



Operational Framework - Time Management

Briefing Document

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1 Use of This Document

This document presents an overview of some approaches to be used for identifying and managing the use of time within a Group / Board / Team / Organisation or individual. Forming part of the Operational Framework for Board – Executive Relationships, the focus is on issues relating to the consumption of time in an organisation and how to best use it, e.g. time of a Board. Any engagement depends rather on what the client is seeking to achieve.

Section 2 looks at issues impacting upon the use of a Board's time, whilst Section 3 notes some general issues around time management. Tools for monitoring the consumption of time within an organisation are seen in Section 4 and the value of time is discussed in Section 5.

2 Board Time

The issues around Boards and Executive Leadership, is making the best use of their time. This applies to before, during and after meetings. Issue for consideration include:

- Minutes, Agendas & Reports - Effective use of reports, minutes, agenda to prepare for meetings, to manage meetings and to assure the level of performance of a Board / Team / Group. Use as tools to drive accountability, resolution of ownership and decision making.
- Clear concise information – The right information needs to be readily presented to a Board for decision making.
- Time to prepare – Boards should be across the issues for discussion before they enter the meeting, i.e. Board members need to prepare beforehand and the right information needs to be presented in advance. Discussion is healthy, but long explanations to Board members who are not across the issues and lengthy discussions often make other members frustrated.
- Cases prepared and articulated – The business cases, proposals and related documents should be concise and articulate detailing the issue, the resolution, the cost and the result.
- Advised on issues & solutions – Boards are seldom exposed to the level detail and understanding that occurs at the source of an issue. Whilst a Board shows leadership, the Board often looks to the organisation for a recommendation. Boards need to be advised of issues and solutions for decision making.
- Discussion aligned to objectives & strategy – It is health for Boards to discuss issues but they need to come to a consensus and the value of discussion that is not aligned with strategy and objectives needs to be questioned.
- Decision making – Boards need to discuss issues but they are there to make decisions and provide direction to an organisation. If the Board is not making decisions effectively and efficiently, then the Board's performance comes into question.

If these are not happening in an organisation, then shouldn't the Board step up and ask for these to happen.

3 Making Better use of Time

3.1 Urgent and Important

Before looking at various productivity techniques and methods, one needs to distinguish between what is urgent and what is important. Sometimes they are the same thing, but often they differ. Doing what is important is that matters but we need to make sure that what is really urgent gets done.

It is urgent that I find job so that I can pay my bills instead of writing this document but preparing this document and sharing it with you to help your life is more important to me.



Balancing the urgent and the important is difficult but it is the urgent and important that should be done first. Many times we respond to things that seem urgent but which are not really urgent or important.

Consider the responding to an email instantly when it is probably neither urgent nor is it important. The case in point is all of the emails you can delete upon return from leave that are no longer relevant but which you would have rushed to read if you had been in the office at the time.

Do NOT let jobs fester. Nip problems in the bud and be pro-active with them¹. It will make you more productive and make you feel better.

3.2 Blocking Time

Although often difficult to do, we are most productive when we can block out time and concentrate on one thing at a time. Whether it is for a 5-minute period or a 30-minute one or longer, we are at a most productive when we can block out time.

Tricks for blocking out time include:

- Not replying instantly to emails, block time to respond to them.
- Sending what calls you can to message bank and calling them back later in another blocked period of time.
- Scheduling meetings in one block rather than all broken up throughout the day.
- Leaving time free at the start and the end of the day to plan etc.
- Arrange to do repetitive tasks at fixed times, e.g. weekly advertising is due Tuesday afternoon so it always gets done by 10:00 Monday. This not only makes it easier for you but others expect to do it as well.

Stick to it as much as you can.

Many of us try to block out time but find it interrupted by those around us. Techniques to overcome this include:

- Fix deadlines for repetitive tasks, e.g. weekly advertising. Be sure that others know the deadlines and what is expected. With time this will become expected and habit. Keep your time free as well to address these.
- Where possible minimise the interruptions by asking people to come back in 5 or 10 minutes. Most people will accept this for many things and with luck it will blow out to longer. Better still, set a time with them to come back and explain.
- Minimise the time of each interruption by asking people to leave things with you, advising of deadline and letting them know that you will get back to them for details on what is required. This saves time now and if they explained now you will probably forget and/or you will need to ask again anyway.
- Separate the urgent from the important and prioritise accordingly.

