
The Ti-Mandi window: a time-management tool for managers

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Abstract

The Ti-Mandi Window (pronounced Time-and-I) is the management version of the well-known Johari Window. It is built on the familiar two-by-two matrix that classifies management tasks as to whether, or not, they are urgent and/or important. In the conventional matrix, the quadrants are indicated by Roman numerals. To heighten interest, the Ti-Mandi Window gives the quadrants indicative names: priority for action (I), neglected essentials (II), trivial hot potatoes (III), and – the light-hearted – goofing off (IV). To fight the tyranny of the so-called urgent, managers must take control of the labels that are put on tasks. They must strip away the fake “urgent” labels that are put on “trivial hot potatoes” – by breaking away – and redirecting the time saved by getting focused on the “neglected essentials”. The window shows how the two processes interact. Working together, they ensure that a manager’s time is concentrated on activities that are both urgent and important.

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Introduction

Many years ago, Joe Luft and Harry Ingrams introduced their famous Johari Window as an aid to better interpersonal relations. In this article I show how I have taken the “window” idea and applied it to the principles of time management.

There is no doubt that the popularity of the Johari Window was greatly enhanced by the hint of the mystic East conveyed in its exotic name. Many readers will know, however, that the name Johari was derived from the names of its inventors Joe Luft and Harry Ingrams.

With this in mind, it will not be difficult to see how the name Ti-Mandi has been derived from the words time and management.

Another way of looking at the name is to pronounce it “time and I”, which immediately links in with the idea of personal time management. Either way, it is hoped that the name will bestow as much benefit as Johari did for the interpersonal window.

In any event, I have chosen to use a window because it is an excellent device to dramatise the interaction of two processes as they produce a beneficial effect. As we proceed, I hope you will see how a window structure helps to give life to a worthy but otherwise rather dull diagram frequently used to illustrate a key lesson of time management.

The key to effective time management

The key to effective time management is to be ever vigilant against “the tyranny of the so-called urgent”. It is inevitable that any task labelled “urgent” will attract attention – no matter how trivial it may be. There is no escaping this compulsion.

This means that the only way for managers to gain control of their time is to take command of the labelling of their activities. Managers must decide for themselves which activities are important and whether an activity merits the label “urgent”.

In doing this, urgent labels that have been attached to unimportant tasks must be removed. The time saved then makes it possible to attach urgent labels to important tasks that are being neglected.

This daily battle to take charge of one’s use of time is dramatised by the Ti-Mandi window. The window shows how, by using the complementary processes of breaking

away and getting focused, managers can ensure that all their time is spent on activities that are both urgent and important.

The urgent and the important

It is quite common to classify the various tasks that occupy a manager's time as important, urgent, both or neither. This is often illustrated in a two-by-two matrix (see Figure 1).

Obviously, time must be spent in quadrant I – doing things that are both important and urgent. Conversely, as little time as possible should be spent in quadrant IV – on things that are neither important nor urgent.

There is a tension between the other two quadrants. On the one hand, urgent things demand attention – even when they are not important (quadrant III). On the other hand, important things – even when they appear not to be urgent (quadrant II) – ought to get done.

Because of the tyranny of the so-called urgent, quadrant III will always win the battle with quadrant II. The urgent label is compelling. As a consequence, important tasks get put on one side, while time is absorbed with the unimportant. We feel that these must be attended to because we have let them be labelled urgent.

Distribution of time between the quadrants

The dominance of quadrant III is illustrated by the numbers given in Figure 2. These

Figure 2 Percentage time distribution in the four quadrants: typical v. effective

		Urgency	
		High	Low
Importance	High	I Typical: 25-30% Effective: 20-25%	II Typical: 15% Effective: 50-80%
	Low	III Typical: 40-60% Effective: 15%	IV Typical: 10% Effective: 1%

numbers come from Covey and Merrill (1994) and compare the typical percentage of time spent in a given quadrant with the time that should be spent there to get the most effective distribution.

The figures for quadrants I and IV offer little surprise. The typical percentage of time spent in quadrant I is only slightly higher than the effective level. Similarly, the little time that is spent in quadrant IV should be squeezed to the point of virtual extinction.

The figures for quadrants II and III – which are almost mirror images – illustrate the tyranny of the so-called urgent. In quadrant III, we allow the urgent label to be attached to unimportant activities to the extent that, instead of 15 per cent, they absorb 40-60 per cent of the typical manager's time.

If these urgent labels were transferred to the important but neglected activities in quadrant II, the time spent there would rise to be in the effective 50-80 per cent range, rather than the meagre 15 per cent that is typical.

Correcting the ineffective distribution of time

Based on these numbers, it is usually inferred that a large chunk of time should be shifted from quadrant III to quadrant II. In principle, most managers agree with this. But, in my experience, discussion of what to do about it tends to be rather lifeless and unenthusiastic.

