

# The 5 Types of Work That Fill Your Day

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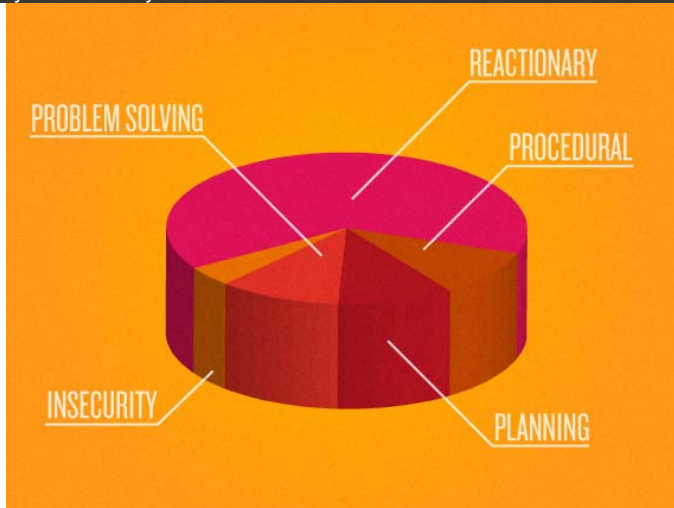


Illustration: Oscar Ramos Orozco

Hacking work is all the rage these days, along with tips for managing email, taking notes, and running meetings. But, at a higher level, what can we learn from analyzing the different types of work we do and how we allocate our time?

First, let's take a look at the five kinds of work we do every day:

## 1. Reactionary Work

In the modern age, most of our day is consumed by **Reactionary Work**, during which we are focused only on responding to messages and requests - emails, text messages, Facebook messages, tweets, voicemails, and the list goes on. You are constantly reacting to what comes into you rather than being proactive in what matters most to you. Reactionary Work is necessary, but you can't let it consume you.

## 2. Planning Work

At other times, you need to plan how you will do your work. Planning Work includes the time spent, scheduling and prioritizing your time, developing your systems for running meetings, and refining your systems for working. By planning, you are deciding how your energy should be allocated, and you are designing your method for getting stuff done. The best workflows are highly personalized and occasionally borderline neurotic, but they keep us engaged. It may not sound sexy, but Planning Work helps you become more efficient and execute on your goals.

## 3. Procedural Work

Of course, there are many motions we go through every day that are neither reactionary nor strategic. Procedural Work is the administrative/maintenance stuff that we do just to keep afloat: making sure that the bills are paid or preparing tax returns, updating a deck for a business presentation, or tracking old outbound emails to confirm that they were addressed/solved. Procedural Work is important, but we must remember to remain flexible in our approach to it. Procedures backfire when they become antiquated and remain only out of habit, not necessity.

## 4. Insecurity Work

**Insecurity Work** includes the stuff we do out of our own insecurities - obsessively looking at certain statistics related to your company, or repeatedly checking what people are saying about you or your product online, etc. Insecurity Work doesn't move the ball forward in any way - aside from briefly reassuring us that everything is OK - and we're often unconscious that we're even doing it.

## 5. Problem-Solving Work

Creativity becomes most important during Problem-Solving Work. This is the work that requires our full brainpower and focus, whether it be designing a new interface, developing a new business plan, writing a thoughtful blog post, or brainstorming the features of a new product. Whether you're working solo or as a team, you're leveraging raw creativity to find answers.

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### What We Learn When We Audit Our Work

Taking all five types of work into perspective, we can audit our day and the types of work we engage in most.

My typical day includes 2-5 types of work, with the majority being Reactionary Work. I hate to admit it, but I find that Reactionary Work constantly bleeds over into my efforts to schedule myself (Planning Work) and the deep thinking required to solve problems (Problem-Solving Work).

I also find that, between nearly any type of work, I usually slip into a period of Reactionary Work that may include surfing the top of my email inbox, or a period of Insecurity Work, which usually comes in the form of scanning Twitter messages about our business.

Here are a few realizations that might help as you do your own work audit:

- **Problem Solving Work is best done when you are fully engaged with the challenge you face.** For many, this means working in a zone free from distraction and the flow of social media. Within groups, the best Problem Solving Work is done when staffing is voluntary and topics fall into the overlap of each person's **genuine interest, skills, and opportunity**. Without a real sense of engagement, results suffer.
- **Procedural Work, meanwhile, is best done with the help of technology.** Wherever possible, technology should be used to automate systems for managing projects and increasing efficiency. With Procedural Work, you want to minimize the time spent on it and optimize accountability. For those of us that manage teams, Procedural Work should be delegated when possible. Legendary managers recognize that they should spend time on Planning Work, setting up the systems that their teams will use to work, and then minimizing their time spent doing the day-to-day administrative (Procedural) work.
- **Reactionary Work can often crowd out all other types of work;** it needs to be controlled by limiting the time you spend on it to distinct blocks throughout the day. Thanks to the proliferation of mobile devices, Reactionary Work seeps into every opening of your time - walks between buildings or a free hour that results from a canceled meeting. The biggest mistake we make is prioritizing Reactionary Work over everything else. Planning Work, in the form of proper scheduling, can help minimize the gravitational pull of Reactionary Work. Similarly, Procedural Work can help you identify stuff that should be delegated, thus reducing your flow of Reactionary Work.
- **Insecurity Work should be compartmentalized into designated periods of time every day** (or every few days if you're disciplined enough to manage it). Perhaps allocate 30 minutes at the end of every day to run through all of your Insecurity Work at once - checking stats, how many hits your blog received, how many new followers you gained - whatever calms you.
- **Planning Work is, for most of us, too circumstantial.** You do it when you get stuck, rather than proactively. But if you believe that organization is, in fact, a competitive advantage (as I do), you need to allocate time for Planning Work and learn methods to optimize it. You should leverage existing systems but then customize them for yourself. After all, making your mark on your system breeds attraction, which in turn breeds the loyalty required to stick with that system long enough to achieve results.

All work is not created equal. Try working with an awareness of the type of work you're doing, and how it's helping (or limiting) your progress.