Stick to it as much as you can.

Blocking out time is not always possible and some interruptions may still occur but by trying and achieving what continuity you can, you will find that you are not only more productive but you will have a greater sense of achievement.

3.3 To-Do List

One of the best tools for maintaining productivity and assuring outcomes is the To-Do List. This is a simple list of what to do by when. It eliminates the shortcomings of a failing of memory whilst allowing you to budget your time accordingly.

¹ Be ones of the smart people who only need to do it once and properly rather than being the frustrated and inefficient person who does it many times badly.



Whether you use a paper list or an electronic one, remember the following when it comes to a To-Do List:

- The list is a tool to help you get the job done. The list is not an end in its own right.
- Record jobs on the list as they arise. The list is only as good as the information on it.
- Cross off jobs when they are completed or are no longer relevant.
- If job allocated to another party, note to whom and follow up accordingly.
- Set priorities for all jobs (A, B and C or 1, 2, 3 according to urgency).
- Regularly review and update list (daily and weekly).

Keep your To-Do List separate from your other notes and on top of the pile. Whether you combine a To-Do List and a diary of events is a matter of choice. Either way, both are required.

Remember the To-Do List also tells you what you have achieved and can be used to show your progress.

3.4 Everything Else

Accompanying the To-Do List is the Everything Else Book. This provides a consolidated view of your events and activities as well as providing a record of your activities.

Whether you use electronic notes or write in a book, keep copies of notes, ideas, meeting discussions and outcomes etc. in an Everything Else Book. Keep your To-Do List separate from the Everything Else Book.

Always note the date and time and attendees in the Everything Else Book. Make careful notes, as this may be your only record of outcomes.

3.5 Delegation

Delegation is about getting people to do things for you so that you get more done in your day. Delegation is both what delegates to you to do and what you delegate to others to help you.

Before we go any further, let us make it clear that delegation only works when you:-

- have someone to delegate to;
- delegate effectively;
- follow up to ensure what you want is delivered on time.

When you delegate to others you follow these principles and when people delegate to you, they should also follow these principles. Dumping on people is not delegation and is unproductive for both parties.

3.5.1 To Others

Having other people do things for you is the best way to get more out of your time. The challenge is achieving it successfully. Tricks include:

- Clearly explaining what is required and by when.
- Clearly define the hand-off to them and back to you.
- Following up early to make sure that the work is being done.
- Following up closer to the deadline to make sure that what you want is being delivered.
- Follow up before the deadline – a friendly reminder.
- Advising them as early as possible of any changes required or variations in deadlines.
- Helping people with issues so that they are motivated to help you and you are not seen as being difficult.



Delegation changes your role from production to management and problem solving when things go wrong.

Many people say they would like to delegate but do not have anyone to delegate to. Whilst this is often true, you would be surprised as to what you can delegate and to whom, e.g. a party submitting an incomplete purchase order to you for processing can be passed back with advice on how to complete it. This is delegation and frees up your time.

Dumping things on people and expecting them to be done is NOT delegation. That is just bad management. You do not like it when it happens to you!

3.5.2 To You

Many times, people are delegating work to you. By applying the principles mentioned previously, you can maximise the use of your time.

Be sure that you understand what is required by when and that you have the right quality of hand-off to you to allow you to be productive. By carefully pushing back on the quality of hand-off, you can increase your productivity. In addition, the principles outlined for blocking off time can be used to manage what is delegated to you, how it is delegated and how you handle the work.

3.6 Phone Calls

Phone calls are part of business and modern life. Proper use of phone calls can increase your productivity and careful management of them can be used to maintain your productivity.

3.6.1 Increasing Your Productivity

The phone is all about getting on with things. It is about having conversations, getting resolution and moving on. Careful use of the phone can increase your productivity.

3.6.2 Purpose

Reduce the number of calls you need to make and the time spent on each call by having a clear purpose for the call. Understand what it is you want to get out of it and have key points written down or identified. Only when you know these should you make the call².

3.6.3 Focus the Call

Reduce the amount of time spent on a given call by keeping it focused. Yes you need to include the social chat but keep it focused. Try to constrain it to your agenda and the subject you are looking to address.

