

BEST PRACTICES



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How CIOs Should Spend Their Day

Deliberately Distribute Time Across Constituents And Yourself

This is the first document in the "CIO Time Allocation Best Practices" series.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the exception of possibly the CEO, the CIO's business calendar is the most difficult to manage. The key? CIOs should balance time management in ways that do not deprive any key constituents of essential time. Each stakeholder group is equally important, and a disproportionate allocation of the CIO's focus and attention will be detrimental to the enterprise and to the CIO's success. Forrester's 30-30-30-10 model forces disciplined balance across constituents, which are classified into four groups: above, across, below, and yourself. This time model will keep IT front-of-mind in the business and allow CIOs to do what they do best: proving and delivering IT value to the enterprise.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Chief information officer

FORRESTER'S 30-30-30-10 TIME DISTRIBUTION FOR CIOs

CIOs often have difficulty balancing their time and focus between their different constituencies, which include their staff, senior execs, and peers. Too often, CIOs are overly focused on one specific area, such as on issues inside their own organization, at the expense of other critical but neglected interactions, such as working closely with a peer business group or executive.

Forrester's model is based on the premise that there are four areas where CIOs must direct their time: above, across, below, and with yourself. Sounds simple, right? Putting this into practice, however, requires a paradigm shift in how CIOs think about and plan their calendar. It's important to note that this is not merely about the time spent *with* these constituents. It is highly unlikely that a CIO will spend 3 hours a day with the CEO. Instead, this is time invested on *behalf* of each constituent. CIOs must distribute their energy with deliberate balance because constituents that are:

- **Above the CIO direct the CIO's agenda.** This group should expect and receive 30% of the CIO's attention. This constituency can be the board of directors, audit committee, CEO, and/or the senior executive team. Time invested with this group of CIO stakeholders builds credibility, proves the enterprise value of IT, enables the CIO to become an architect of corporate strategy, and develops the CIO's ability to deal from a position of strength.

- **Across from the CIO are the constituents of IT organization results.** Demanding another 30% of the CIO's time, this constituency is made up of peers, CxO executive colleagues, and key vendors. They are the customers of IT in the enterprise. CIOs may rely heavily on team members to work closely with these other groups, which, while necessary, is insufficient to ensure that a CIO fully understands key business issues and concerns.
- **Below the CIO make up the team that collectively delivers IT value to the business.** Requiring another 30%, this group is the CIO's own organization. For CIOs, time invested with their own organization provides the leadership for IT to perform effectively, deliver on expectations, and to run like a well-oiled machine. Sometimes, CIOs are so busy working with other execs and above, the "well-oiled machine" becomes badly in need of management maintenance — and this becomes all too apparent to those outside of IT.
- **You: CIOs need private time to restore and keep perspective.** The CIO should reserve 10% of business time for strategizing, perspective setting, and reflection. This time should be used for consultation with mentors and coaches and dialogue with trusted colleagues and business role models. This should also include self-assessment as to which behaviors and relationships are working well and which are not. This time contributes greatly to the CIO's effectiveness.

WHY CIOs SHOULD BE DELIBERATE AND BALANCED IN MANAGING THEIR TIME

CIOs should deliberately structure and organize calendars in a 30-30-30-10 distribution to maximize effectiveness in the role and to ensure that constituents are pleased with IT and that IT is looking ahead. And no portion of the CIO's time should ever exceed 40%, even allowing for IT organizational structure variants like federated or decentralized. The risk of imbalance inevitably results in issues surfacing with one constituency or another.

An Approach To Solving The Current Balance Problem

Consciously keeping this balance in mind, whether it is through daily, weekly, or even biweekly reflections is the key ingredient to success. Forrester recently interviewed 18 CIOs to learn about how they distribute their time. They generally agree that the model makes sense, but some report that they struggle with balance:

- **I spend too much time reacting and fixing problems below.** Unsuccessful CIOs sometimes spend too much time below them, which takes away opportunities for them to prove IT's value to the rest of the business, namely in the above and across categories. Anytime a CIO is spending more than 50% of their day on behalf of the constituents below them, with at least half of that time on reactive problem-solving, they are in trouble.

Solution: Interestingly, CIOs with technology backgrounds get stuck in this rut more often than their colleagues with a business background. The reason? They instinctively want to fix

problems themselves because they can. CIOs should deliberately teach and mentor a strong management team that is constructed to handle all tactical problems that should not need CIO attention. Cultivating this team in the long run will make the team's job easier and, more importantly, the IT organization more efficient.

Example: If a CIO finds that he or she is spending too much time putting out fires inside IT, and his or her team isn't strong, it may be in the CIO's best interest to appoint an operations executive to handle all of these problems until a solid management team is in place beneath them. This way the CIO can continue to serve all other constituents without getting sucked into a reactive problem-solving role. For example, one newly appointed senior IT VP in a nationwide bank is consolidating support responsibilities under a single trusted leader who will run day-to-day operations while the VP spends more time developing and promoting new technology-enabled business ideas that the bank can use.

