



## Working more effectively

**Efficiency** and effectiveness are second nature to internal auditors. The words are frequently used when evaluating controls and forming opinions on the activities of others. Yet how often are they internalised? What of your own efficiency and effectiveness?

It is possible to be efficient without being effective and vice versa:

- Reading a detailed manual to fix a leaking tap is effective although watching a two minute video is more efficient.
- Responding to emails quickly is efficient but reduces efficiency at completing any task in hand.

It is important to balance the skills and good performance evaluation processes focus on rewarding what has been achieved (effectiveness) and also how it was achieved (efficiency).

We explore effectiveness and provide ideas on how to work on what really matters.

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## Are you effective?

Being effective is about choosing the right things to invest your time in. There is nothing more disheartening than working really hard only to find you've made no progress, or to see the team diligently working but missing all their deadlines. No-one ever sets out to be a busy fool...

Typical warning signs for ineffectiveness include;

Feeling busy but getting nowhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not overly keen on change	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushing deadlines out	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prone to complaining/pessimism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multiple to-do lists	<input type="checkbox"/>	Blame others for problems	<input type="checkbox"/>
Impatient, often in a hurry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find it hard to recover from setbacks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Procrastination – putting things off	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stress, Anxiety, Irritability	<input type="checkbox"/>

How many did you check? Do you see any of these traits in your team?

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## Everyday Ideas

This is not an exhaustive list or a tick list of things to work through. It is a collection of thoughts to offer

practical advice on improving efficiency. Hopefully many will be familiar practices, if not they are ideas to try.

- **Clarity.** The first step towards effectiveness is having a purpose; be it personal, professional or organisational. Understanding the goals and objectives that need to be achieved is essential to avoid going off track. A good auditor doesn't start an engagement without a scope of reference and the same logic applies to the use of your own time...even on a weekend. Unless you're clear that the objective is to relax on Sunday afternoon it's easy to get caught into doing other things and wonder on a Monday morning where the weekend went!!

## Clarity of vision

- **Prioritisation.** Knowing how to prioritise is a key skill for effectiveness. There are three things that should be taken into account; urgency, value and effort.  
How urgently does the activity need to be completed...if it has no discernible deadline then it's not urgent even if someone shouts a lot about it.  
What value does the work have...the output itself, to the reputation of the function, to you, is it career enhancing, will it develop new skills. There is also value in who the work is for, a new stakeholder relationship, a promise of support, generating goodwill or philanthropy.  
The final part of the decision should include an estimation of the effort required to complete the activity.

## Urgency -value-effort

- **Challenge meetings.** There's nothing more soul destroying than sitting in a meeting thinking your time would be better spent elsewhere. Don't accept meetings without knowing their purpose and your role, ask to see the agenda and attendee list. Watch what happens when meetings don't go to plan in this funny [video](#) on how conference calls work in real life (the inclusion of this link does not imply a recommendation or endorsement for any products or services offered).

## Know your purpose

- **Schedule.** We all know that a to-do list is a helpful aid. Transitioning to the next level of effectiveness is replacing the list with a schedule; allocating specific time slots for tasks. Maximising your natural highs and lows (see effectiveness). This approach works well in an electronic calendar where time can be blocked out and you can choose whether others see your time as busy (priority tasks) or free and interruptible.

## Put time aside

- **Differentiate time horizons.** Along the same theme is differentiating between the list/schedule for today or this week and those activities for the longer term. Separating the immediate to-do's from a master list that is more aspirational, strategic or low priority. A huge task or long list can be intimidating, break it down into a challenging but achievable daily schedule.

## Now and next

- **Finish ready to start.** Although efficient, it's not always possible to finish every task that you start. When this happens, either planned or unplanned, it is critical that it's easy to pick back up. Knowing

exactly what is needed makes this possible. A note to remind yourself of the next steps gets you 'in the zone' quickly. If writing a report or presentation maybe jot down the key thoughts that you need to expand on or highlight the space to restart (some software even has a 'pick up where you left off' feature).

