



Productivity and Time Management

- CA Madhukar N Hiregange

Look upon time management as a vehicle that can take you from wherever you are today, to wherever you want to be in future.

Brain Tracy (Motivational Speaker)

“Are you struggling to manage your time effectively in a busy work environment?”

In today’s fast-paced world, productivity and time management are skills that are crucial for our professional and personal lives. We have experienced scenarios where we do not get enough time to complete our professional tasks. We do not know how to prioritise and manage our time accordingly. Most of our time goes towards minor tasks and urgent activities, which could be important or not. There’s not enough time to practise growth-oriented habits like enhancing knowledge, being healthy, and training ourselves long term.

“The key is not to prioritise what’s on schedule, but to schedule your priorities.” - Stephen Covey

We can categorise or rank everything we do in our lives according to its importance and urgency. We are aware of our tasks and know what is important, but we fail to prioritise them productively. This has become a pretty common issue faced by high-end professionals and trainers. Dedicating more time to our work is only going to get exhausting, and the hopes of “work-life balance” will end up being an illusion.

Let’s change our working style and beliefs for a more productive lifestyle.

If we know how to allocate time for each activity, ensuring that we address the **important** aspects in time and follow a proper structure to manage time, we can achieve brilliant success in our career or professional life.

As working individuals, it is our responsibility to stay updated on the subject, such as new trends and innovations, new competitions, and many other factors. Managers and high-end professionals have a lot of tasks to manage, making it difficult to allocate the necessary time for long-term tasks. The use of generative AI for research, automating routine tasks, and training juniors for delegation are part of the duties assigned to managers, which require their constant attention. One of the major issues seen among higher-level professionals is the fear of being outperformed or replaced by their juniors. Well, in order to build competence in the future, we look beyond ourselves, i.e., to the next line of business. It would lead to exponential growth for the organisation.

To understand the importance of “Work-life balance”, I would suggest an inspiring Ted Talk **“How to make work-life balance work”** by Nigel Marsh.

If you really wish to achieve satisfaction from your work life and personal life, then it’s time to ask yourself some difficult questions - Do we not want a work life balance, do we not want growth, do we not want good



health, do we not want to get up every day with a spring in our steps and get a good night sound sleep after a fulfilling day of work?

It's time we correct the misplaced prioritisation with our tasks and create a good structure with the help of 4 quadrant theory of management.

What is a 4 quadrant theory of time management?

The 4 quadrant theory of time management also known as Eisenhower Matrix is a framework for organising tasks according to its urgency and importance. Dwight D. Eisenhower designed it. Implementing the 4 quadrant theory helps us to balance our tasks and prioritise them according to their importance.

	I Quadrant <i>Important and Urgent</i>	II Quadrant <i>Important and Not Urgent</i>	
Necessary/ Manage It	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Overdue work Sudden assignment accepted 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Work being done within time Long term objective: building a knowledge edge; essential / future skilling; building a winning attitude; strategizing for future, training juniors for taking up responsibility/ work; training managers as leaders;; increasing the visibility of the organisation (brand) 	Most Important / Find Time
Omit/ Automate/ Delegate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lower priority work Long overwhelming list of jobs accumulated over time- creating stress and guilt 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lazing around in bed / gossiping in office Stress busters Distractions – TV, social media, notifications, serials.. Unproductive calls/ meetings 	Avoid / Limit
	III Quadrant <i>Not Important and Urgent</i>	IV Quadrant <i>Not Important and Not Urgent</i>	

Watch a quick and easy introduction on the **Eisenhower matrix** to understand better!

There are situations where what one person prioritises under Q II may not be the same for another person. Therefore, changing the order of discussion will help us convey the intended message more effectively. The examples above are as they are perceived.

Now, let's learn how to categorise our tasks into these quadrants.

IV Quadrant - Not Important or not urgent, Avoid or Limit

Activities like watching tv, playing video games, browsing through our phone or drinking away the evening could lead to living an irresponsible life. It is preferable to avoid these activities during working hours as they can be a distraction. Well, we can choose not to avoid them completely, as these activities often serve



as stress relievers or ways to relax after a stressful day. Give these leisure activities an allocated time so you can enjoy your free time without guilt and not live a robotic life.

We can start by avoiding such activities during our work hours and set aside just 1 hour at home for them. More hours of watching tv or browsing through your phone can become a lazy habit leading to an unhealthy lifestyle. The 6-8 hours post work, let's focus on taking care of our health, indulging in hobbies or sport and spending time with family.

