, and decreased performance. Conversely, adequate resources may enable employees to manage work demands more effectively.

One relevant resource in workload management is time management. Time management is defined as the process of planning, organizing, and controlling the use of time to achieve objectives effectively and efficiently (Shakirova et al., 2022). Effective time management enables employees to prioritize tasks, allocate sufficient time to important activities, and minimize distractions that hinder productivity. A meta-analysis conducted by Aeon et al. (2021) demonstrated that effective time management is positively associated with work performance, psychological well-being, and goal attainment. Similar findings were reported by Adebisi (2013) and Patzak et al. (2025), who identified the contribution of time management to work effectiveness and productivity.

Among various time management strategies, time blocking and to-do lists offer practical approaches to organizing work activities. Time blocking is a scheduling technique that allocates specific blocks of time for designated tasks, thereby supporting concentration and structured work activities (Newport, 2016). Meanwhile, a to-do list is a structured record of tasks that need to be completed

within a specified period, facilitating task organization, prioritization, and progress monitoring (Fellmann et al., 2020). Proper implementation of task lists may also support systematic task completion and reduce task accumulation (Karras et al., 2017). Used together, these strategies provide complementary functions: to-do lists help employees identify and prioritize tasks, whereas time blocking helps allocate specific periods for completing those tasks. This combination therefore has the potential to support more systematic workload management.

The application of these strategies can further be explained through Goal Setting Theory developed by Locke and Latham (2002). The theory proposes that specific and clearly defined goals direct attention, increase persistence, and encourage effort toward goal achievement. In workload management, time blocking can translate work responsibilities into specific time allocations, while to-do lists can clarify task priorities, deadlines, and completion targets. These structured planning techniques may therefore help employees direct their attention toward prioritized activities and monitor progress toward work goals.

Previous studies have demonstrated positive relationships between time management and work-related outcomes. Aeon et al. (2021) reported beneficial associations between time management, productivity, and psychological well-being, while Adebisi (2013) and Patzak et al. (2025) highlighted its contribution to work effectiveness. Research by Fellmann et al. (2020) and Ohly et al. (2017) also supports the role of structured task management and routinized work behavior in organizing work activities and maintaining work focus. However, previous research has predominantly examined time management as a skill or its relationship with work outcomes, while empirical studies evaluating a practical intervention that integrates time blocking and to-do lists into a structured workplace handbook remain limited.

This gap is particularly relevant for employees who manage multiple concurrent responsibilities, varying task priorities, overlapping deadlines, meetings, and unexpected work demands. The preliminary findings in the Assessment Center Unit reflected these conditions, making the setting relevant for evaluating a practical intervention that combines task prioritization and structured time allocation. Therefore, this study developed a handbook integrating time blocking and to-do list techniques as a structured tool that employees could directly apply in their daily work.

The handbook integrates task identification and prioritization through to-do lists with structured time allocation through time blocking. It guides employees to identify tasks, determine priorities, record deadlines, allocate planned working periods, and monitor task completion. Through this approach, the handbook is

intended to provide employees with an accessible structure for planning and organizing multiple responsibilities.

Based on these considerations, this study aimed to examine changes in employees' workload management following the implementation of a handbook based on time blocking and to-do list techniques. The study focused on differences in workload management scores before and after the intervention and was complemented by observations, semi-structured interviews, and handbook records to provide contextual information regarding participants' experiences and implementation of the intervention. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on practical time management interventions in industrial and organizational psychology and provide organizations with an applicable tool for supporting workload organization.

Based on the Job Demands Resources Model and Goal Setting Theory, the use of structured time management strategies is expected to provide employees with practical resources for organizing work demands and directing their efforts toward prioritized goals. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study was that employees' workload management scores would differ between the pretest and posttest following implementation of the handbook based on time blocking and to-do list techniques.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach complemented by qualitative data to examine the practical usefulness of a handbook integrating time blocking and to-do list techniques in supporting employees' workload management. The method consisted of the research design, participants, measures, research procedure, and data analysis.

This study employed a pre-experimental method with a one-group pretest–posttest design. The design was used to examine changes in employees' workload management scores before and after implementation of the handbook based on time blocking and to-do list techniques. The independent variable was the handbook intervention, while the dependent variable was workload management, defined as the ability to plan tasks, prioritize work, allocate working time, and monitor task completion systematically.

