

## The Insight

Amy Jen Su offers a framework for managing our professional lives. This framework can also be applied to the processes and tasks of assessment, and teaching and learning more generally, for both faculty and students.

## Implications

What are your thoughts on Su's framework? What elements might you incorporate in your own work and/or share with your students?

*"[Using the four Ps] will help you shift from feeling unsettled and exhausted to working smarter, being more present, and spending time on the things that matter most" (Su, 2016).*

## A Different Notion of Self-Assessment

With Valentine's Day this week, it seems a timely opportunity to consider a more personal or relational view of the challenging work of assessment. Effective assessment at the course, program, or institution level requires time, critical and creative thought, collaboration, reflection, and energy. With a host of professional and personal demands on our time, these valuable resources may all too often seem too-thinly spread across the competing items on our To Do lists. Prioritizing tasks and time can be tough. Indeed, many people are "taking on heavier workloads with fewer resources, living with uncertainty during... change, and experiencing greater levels of stress" (Su, 2016).

In a post on the Harvard Business Review's website, Amy Jen Su describes a framework for self-management in the face of today's work world. This framework consists of the four Ps: *Planning, People, Priorities*, and being *Present*. *Planning* involves "using structure and rituals to stay organized." *People* concerns relating to and engaging with others. *Priorities* deals with being intentional with scheduling (or not scheduling) your time and energy. Being *Present* is attending to the people, tasks, and emotions present in an individual moment.

Su offers a self-assessment that enables you to rate yourself on different aspects of each "P" and see how your responses compare with the responses of other Harvard Business Review website readers. She reminds us to examine our scores without judgement and offers specific strategies for attending to each P. For instance, she writes that *Planning* can be enhanced through "look-ahead rituals." This entails mapping vacations, events, etc. on your calendar far in advance, and then "scanning" your calendar regularly and determining where small investments of organizational and prep time might yield large dividends. Mapping out your downtime (which Su calls "white space") and blocking it for "restorative" or "productive" purposes is also helpful: scheduling such breaks can help you maintain focus.

Su also recommends maintaining a "snapshot" to help with *Priorities*. To create your snapshot, write down what is most important to you. To build on Su's guidance, this could include values, goals (short- and long-term), and commitments. Adding your "why" may also be helpful, as could noting any relationships among your values, goals, and commitments. Su suggests carrying your snapshot with you and/or posting it at your desk, and using this constant reminder of your priorities to guide your actions and decisions. Further, Su advises us to "accept and then act" in order to stay *Present*. This might mean recognizing the unpleasantness or difficulty of a task, accepting the "discomfort" of it, and engaging in the responsibility. She notes that acknowledging the challenge "frees up our energy" to address it.

Su's framework is meant to be applied to the overall scope of one's professional life. Notably, though, aspects of Su's framework could be applied directly to assessment. For example, *Priorities* are parallel to learning outcomes. Keeping a constant reminder of learning outcomes can help ensure your teaching and learning time supports students' attainment of those outcomes. For *Planning*, setting your course schedule is not unlike Su's "look-ahead" task. Su's concept of both restorative and productive white space is a good reminder to intentionally include time for things like reviewing course material, seeking student questions, and/or building a sense of community in the classroom.

Similarly, students may benefit from her framework. For instance, encouraging students to map out their semester on a calendar, noting deadlines and exams, setting interim goals and deadlines, and including campus activities and personal commitments, can help them succeed. Engaging them in conversations about the challenges of assignments and strategies to tackle the hard work can help them acknowledge any fears or anxiety they have about the work, realize that other students may share similar fears, and understand the need to do the work despite (or perhaps because of!) these fears. Ultimately, reflecting on and applying elements of Su's framework might help anyone have a more productive, meaningful, and satisfying teaching and learning experience.

## Reference:

Su, A.J. (2016, December 27). *Assessment: Can you handle the increased workload of being a modern leader?* Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2016/12/assessment-can-you-handle-the-increased-workload-of-being-a-modern-leader>