- **My peers' expectations of my IT organization are too high.** CIOs who cite this are really saying that there is a lack of communication between the CIO and the execs of the business lines, the customers of IT. If peer execs don't understand what IT is doing or what they should expect from IT, exec grumbling and frustration grows.

Solution: CIOs must work hard to market IT more effectively, boost communication with their peers, better understand their peers' issues, and manage their peers' expectations of IT.¹ This proactive effort can in some instances feel awkward, but these relationships must be developed through one-on-one meetings or even something as simple as a weekly lunch. Once this relationship is built and the communication is improved, the CIO's peers become credible sources about the value of IT to their businesses — a topic the CIO's executive team above should constantly be reminded of.

Example: The CIO at one of the world's largest multinational consumer products companies said: "I tend to engage my peers in new possibilities, new ideas, and new strategies that we can work on together. We get a lot of insight early on. People want to help — they want to feel that what they think is interesting. Three years ago, we created new strategies for IT here. We had very early discussions with these people to get their reactions, and it worked beautifully."

- **My executive team doesn't care about strategic input from IT.** The executive team in some firms recognizes the importance of IT and regularly discusses IT's impact on the business. Where that doesn't happen, it is not the CEO's or anyone else on the executive team's job to make this connection — it is the CIO's job. Again, this involves proactively finding opportunities to provide business value through casual or formal meetings in the office or outside of it. It requires going beyond learning about other parts of the business to find areas where IT can provide value.²

Example: When asked about which topics were covered during executive dialogues with constituents above and across from the CIO, the CIO of a \$1 billion-plus manufacturer and retailer said: “I tailor the message to who is in the room and how they can help IT in the next 60 days. I coach the CEO on how other division presidents can use IT efficiently and more effectively, and this works.”

- **I don't have time to even think about balancing my time!** Often CIOs will be so caught up in day-to-day crises and tasks, they lose the time to reflect and make adjustments moving forward. When CIOs find themselves in this situation they must realize that this comes from constantly reacting to problems in the business and not being able to execute their own agenda.

Solution: Alone time is significant because it allows CIOs to step back and see exactly where they have been spending their time and how effectively it has been spent. Taking a half hour daily or a few hours at the end of the week for this reflection is a good investment of time because it allows CIOs to correct their mistakes and work more confidently and efficiently moving forward. Also, this alone time is an opportunity to seek help from fellow CIOs or trusted advisors within or outside company walls with tough questions that are troubling them. Often times, a fresh outlook will be exactly what CIOs need to solve a problem. Simply, networking with other CIOs on a regular basis is best practice to succeed in this role.

Example: Following an old adage to a T, the CIO at a billion dollar information service and technology firm never eats lunch alone. The CIO says: “I frequently connect with peers, vendors, and other CIOs informally. This is invaluable, especially with CIOs at bigger companies. Their organizations are more complex, and they deal with much larger issues. They offer an idea that I haven't even imagined.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

CIOs WHO BALANCE THEIR TIME BALANCE THE IMPACT OF IT

In Forrester's research process, we frequently encounter CIOs who want to talk with an analyst. But, these CIOs may abruptly cancel meetings because of internal emergencies, or they can only spare a few minutes, or they have calendars that are so full that a meeting must be booked two months in advance. These are indicators that the job owns the CIO's calendar, not the other way around. In contrast, CIOs who are in control of their day and balance time across constituents:

- **Become a trusted contributor to executive thinking.** CIOs with great performance who also establish a strong connection above them are key providers of insights to the executive team about new business opportunities, ways to speed up product introduction, or other potential technology-enabled business changes.

- **Propose new solutions to solve vexing business problems.** CIOs that are in tune with business unit issues can surface opportunities and direct their staff to solve vexing problems, like paper-intensive sales lead handling or cumbersome manufacturing processes.
- **Retain and grow a loyal staff.** Some IT execs describe high job satisfaction and very low turnover in IT, even for highly marketable skills. Why? Because career and employee development is a priority of the CIO who makes the time for his or her team.
- **Take time to learn and test ideas.** CIOs are the thought leaders in their firms about the business uses of technology and the primary guide of IT strategic thinking. CIOs who pause to learn from others and reflect will find that new ideas and a refreshed perspective keep the job fresh and their organizations energized.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ IT's inability to market effectively cements its cost center role in the enterprise: communicating status but not value, fulfilling requests but not solving problems, and partially deploying technologies but not delivering expected results. IT organizations need to embrace the concepts, terminology, and process of marketing — creating marketing plans, executing campaigns, and boosting brand equity. See the August 23, 2005, Best Practices “[The Marketing Of IT](#).”
- ² Nobody wins if IT only strives for faster reaction time. Instead, IT must forge an understanding of what's important for business outcomes to craft a deliverable vision for how to enable them. This business-focused enterprise architecture must be championed by the CIO. See the December 27 2006, Best Practices “[Moving From Reactive To Strategic IT](#).”