Data Analysis Method

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics, including minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard deviation, were calculated to describe participants' workload management before and after the intervention. Given the very small sample size ($N = 4$), the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to examine within-participant differences between pretest and posttest scores.

In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative data obtained from observations, semi-structured interviews, and participants' handbook records were analyzed descriptively. These data were used to provide an individual-level description of participants' experiences, changes in work-planning behavior, application of time blocking and to-do lists, and practical challenges encountered during the intervention. The qualitative findings were used as supporting evidence for interpreting the quantitative results rather than as a substitute for statistical testing.

Procedure

The study began with an orientation session explaining the objectives, research procedures, and the use of the handbook. Participants first completed the Workload Management Scale as the pretest to measure baseline workload management effectiveness. Following the pretest, participants received the handbook and implemented the time blocking and to-do list techniques in their daily work activities for two consecutive working days during regular office hours (07:00–16:00 WIB). During the intervention period, participants organized work priorities, allocated specific time blocks for each activity, and documented task completion using the handbook. The researcher conducted direct observations throughout the implementation to monitor participants' adherence to the intervention procedures.

After completing the intervention period, participants completed the same questionnaire as the posttest. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges encountered while using the handbook. Observation and interview findings served as complementary qualitative data to support the interpretation of quantitative results.

Prior to participation, all participants provided informed consent after receiving an explanation of the study objectives and procedures. Participation was voluntary, and all collected data were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

Participants

The participants consisted of four employees from the Assessment Center Unit who were recruited using purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on several inclusion criteria: (a) actively involved in administrative or operational activities, (b) responsible for completing daily work tasks, and (c) willing to participate in the entire research process. The participants represented a small-scale intervention sample intended to evaluate the preliminary effectiveness of the handbook before wider implementation. All participants completed the pretest, intervention, and posttest phases. Participant identities and personal information were kept confidential throughout the study in accordance with research ethics.

Measures

The primary instrument was the Workload Management Scale developed by the researchers based on five dimensions: time management, work organization, priority

management, task accumulation, and work focus. The scale consisted of 15 items measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Unfavorable items were reverse-scored before analysis. The same questionnaire was administered before and after the intervention as the pretest and posttest.

Prior to data collection, the instrument was reviewed through expert judgment to assess item relevance, clarity, and representativeness. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha based on the pretest responses of the four participants. The analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.670. Because the reliability estimate was calculated from only four participants, this coefficient was interpreted cautiously as a preliminary estimate of internal consistency and should not be considered a robust reliability estimate. Further research involving a larger sample is needed to establish the reliability of the instrument more adequately.

The intervention instrument was a handbook integrating time blocking and to-do list techniques. The handbook contained guidance on time management, procedures for implementing time blocking, instructions for preparing daily to-do listREs, examples of workplace applications, and worksheets for recording tasks. The worksheets included task, priority, deadline, planned time, start time, finish time, and task status. Observation sheets and semi-structured interview guidelines were also used to document participants' experiences and challenges during implementation.

Results and Discussion

The analysis examined changes in employees' workload management following the implementation of a handbook integrating time blocking and to-do list techniques. Because the study involved only four employees ($N = 4$), the findings were interpreted through descriptive statistics, individual score changes, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, and supporting qualitative evidence from observations, interviews, and handbook records.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Scores

Measurement	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Pretest	4	51	58	54.50	3.11
Posttest	4	54	62	57.75	3.86

Table 1 shows an increase in the mean workload management score from 54.50 ($SD = 3.11$) before the intervention to 57.75 ($SD = 3.86$) after the intervention, representing a mean increase of 3.25 points. Given that the maximum possible score was 75, the absolute increase was relatively modest and should therefore be interpreted as a descriptive change rather than evidence of a substantial intervention effect. Nevertheless, all four participants demonstrated higher posttest scores than pretest scores.

Table 2. Individual Changes in Workload Management Scores

Participant	Pretest	Posttest	Change
I.P	56	60	+4
H.S	53	55	+2
E.A	51	54	+3
F.H	58	62	+4

As shown in Table 2, all participants experienced increases in their workload management scores, ranging from 2 to 4 points. The largest increases were observed for I.P. and F.H. (+4), followed by E.A. (+3) and H.S. (+2). These results indicate a consistent direction of individual change, although the magnitude of change varied across participants.