A common reaction is "Sure, but how?" Managers do not see how they can be

Figure 1 The urgency/importance matrix

		Urgency	
		High	Low
Importance	High	I	II
	Low	III	IV

expected to neglect things that are urgent – they are under too much pressure. Apart from pious hopes, there is no incentive for them to switch their time to things that do not seem urgent – no matter how important they may be.

The Ti-Mandi window has been devised to bring to life the urgent/important matrix and identify the mechanisms by which managers can take control of their time.

The first step in adding interest to the discussion is to jettison the sterile roman numerals and give the quadrants some evocative names. My suggestions are illustrated in Figure 3:

- I *Priority for action*: priority must be given to activities that are both urgent and important
- II *Neglected essentials*: important things should not be neglected just because they do not appear urgent.
- III *Trivial hot potatoes*: why waste time on trivial, unimportant things just because they seem to be urgent?
- IV *Goofing off*: there is a deadly time-trap in doing things that are neither urgent nor important.

Naming the quadrants helps to enliven the discussion. When activities are called trivial hot potatoes, it becomes obvious why they should be eliminated. When important/low urgency tasks are regarded as neglected essentials there is a clear incentive to find time for them. Goofing off is bad – but could an occasional light relief brighten the day?

Tackling the real problem

Breathing some life into the discussion is a step in the right direction but it misses the real difficulty – managers are being urged to defy the tyranny of the so-called urgent. In effect, they are being asked to turn their backs on some urgent activities and spend time on other things that are, apparently, not urgent. Not being saints, it is hard for them to whip up much enthusiasm to do this.

Looking at it more closely, their instincts are right. It is just as ineffective to waste time on things that are not urgent as it is to waste it on things that are not important. So, really, there is no point in shifting time between quadrants III and II – both quadrants should be minimised.

In other words, the real objective should be to spend all one's time in quadrant I, on things that are both urgent and important. This can be visualised by imagining that the “cross-wires” in the diagram are movable. The vertical cross-wire must move to the right to minimise the neglected essentials. The time that this absorbs is found by moving the horizontal cross-wire down, to eliminate the trivial hot potatoes.

The static diagram has now become converted into a dynamic “window”. In the window, the manager can see two complementary processes working together to make the best use of his or her time. Time spent on trivial hot potatoes is redirected to reduce the neglected essentials. As a result, most time is spent on activities that are both urgent and important. This visualisation provides a powerful motivation to encourage a real shift in behaviour.

Rather than defy the tyranny of the so-called urgent, head-on, the window shows managers how to subvert it. They do this by taking command of the labels that are put on their activities so that they control the relative size of the quadrants in the window.

Beating the tyranny of the so-called urgent

The tyranny of the so-called urgent is very strong and hard to beat head-on. The principles of judo show us how to win in such circumstances – use the opponent's strength to your advantage.

Figure 3 Evocative names for the quadrants

		Urgency	
		High	Low
Importance	High	Priority for action (Concentrating on tasks that are both urgent <i>and</i> important.)	Neglected essentials (Neglecting important tasks because they do not appear to be urgent.)
	Low	Trivial hot potatoes (Wasting time on so-called urgent tasks that, actually, are not important.)	Goofing off (The deadly time-trap – although occasional light relief can brighten the day.)

Accepting that time will inevitably be spent on things that are labelled urgent, the answer is to make sure that everything you want done is labelled urgent. Conversely, make sure that the urgent label is removed from all the things on which you do not want to waste time.

Getting the labels right solves the motivation problem – the tyranny of the so-called urgent is subverted so that it is driving you in the direction you want to go. Paying attention to the urgent becomes a good thing, since everything that is labelled urgent is now also important. Thus, paying attention to the urgent means that all one's time is spent in the priority area on things that are both urgent and important.

There are two processes by which a manager can take control of the labels that are put on their activities. I call them “breaking away” and “getting focused”. Working together, they reduce both quadrants II and III – allowing more time to be spent in quadrant I on tasks that are both urgent and important.

Breaking away

To make sure that all the things they do are in the priority area, managers must “break away”. They must strip away the fake urgent labels that are constantly being put on to “trivial hot potatoes”. Breaking away saves a lot of time that would, otherwise, be wasted on trivial hot potatoes.

There are two ways to eliminate trivial hot potatoes:

- (1) delegating them to others – for whom the task will be important; and
- (2) resisting so-called urgent demands that are constantly being imposed from all quarters.

Breaking away takes an effort because, very often, managers do not realise that they, themselves, are responsible for the fake urgency in the first place. Through habit and inertia, they passively accept unjustified pressures because they do not fight to get rid of trivial hot potatoes.