Long-winded and complicated calls with no clear outcomes are frustrating for all.

3.6.4 Engaging Calls

Gain by making the calls engaging and interesting. An engaged listener is more likely to respond positively and to fewer calls than one who is unengaged.

3.6.5 Maintain Good Spirit

Although we may sometimes struggle and we may not always feel like it, it is important that the party on the other end leaves the conversation in good spirit – not burn bridges. This will make it easier should you need to call them or their organisation again.

² Social calls are obviously slightly different but the intent is the same.



3.6.6 Taking Notes

As required, take notes of the call as you make it. Include outcomes, agreements and action items. This saves you from having to recall things and write everything at the end. If necessary, send a short email to confirm issues.

3.6.7 Leaving Messages

Reduce the number of calls you need to make and the time spent on calls by leaving a clear message for the purpose. State:

- Who called (your name)
- Organisation (if relevant)
- When you called (time and date)
- Phone number to call back on
- Reason for the call
- Action required by the recipient
- Name of caller (your name)
- Phone number to call back on

You may need to return the call yourself to follow up but if no reply is received after three calls, they are unlikely to return your call. So either move on or change strategy.

3.6.8 Conference Calls

Getting people together on a conference call is a good way to bring people together to resolve issues. The principles for general phone calls apply equally to conference calls. The challenge is that there are many more people involved and a greater management of the call is required.

When setting up such a call, it is best to define who really needs to be there and control the number of participants accordingly. Provide all participants with details of the call including purpose, when the call is made and how to connect. Follow up with a summary email of the main points, issues and actions.

Use the downtime on a conference call to write notes and do other tasks.

3.6.9 Interruption Calls

Interrupting a call to take another call is very rude. Only if it is very urgent and/or you know the party well should you ask the party if they mind if you take the other call. Better still, send it to message bank and follow up in the blocked out time.

3.7 Maintaining Your Productivity

Whilst phone calls can increase your productivity they can also be a distraction when you are receiving them. Using the principles mentioned previously, maintain your productivity by:

- Taking only the most important and urgent calls.
- Blocking time to call people back.
- Following up where appropriate with a summary email.
- Actioning items as soon as you can and always follow up.
- Agreeing a time to call back when you start to play phone tag.



3.8 Emails

Emails are part of modern life and communication. Email is a very powerful tool and much information is contained within them. Email can also be very time consuming and unproductive. The following are ways to control email and keep you productive:

- Try to block out time for the processing of email. Be disciplined in this
- Limit the number of times a day that you process email. If it is really urgent someone will call you or come see you.
- Avoid instantly reading and responding to emails. Many are not important nor are they urgent.
- Either action an email, file it or delete it.
- Keep emails short and simple. If your email is over half a page then it should be in a document and sent as a document or as a link to the document. If your email is over half a page, get on the phone or go see the person to get the issue resolved.
- Where possible, talk to someone and only send a summary confirming email.
- Think before you send the email. Sending lots of email to lots of people does not make you look busy; it makes you look incompetent.
- Email is a means to an end and not an end in its own right. An empty email box is not a good measure of your productivity.
- Use email filters and other tools such as anti-spam.

3.9 Responding to Chaos

You may be highly organised and efficient in the use of your time but you may work in an environment where you need to respond instantly to things or the people around you are less efficient than you. This can be a cause of friction and frustration.

Whilst there are no simple answers and one size does not fit all there are a few things that can be done.

Do you really have to respond instantly? Will waiting a few minutes be that critical? Look at ways to buy yourself sometime.

Gently push back. Where possible, find ways to push gently back and/or say no with empathy. Ask if they can come back at a given time, can you delay the time you need to complete the task by, can you delegate, can you direct the person to another party? Simply say no, but say it with empathy.

Sometimes you need to play the onus back on those asking. Use techniques like asking them to clarify your priorities or draw them into finding solutions to a problem.

Make clear notes so that you can follow up on items at a later time and delay the non-urgent.

3.10 Timesheeting

Many of us are required to fill out timesheets and they are often an annoyance. Timesheets have many business uses but above all, they are there to help you. The frustration we often have with timesheets is because we do not do it as we go and/or we do not know what to put in them. If a To-Do List and an Everything Else Book are properly used, then they will make timesheeting easier.

