

# H4 Consulting Brief

## Working Hard(ly)

Despite the perception that publicly funded organisations work slowly, many people who work in these organisations feel overworked, underappreciated, and under constant pressure to deliver large volumes of work. Quality is often prioritised over timeliness, so unfinished projects stack up, leaving workers feeling overwhelmed by the volume of concurrent work. Despite working hard, these teams often find themselves hardly delivering.

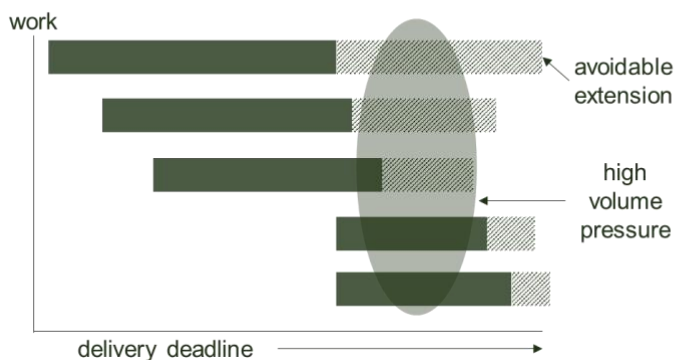
Many features of publicly funded organisations tend to encourage the perception that time is not the most important dimension to manage. The organisations have long lives, creating public value in ways that often demand ongoing time and effort. They also tend to be held accountable for indicators of quality rather than timeliness, valuing appropriate caution to avoid misuse of public funds or harm to vulnerable people.

Many people working in hierarchical organisations have only sporadic access to executives to progress or finalise work. Executives have many demands on their attention, and work can be delayed when they are unavailable to make decisions. Late changes in direction can mean that even finished work is subject to revision, remaining perpetually incomplete.

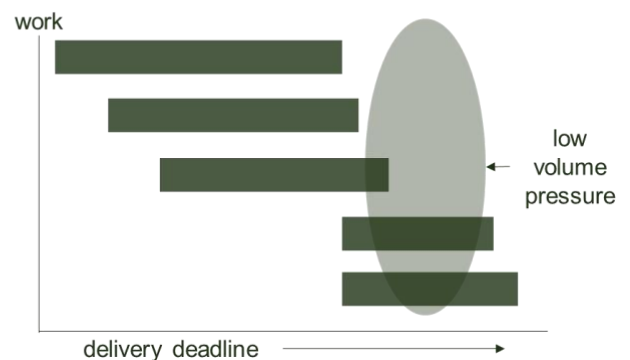
People working in publicly funded organisations tend to prioritise quality and, with finite resources, timelines often slip. Limited access to decision makers, often constrained by external pressures, compounds delays. Work in progress can remain half-finished for extended periods, waiting for the next step. This leaves space for new information or developments to trickle in, triggering often low value updates and rework that further extends delays.

Managing planned work reactively based on access to executive attention means that many workers feel powerless to control the pace and volume of their work. The lack of time pressure allows work to drag on and stack up, all demanding attention at the same time and increasing the feeling of volume pressure.

### work without time pressure dilutes focus



### work completed promptly enables focus



Teams that manage work more closely to deadlines will deliver more work on time and reduce the build-up of concurrent demands, reducing volume pressure. Balancing quality standards, workflows, and timeliness requires active management. The value of adjusting for any new developments, for example, should be weighed against the benefits of finishing the work on time. Work should not automatically stop to address new developments that offer few benefits.

Building a culture that is focused on meeting deadlines communicates a starting assumption that work will be completed on time, and the expectation that potentially conflicting deadlines will be managed across the team. Aligning decision points with executive availability helps them to focus on finishing important work, not just reacting to whatever demands are most urgent.

Increasing perceived time pressure can have the counter-intuitive effect of helping workers feel less overwhelmed. Reducing the volume of concurrent work, and the need for low value rework due to extended delays, increases the perceived control of workers, and empowers them to focus on getting things done. Executives spread over less concurrent work are likely to make better decisions and contribute to momentum rather than becoming bottlenecks.

Juggling many concurrent demands to high standards, gives workers many reasons to feel overwhelmed. A culture focused on finishing promptly gives workers many opportunities to feel a sense of achievement. Teams that strive to finish on time will organise their work in ways that simultaneously get more done, and feel a lot less hard.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: [info@h4consulting.com.au](mailto:info@h4consulting.com.au)  
Find additional resources at [www.h4consulting.com.au/resources](http://www.h4consulting.com.au/resources)