To further describe the distribution of scores, categorization was conducted using criterion-referenced intervals derived from the theoretical score range of the 15-item instrument (15–75), rather than population norms or standard deviations.

Table 3. Categorization of Workload Management Effectiveness Before and After the Intervention

Category	Score Range	Pretest n (%)	Posttest n (%)
Very Satisfactory	64–75	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Satisfactory	52–63	3 (75%)	4 (100%)
Fair	40–51	1 (25%)	0 (0%)
Unsatisfactory	28–39	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Very Unsatisfactory	15–27	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Before the intervention, three participants (75%) were categorized as satisfactory and one participant (25%) as fair. Following the intervention, all four participants (100%) were categorized as satisfactory. The categorization was based on the theoretical score range of the 15-item instrument, with scores ranging from 15 to 75 and divided into five categories: very satisfactory (64–75), satisfactory (52–63), fair (40–51), unsatisfactory (28–39), and very unsatisfactory (15–27). No participant reached the very satisfactory category because the highest posttest score was 62. These categorical changes provide additional descriptive information regarding the distribution of scores but do not constitute evidence of statistical effectiveness.

Because of the small sample size, the difference between pretest and posttest scores was examined using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test.

Table 4. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test of Pretest and Posttest

Comparison	N	Test Statistic	Z	P
Pretest–Posttest	4	10.000	1.841	.066

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test indicated that the difference between pretest and posttest workload management scores was not statistically significant, $Z = 1.841$, $p = .066$ (two-tailed). Because the p-value exceeded the 0.05 significance level, the hypothesis that the handbook significantly improved employees' workload management was not statistically supported. Nevertheless, all four participants showed positive individual changes. Therefore, the quantitative findings should be interpreted as preliminary descriptive evidence of change rather than definitive evidence of intervention effectiveness.

The quantitative findings were complemented by observations conducted during the internship, which indicated that employees in the Assessment Center unit experienced a dynamic workload involving multiple tasks, overlapping deadlines, simultaneous responsibilities, meetings, and Zoom sessions. Employees were also observed to resume work immediately after prayer and meal breaks, indicating the presence of continuing

work demands during the workday. Preliminary observations and discussions with employees indicated difficulties in determining task priorities, managing accumulated tasks, and dealing with work that needed to be completed concurrently or within overlapping deadlines. These conditions made the Assessment Center a relevant setting for the intervention because employees were required to manage several responsibilities simultaneously rather than completing tasks sequentially.

Before the intervention, participants generally did not record their daily activities, working times, or task priorities in detail. Work was commonly performed based on immediate demands or schedules provided by supervisors. The handbook introduced a structured process in which participants recorded tasks, priority levels, deadlines, planned working periods, start and finish times, and task status. The handbook records demonstrated that participants actively used these components during the intervention.

Table 5. *Summary of Task Records Documented in the Handbook*

Participant	Total Tasks	Completed	Not Yet Completed	Cancelled
I.P.	19	9	9	1
H.S.	13	11	1	1
E.A.	11	6	5	0
F.H.	8	8	0	0

The handbook records show that participants documented and monitored their work activities by recording priorities, deadlines, planned working periods, start and finish times, and task status. These records provide evidence of the practical implementation of the handbook, although they should not be interpreted as direct evidence of increased productivity because comparable task records before the intervention were not available.

The interview findings provided contextual evidence regarding how participants experienced the handbook during daily work. E.A reported that written deadlines created a greater sense of challenge to complete tasks according to the planned schedule. The priority classification was also perceived as useful when multiple tasks had to be handled, although additional assignments could arise outside the original schedule. I.P reported that the handbook was particularly useful for monitoring multiple Zoom meetings and other responsibilities because the priority and task-status features made completed and unfinished tasks more visible. H.S reported that before the intervention, tasks were often completed according to immediate demands, which could result in accumulated tasks being overlooked. After using the handbook, H.S reported having a clearer overview of daily activities because tasks could be planned together with expected starting and finishing times. F.H reported that work was previously performed mainly according to schedules provided by supervisors, whereas the handbook allowed activities to be anticipated and recorded in advance, which was perceived as helping reduce rushed work.