To break away, one must fight against the tyranny of the urgent. We feel that missing an urgent deadline, no matter how unimportant the task, is a reflection on our competence as a manager. But would it really matter if that routine report were delayed? What happens to

all those so-called urgent things when you have a day off sick?

Getting focused

Getting focused means raising the urgency on important things that have been pushed to the bottom of the pile. To get neglected essentials into the priority area, they must be labelled urgent.

Doing this requires effort because these neglected essentials are very often tough and time-consuming – like long-range planning or even putting enough thought into doing a good job of staff appraisals.

One way to raise the urgency on neglected essentials is to set yourself a task of the week (TOTW). Take something from the bottom of the pile and promise yourself that you will make the time to finish it this week. Mentally pledging yourself to a TOTW gives concrete motivation to help resist the false appeal of trivial hot potatoes – unimportant things that appear to be urgent.

Very often, of course, important things are pushed to the bottom of the pile because they require some mental effort and uninterrupted concentration. A good way to find the required time for these neglected essentials is to have a pow-wow – just like the Red Indians when they discuss an important issue.

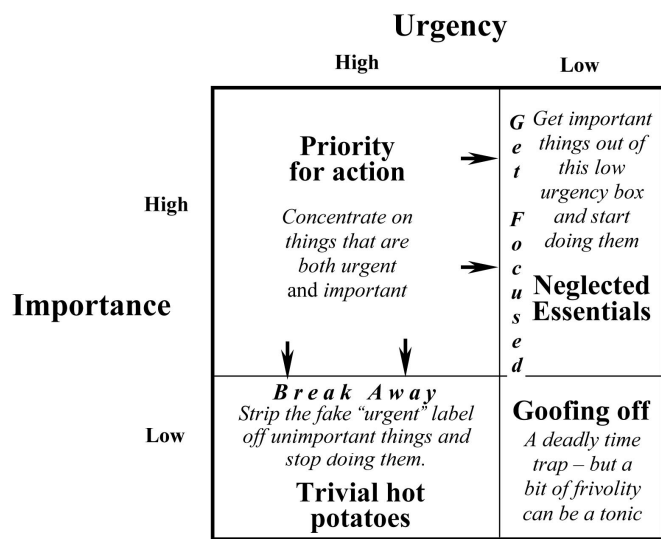
Pow-wow stands for “Plan-on-Wednesday, Withdraw-on-Wednesday”. Get out of the office on Wednesday for a quiet day off-site. Wednesday is good for this since it misses both the start-of-the-week rush and the end-of-the-week scramble. If you cannot actually get away, physically, do it mentally – turn off the mobile and put the DND sign on your door.

The Ti-Mandi window

The two complementary processes used to control the labels that are put on a manager's activities are illustrated in the Ti-Mandi window, as shown in Figure 4.

The window shows how breaking away reduces the time spent on trivial hot potatoes, while getting focused redirects this time to reduce the neglected essentials. Working together, these complementary processes make sure that all one's time is spent in the

Figure 4 The Ti-Mandi window



priority area on things that are both urgent and important.

By breaking away and getting focused, effective time managers strive to put most of their effort into the box at the top-left. In this "Priority area" they give high urgency to all the things that are really important.

By concentrating on the priority area, managers also minimise time spent in the bottom-right box – a deadly time trap. To keep things light-hearted we call this box "goofing off". This name reminds us that, although we know it is a waste of time, an occasional bit of frivolity can give us a lift.

In a nutshell, breaking away frees up time by stripping the fake urgent labels from trivial hot potatoes. The time that is freed can then be used to get focused on the neglected essentials.

Obviously, this is not as easy as it sounds, but at least we know what ought to be done. Any manager who makes the effort will have a better chance of long-term success.

Summary

The traditional two-by-two matrix showing activities to be urgent and/or important is a useful, but not very exciting, way of thinking about effective time management.

The matrix illustrates the problem but gives little incentive to correcting it. Everyone knows that there is a temptation to spend too much time on unimportant things that seem urgent. The trouble is that, to resist this temptation, a manager must confront, head-on, the tyranny of the so-called urgent.

The Ti-Mandi window modifies the traditional matrix to give managers some incentive to make this effort. First, it gives vivid names to the quadrants – rather than the austere roman numerals usually used. More importantly, it shows how two complementary processes interact to put managers in charge of the labels that are put on their activities.

The two processes are:

- (1) *Breaking away*: stripping the fake urgent labels off trivial hot potatoes.
- (2) *Getting focused*: using the time saved to raise the urgency of neglected essentials.

The Ti-Mandi window is a powerful way to illustrate the interaction of these two processes. By actively using both of them, managers take command of the labels that are put on their activities – thus beating the tyranny of the so-called urgent. In this way, they ensure that all their time is spent on activities that are both urgent and important.

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