## Finish ready to start

- **Develop a start routine.** Most people, even spontaneous, creative types, work well with routine. Training yourself to respond to a 'time for work' signal can be beneficial. Something as simple as a playlist for the commute, warm up exercises/stretchers, chat/surf with a morning coffee – the routine should be time bound and repeatable, i.e. finish coffee is the trigger to start work.

## Signal work time

- **Reduce distractions.** The effectiveness paper highlighted that multi-tasking is a myth. Create barriers to reduce distractions. If you work in an open plan environment agree do not disturb times/signs with colleagues, try to move to a quiet space to focus or put noise cancelling headphones on for silence, classical music can also help productivity. Put your phone on silent out of sight/touch.

## Reduce distractions

The internal audit team at Progress Housing Group embarked on a programme of working more effectively as part of a corporate drive towards being more agile. Their journey is one of practical insights.

Read the case study [here](#).

- **Resilience.** The ability to recover from a setback is a trait of effective people. It links closely with attitude to change. Identifying solutions, looking forward, adapting to changing circumstances and being proactive are powerful ways in which resilience can be developed.

## Adapt and rebound

- **Accountability.** Effectiveness requires taking accountability for your actions and time. Remember the old adage a poor workman blames their tools – do members of the team blame each other for delays, their business colleagues, technology? Do you? We are often dependent on others to complete tasks, being flexible in our own actions, attitudes and behaviours can make all the difference in how the end result is achieved.

## Take ownership

- **Self-talk.** Our inner self-talk can be motivational or detrimental to our well-being. If we repeatedly say we cannot do something, then we believe it. It's important to be positive and reaffirming in our own self-talk. Self-talk such as 'I feel under pressure with work' will create anxiety and more pressure. Conversely the same workload expressed as 'I'm supporting the success of the business today' or 'I'm going to complete 8 things today' is inspirational and uplifting.

## Shift your perspective

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## Closing thoughts

Unlike in our early careers when we were assigned tasks - working autonomously as internal auditors or in a leadership role requires self-direction. The building blocks of effectiveness can often be assumed or overlooked yet these softer skills are as important to develop and maintain as the technical proficiency that defines our profession.

## Top Tips

Efficiency	Effectiveness
<b>Work to your strengths</b> know your natural highs, what time of the day you are creative, productive, energised...	<b>Clarity of vision</b> be clear of the goal, objective or purpose of what you are doing
<b>Finish the tasks you start</b> plan in small stages to finish what you start, avoid multi-tasking	<b>Prioritisation</b> consider the urgency and value of tasks and the effort required to complete them
<b>Create time for yourself</b> take control of your calendar, build in 'me time' for reading, networking, lunch...	<b>Challenge meetings</b> your time is valuable, know your purpose or decline the invitation
<b>Manage information</b> limit what you ask for and what you read, think 'appropriate and proportionate'	<b>Schedule</b> allocate specific times to do tasks rather than a to-do list
<b>Right first time</b> double check documents, avoid rework, know where things are, be tidy	<b>Now and next</b> differentiate time horizons, separate lists or schedules for immediate and long term tasks
<b>Less is more</b> re-engineer work flows and processes to remove unnecessary steps, work smart	<b>Finish ready to start</b> when unavoidable, leave tasks in a way that helps you quickly get back in the zone
<b>Communicate clearly</b> listen and read carefully before responding take time to pause, reflect and learn	<b>Signal work time</b> develop a start routine, let you mind and body know that it's time to get started
<b>Delegate</b>	<b>Reduce distractions</b>

<b>Delegate</b> know your strengths and those of others, no-one is awesome at everything all the time	<b>Reduce distractions</b> know how you work best, when to use quiet space, background noise, interaction...
<b>Plan</b> save time overall and get a better outcome	<b>Resilience</b> change happens, adapt and rebound
	<b>Accountability</b> take ownership avoid blame and excuses
	<b>Self-talk</b> be positive, shift your own perspective

*"Efficiency is doing things right - Effectiveness is doing the right things"*

**Peter Drucker**