

TIME MANAGEMENT SERIES

Mark Rendell, independent trainer and project manager, has developed a series of models and guides to equip managers and their staff with the skills needed to become **Masters of Time in the Modern Workplace**.



1. The “Value and Complexity” Grid

I devised this Grid in response to what I perceived to be a minor flaw in the Urgency and Importance (Time Management) Grid proposed by Stephen Covey¹ in his 1994 book, ‘First Things First.’

It came from a very practical and persistent problem I encountered in my own business: ‘How do you know that something is urgent?’ It had been my experience at the time that some clients had learnt to attract my attention and efforts more securely and speedily by exaggerating the relative urgency of a particular task. This caused some disruption to my own systems for allocating and prioritising work as it degenerated into a ‘who shouts loudest’ approach!

Clearly, the vulnerability here was that I didn’t have an objective method to verify the level of urgency of an incoming request as defined by the client (internally, I could do this without a problem). This prompted me to reflect on Covey’s Grid and to develop it so that the two filters could be something that I could assess for myself.

Filtering the workload

These two filters became **VALUE (V)** “What level of value do I attach to this task?” and **COMPLEXITY (C)** “How much time (and other resources) do I need to allocate to this task?”

These filters aim to provide a rapid assessment of the type of work and its importance to and impact on the business (particularly useful for sole traders and small businesses) to help decide on how the business can best deal with the task (by distinguishing between project-oriented tasks and non-specialist tasks) and to be able to maintain some vigilance on workload capacity.

Take a look at the V + C Grid...

Level of value to business HIGH >> <<LOW	1. Valuable & Simple	2. Valuable & Complex
	3. Not Valuable and Simple	4. Not Valuable and Complex
	Amount of time required to process <<LOW	HIGH>>

¹ Stephen Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill, First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

What do the Quadrants represent?

In this Grid, all types of potential work can be divided up into four quadrants depending on whether they are valuable to the business or not, and how much time (and resources) you'll need to allocate to achieve the task.

Quadrant 1 is for tasks that are valuable and that will not take very long to do. They are likely to cause minimal disruption to established timetables and current workload. They could possibly be done by outside contractors (due to a low level of complexity, i.e. non-technical or non-specialised). Quadrant 1 is also where 'quick wins' will arise. Your speed of response to the client will demonstrate high levels of responsiveness and competence. They don't need to know that you considered the task 'simple', by the way!

This Quadrant may include consultancy, presentations, writing articles, one-off support, research and some kinds of training. They are tasks that can be allocated to one person and that are easy to scope and cost, and tasks that are 'repeat-business' where all the development has been done previously and where your administrative and support systems are already established so that the task can be delivered with minimal impact on resources.

Quadrant 2 is for tasks that are valuable to your business and that will take time to do or are complex in some way. These tasks need a project management approach. These tasks (or more likely, sets of related tasks) will require a project leader with a team and a budget. Good project management skills will be essential for these projects to be delivered on time, to budget and to design.

This Quadrant may include projects or tasks that require input from a range of people and resources (both inside and outside your organisation), that may involve some risk or experimentation and that may extend the scope and expertise of your services. This Quadrant may involve trials, pilots and one-off schemes that demand a great deal of up-front input. This Quadrant may also include projects that are funded from a range of sources or that are only part-funded or are evaluation dependent before extra funding is made available. This Quadrant may also include tasks that involve a significant amount of monitoring and evaluation or evidence-based research.

Quadrant 3 is for tasks that are not valuable to your business and that would not take much time to do. They could be tasks that other businesses could do for you so weigh up the impact on reputation, market presence and goodwill, and either subcontract, decline or allocate under-employed members of staff to the task. These tasks could be considered 'loss leading' (although they may be profitable) and could be seen as an investment in partnership working, gaining traction in new markets, increasing goodwill, doing a favour, experimentation, internal training opportunities etc. These tasks are not likely to require specialised input and could be given to non-technical staff.

This Quadrant may include tasks that have a marketing, sales or promotional opportunity attached to them. They may also be tasks that are currently outside the remit of your service but provide an opportunity to explore currently non-core work.

Quadrant 4 – decline to undertake any tasks that would be allocated to this Quadrant.

For further information: www.markrendell.co.uk