3.11 Time for you

It is very important that you put time aside for you. A 15-minute walk at lunchtime or a 5-minute break after a difficult issue will make you feel better and make you more productive. The cost of not doing them is greater than the cost of doing them.



3.12 Only as Good as You

It is not about working longer; it is about working smarter. It is about being productive with your time. It is about quality use of your time. Whilst the techniques outlined can help you be more efficient and allow you to have more quality time outside of work, they are only as good as your implementation. The cost of not doing them is greater than the cost of doing them.

4 Time Consumption

Within an organisation or a team, the question of where time is consumed is often an important question due to the hidden costs that go with it.

4.1 Distractions

Distractions, those things that stop people from doing their job contribute significantly to higher costs and lower performance. Whilst some roles are about managing distractions and addressing the exceptions, most roles are about routine operations and service delivery where distractions are just that. The significance of priorities and supporting core operations are all often recognised, the issue though is what is detracting from these? Once these distractions are known, what is going to be done to address them or is that just the cost of doing business?

4.2 Time Outline

The Time Outline is just a simple list of days in a week on one axis and the topic of interest on the other axis, Figure 1.

Person / Role / Task	Day				
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri

Figure 1. Simple weekly time outline.

The time can be days, weeks, hours or combinations thereof. The other can be a role, a task or a person etc. The relevant information is then recorded. Uses include:

- Diary – Regular diary activity, including blocking of time and scheduling.
- Time allocation – Who should be doing what activities throughout the week at a high level. Ideal for tracking activities and what people should be delivering.
- Time consumption – Reporting time usage on tasks other than what is scheduled.
- Team organising – Similar to a diary and time consumption but for a team / roles.

Taking a Team / Group through the exercise of completing Time Outlines and tracking performance to expected, is often quite reviling.

4.3 Timesheets

Simple timesheets used as a tool for recording what is happening, i.e. where the distractions are, often reveals significant issues.



4.4 Issues Management

The simple identification of issues and seeing them through to resolution can be a simple yet effective tool for managing an organisations time. Issue management is about operational areas tracking issues as they arise, addressing them where possible and escalating issues them to ensure resolution. Issue management occurs at all levels, top down and bottom up, but it is the bigger items impacting multiple areas of business or significantly impacting service delivery that are important to senior and executive leadership. Therefore, a filtering process is required for issue escalation.

A simple tracking tool is required for reporting issues including items for action and follow up. Whether it is a simple spreadsheet, a database or a more powerful application, the following information is the sort of details that need to be tracked:

- Issue Number - A number for tracking an issue.
- Date Raised – The date an issue was raised.
- Issue Owner – Who in the business owns the issue.
- Business Country – Country of the customer that raised the issue.
- Customer Name – Name of the principal customer impacted.
- Business Area – Name of the impacted business area.
- Business Activity – The business activity that is causing the issue.
- Issue – A description of the issue.
- Business Impact – An assessment of the impact to the business from not addressing the issue: Extreme, High, Medium or Low.
- Resolution Date: Expected date for resolution of the issue.
- Issues Status – The status of the issue: Open, Closed, Re-opened or Deactivated. In line with standard audit practice: once raised, an issue cannot be deleted.
- Name of Raiser – Name of the person who raised the issue.
- Comment – A general comment field for further details.

As items are reported, they are raised and tracked to assure resolution. As part of weekly or other team and business meetings, the issues will be reported, managed and resolved accordingly. Staff will need to be trained on management of issues and should not be afraid or penalised for reporting issues.

5 The \$86,400 Account

Imagine you have a bank account and each day \$86,400 are deposited into it. Every day for the rest of your life you will be given the same amount to spend. You can spend as much of the \$86,400 as you want on anything you want. The only restrictions on the account are:

- At the end of the day, any unspent money is lost.
- You cannot roll over the balance of fund to the next day, i.e no savings.
- Your direct daily spend limit is \$86,400.

This is over \$32million per year. What would you do with money? Would you spend it all each day? How would you maximise your value for money? Sounds too good to be true? Well rest assured it is true. Each day we are given such an account, the question is what do we do with it? (In this case we valued one second at one dollar).