The qualitative findings indicate that the perceived benefits of the handbook were primarily related to organization, task visibility, prioritization, and work planning rather than demonstrated increases in objective productivity. This interpretation is consistent with the modest descriptive increase in questionnaire scores. The qualitative evidence therefore provides contextual information regarding how the handbook was experienced and used during daily work.

The observations and interviews also revealed practical challenges in implementing time blocking. The main challenge was the dynamic nature of work in the Assessment Center Unit, where new assignments could arise after schedules had already been prepared. E.A reported that additional tasks could occur outside the planned schedule, while I.P had to manage multiple Zoom meetings and other responsibilities within the same working period. These findings indicate that time blocking could not always be implemented as a rigid schedule. Instead, it functioned more appropriately as a flexible planning framework that allowed employees to adjust time blocks when new tasks, meetings, or changes in priority occurred. Thus, the handbook did not eliminate interruptions but provided a structured reference for determining priorities and reorganizing remaining activities.

These findings can be interpreted through the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Multiple simultaneous tasks, overlapping deadlines, meetings, and unexpected assignments represent job demands requiring sustained attention and effort. The handbook may function as a practical resource by providing employees with a structured method for prioritizing tasks, allocating time, and monitoring progress. Rather than eliminating job demands, the handbook provides an external structure that may help employees respond to those demands in a more organized manner.

The findings can also be interpreted through Goal Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2002), which proposes that specific and clearly defined goals can direct attention and support effort toward goal achievement. In this intervention, time blocking translated work responsibilities into specific time allocations, while the to-do list provided clearer task priorities, deadlines, and completion targets. Participants' reports of greater clarity, organization, and awareness of unfinished tasks are consistent with this theoretical perspective. However, because the quantitative analysis did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference, these theoretical interpretations should be considered explanatory rather than evidence of a confirmed causal effect.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that the handbook has potential as a simple workload-management tool for employees in the Assessment Center Unit. Its main practical value lies in making tasks, priorities, deadlines, planned time, and completion status more visible. Participants reported that these features helped them organize their work, identify priorities, and monitor unfinished tasks. For longer-term implementation, however, the handbook should be integrated into existing work routines rather than treated as an additional administrative burden. Employees could use a brief planning period at the beginning of the workday to identify tasks, determine priorities, and allocate time blocks, followed by a brief review at the end of the day to update task status and reschedule unfinished activities.

Nevertheless, the sustainability of the intervention cannot yet be established because the implementation period was relatively short and no follow-up measurement was conducted. The dynamic nature of Assessment Center work also requires the handbook to remain flexible, as unexpected assignments, meetings, and changes in

priorities may require employees to revise their original time blocks. Therefore, future implementation should emphasize flexible adjustment rather than strict adherence to predetermined schedules. Future research should examine the continued use of the handbook through longer follow-up periods, larger samples, objective indicators such as task completion and deadline adherence, and a control or comparison group.

Overall, the quantitative findings demonstrated a descriptive increase in workload management scores from 54.50 to 57.75, with all four participants showing positive individual changes. However, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference, $Z = 1.841$, $p = .066$. The

qualitative findings indicated that participants perceived the handbook as useful for organizing tasks, determining priorities, recording deadlines, planning working time, and monitoring task completion. Taken together, the findings provide preliminary evidence regarding the practical usefulness of a handbook integrating time blocking and to-do list techniques, but they do not establish a statistically significant intervention effect. Stronger conclusions regarding effectiveness and long-term sustainability require further research involving larger samples, control or comparison conditions, objective performance indicators, and longer follow-up periods.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide preliminary descriptive evidence regarding the practical usefulness of a handbook based on time blocking and to-do list techniques for supporting employees' workload management. Although the quantitative analysis did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, all participants showed descriptive increases in their workload management scores following the intervention. Observations, handbook records, and interviews further indicated that the handbook helped participants organize tasks, determine priorities, record deadlines, allocate working time, and monitor task completion more systematically. The findings suggest that the handbook has potential as a practical and low-cost tool for supporting workload organization in the Assessment Center Unit. However, the small sample size, absence of a control group, short intervention period, and lack of long-term follow-up limit the generalizability of the findings and conclusions regarding sustainability. Future studies are recommended to employ larger samples, controlled or comparative designs, longer follow-up periods, and objective performance indicators to provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of handbook-based workload management interventions.

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