III Quadrant - Not important and Urgent, Omit - Automate - Delegate

Some of us have a working lifestyle with a long list of unattended emails and 100+ tasks in our "To do" list. If we do, then you're part of this quadrant. The problem we face here is spending time on unimportant tasks like long calls, interventions during work and unscheduled meetings etc. In this quadrant, one is being held hostage and forced to be **reactive and unsatisfied**. By the month end, when we look into our productivity chart, we find ourselves unable to justify what exactly we have done of significance.

We can avoid this by implementing a few steps.

1. Remove tasks that are not important/urgent.
2. Distribute work among our juniors or colleagues, which would be suitable for them.
3. Stop saying "yes" just to please our boss/senior. Let them know when you cannot accommodate a task. This would be better than finding an excuse for unfinished work.
4. By automating some of our tasks, we can reduce our workload and stay updated with new emerging technology.
5. It is important to attend to certain tasks that cannot be delegated or avoided. Get these tasks done quickly to free yourself.

Eat the frog- Brian Tracy- short book

"Procrastination is the foundation of all disasters"

- Pandora Poikilos

II Quadrant - Important but Not Urgent

This area supports professionals like us in being proactive and taking action. We start by breaking our duties into 2 baskets. The first type of activities in this quadrant will be our primary job tasks. We have to complete these tasks on time and cannot delegate them. If they do not get completed on time, the tasks could move to Q I and we will have to compromise on the quality of work possibly while being out of control with regard to time.

Second type of activities are mainly long-term activities and personal development work -

- Recruiting the right people and training them with the adequate skills for the job.
- Focusing on goals that will benefit the growth of self and the organisation.



- Work towards a shared purpose and vision for the organisation.
- Keep yourself updated with new trends and learn new skills.
- Strategising a plan and allocating resources for expansion.
- Including automation for internal processes to increase work efficiency.
- Taking care of our physical and mental health.
- Building connections with staff and other professionals for smooth functioning of work.
- Spending time with family on a daily or weekly basis and going on holidays to rejuvenate.
- Strategising for future ventures.

We might be at different levels of our career, so the hours we spend on our tasks would vary. It's best recommended for a beginner to spend 50% of their time to enhance basic knowledge and expertise in the chosen field. It may reduce to 25% as soon as one achieves a reasonable level of skills and knowledge to deliver quality work.

I Quadrant - Important and Urgent

To understand better, let's categorise our tasks into 2 segments. We will focus on the first segment that are the tasks from Q II that we delayed and cannot postpone anymore. Segment 2 will act as the real emergencies, unexpected occurrences, or follow up from the client or boss. Most of us find some part of our work that keeps coming into this quadrant, leaving us no choice but to pull all nighters to deliver to the client. This creates an environment of stress causing us to compromise on the quality of our work.

Yes, it is inevitable to get rid of these tasks but we should train ourselves to reduce the time in this area as it would affect our growth in the organisation by working on the long-term goals rather than routine work. Illustratively described in Q II at this time could help ensure that we limit Q1 activities to no more than 50% in the early phases of practice and 20% in the mature stage. Because our line of work is dynamic, we will inevitably encounter situations in which we cannot disregard emergencies involving current or potential clients.

Note - The above classification may need a bit of tweaking depending on one's goals, position in organisation and character.

"Strive not to be a success, but to be of a value"

Albert Einstein

Conclusion

The Eisenhower matrix serves as one of the best tools for us professionals to enhance our productivity and manage our time the most efficiently. We can implement this tool into our work lives to help ourselves finish our Q I and Q II tasks faster, which gives us ample time to focus on our long-term goals. As we learn to prioritise our tasks, we will kick off the habit of procrastinating on our duties.

We should list down our tasks, why they're important, and the required time frame for each task to improve our work efficiency and achieve great results. Once we start implementing this tool, we should monitor our results once a week to increase our capacity and inspire ourselves to reach our goal and improve year by year.



Questionnaire

Question 1:

What is the primary focus of productivity?

- A) Maximising effort
- B) Minimising work hours
- C) Achieving more with less effort
- D) Increasing task complexity

Question 2:

What does the Eisenhower Matrix help you prioritise?

- A) Tasks by due date
- B) Tasks by difficulty
- C) Tasks by importance and urgency
- D) Tasks by personal preference

Question 3:

What is a key benefit of using the Eisenhower Matrix for time management?

- A) It increases the number of tasks you can do simultaneously
- B) It helps in making quick decisions based on task priority
- C) It eliminates the need for any planning
- D) It focuses on urgent tasks only

Question 4:

What tool is recommended for managing time and tasks?

- A) Random notes
- B) A to-do list or task manager app
- C) Sticky notes
- D) Oral reminders