

Quantifying your most important resource

Why measuring time can be used to justify changes to management

One thing we can all measure about our effectiveness is how we and our staff are spending our time. It takes very little additional time to do it, requires no one's permission, and costs no more than a software program.

How you benefit

You can use the information you gain from time recording to make your job more fulfilling and your time more highly valued by management. For example, you can:

- Determine how long it really takes to do something, in order to make better estimates and avoid over-committing yourself;
- See how much time is spent on your various highest priority projects versus other projects;
- Have a better basis for discussions with your boss on the need for additional resources – either more staff or a larger freelance budget;
- Quantify how much time is being spent doing the appropriate level of work by different levels of staff.
- Compare the cost of providing a particular service in-house rather than going outside to an agency;
- And, if you work in a business unit, you can quantify how much time it really takes to implement all the communication initiatives corporate pushes down to the field, let alone the work you are expected to do by your own operational management.

Keeping track of your time can be as simple as writing into a daily calendar what you did in each quarter hour of your day. Generally, you'll just write down when you start and end a particular activity, showing breaks if you were interrupted by phone calls or drop-ins to your office. Just reviewing it and drawing broad conclusions at the end of each week can be very revealing.

You can analyze your time more quantitatively for some truly eye-

opening insights. I'd recommend using packaged time-keeping software because of its flexibility in analyzing your time. However, if you just want to keep track for a short period of time or on only a few aspects of what you spend your time on, you can simply create an electronic spreadsheet for yourself.

Use codes to categorize

If you need to capture several different aspects of how you spend your time, create categories of code numbers or letters for each of these. At the end of each day, week, month or year, add-up the time you spent on particular activities, such as working on your intranet site, and turn them into percentages of your total time.

You could reserve certain project numbers for specific categories of your work, such as numbers in the 100 range for employee communication, 200 range for media relations, and the 900 range for staff management functions (recruitment, performance reviews, staff meetings). For example, "100" could be a catch-all for all small projects on employee communication, like drafting an e-mail for the president (first row below) and giving communication advice to operational managers when they ask for it (second row below). Project 101 might be the on-line newsletter, 102 the meeting-in-a-box support you do and 103 the brochure on the new pay program you're developing for HR. You'll also need a project number for general time not captured by other categories, perhaps "999."

The table (right) has been sorted by project code, showing that on November 1, this person spent 5.75 hours on internal communication and 2.25 hours on media relations. If we sort by the second column, we can more easily tell that this person spent 2.75 hours working on projects supporting the field, and 7 hours on corporate projects. Similarly, sorting the third column would show that he or she spent only half an hour on

strategic-level work, 6.5 hours on craft work like writing, and 1 hour on administrative tasks like photocopying. This last breakdown might be acceptable for a one-person staff, but might indicate opportunities for delegation if this person is the department director.

Ongoing or *ad hoc*

Time measurement can become an ongoing process that helps you manage the communication function or something you use more tactically. For example, if this approach to time measurement seems too time-consuming, you might try it for a sample week every other month. Or, on a regular basis you might keep track of a single type of activity that is critical to you, such as time spent on strategic work, or on administrative work carried out by your entire staff to justify the hiring



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Figure 1: Project coding analysis

Project Number	Corp., Field, Other	Strategic, Craft, Admin., Other	Nov. 1
100	C	C	1.50
100	F	S	0.50
101	C	C	2.75
101	C	A	1.00
210	F	C	2.25
999	C	O	1.75
Total			9.75

of your own departmental assistant. Or perhaps you need to know how much time was spent on a particular project to in order be able to calculate the return on investment.

Either way, you'll find you have more objective ammunition when talking with senior management at your annual budgeting time, or when they want to add a few more projects to your "to-do" list. You could even turn the numbers into bar charts or pie charts to really get their attention! **TCM**

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