

18 What's worth doing?



Technique sheet

Problem-based learning resources

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Introduction

Sometimes, you have to accept every job you are offered because there are very few opportunities around. At other times you might have choices between two or more jobs? Which one should you do first? Are there some that are just not worth doing? Or have enough time to do everything? How do you decide what to do? How do you prioritise? And what has this got to do with low hanging fruit?

Are there any safety issues?

Always prioritise safety. If you have a list of jobs to do and not enough time or funding to do them all always prioritise safety. Renewing or repairing unsafe wiring may not be as glamorous (or as much fun) as installing LED lighting displays or a new, more powerful sound systems in a theatre but the building won't burn down if the lights are a bit dim or the sound a bit quiet. Always do the work that maintains, and ideally improves, safety first.

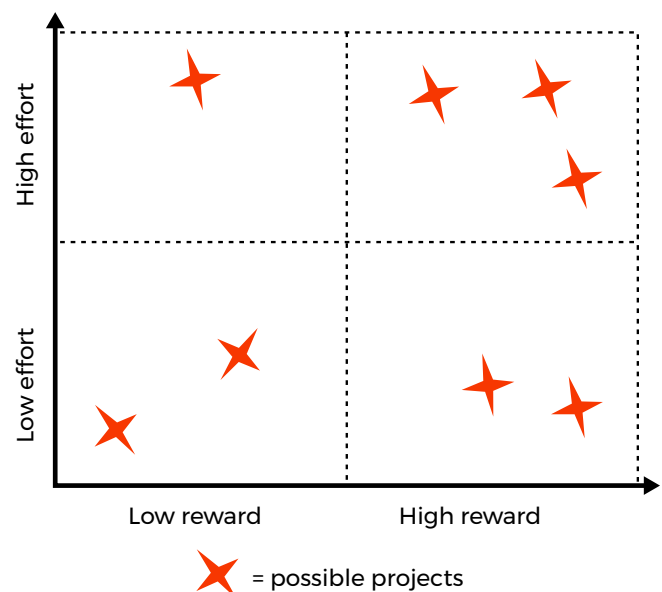
- Make sure you prioritise safety – for yourself and others – even if the client is keen to get on with more visible or exciting work.

What do I need to consider when choosing which jobs to do?

Think about the effort needed to get it done and the reward it offers. Replacing the wiring system in a factory would be high effort. If it allowed increased power delivery and the installation of

more machines the reward could also be high. If it merely replicated the existing facility the reward would be low. Think about the effort and reward for each of the possible projects and position them on a simple two-by-two grid to give you a quick overview of each task's effort-reward value.

- Make sure you consider the effort-reward issues when considering which jobs to do. But remember, some tasks are non-negotiable!



Where is the low-hanging fruit?

The easy tasks (low effort) lie along the bottom of the chart. These are relatively easy to do in the time available so maybe you should opt to do these?

If you do, look at the jobs in the high reward quarter – these give you the best outcome for the least effort. These are sometimes called the low-hanging fruit because they are easy to get hold of and taste sweet! Remember that this does not mean you only do the easy stuff, but it does mean that with limited time and resources it's good to do the work that produces the biggest benefit first and, if time becomes available, the more complex and demanding ones later.

- Make sure you concentrate on the high-reward projects (the ones that make a difference) and consider starting with the ones that produce that difference with the lowest effort.

So, does the difficult stuff never get done?

Does that mean the projects on the top row (the difficult to do stuff) never gets done? No, because you are prioritising work and, once the first priority is complete, you move on to the next one in the list. If time or funding become available, you will get to the more difficult tasks or the tasks that offer the smallest benefit to the client. Sometimes the reward of the difficult task is so high that it becomes a priority even though it is difficult. Landing a human being on the Moon and bringing them safely back was not easy but it became a priority for much of USA hi-tech industry in the 1960's!

- Make sure you do not ignore the difficult to do projects – they may have important benefits to your client. Also, once the simpler projects are completed the more complex ones with lower benefits may rise to the top of your priority list.

What if I have no choice about which jobs I take?

Even if you have no choice about the jobs you take on it is still useful to consider the sequence of tasks in a job you have to do. Sometimes the sequence of jobs in a project is given by the project logic itself (e.g. you cannot test the software until you have installed it and you cannot install it until the hardware is in place and connected to power). If you do not have enough time you have to look at the outcomes of the project and choose the best way to meet the client's needs overall. If you do not have time to complete a planned project, there is no point starting! It would be better to find another way to solve the client's problem in the time available – even if the solution was temporary until more time or funding was available.

- Make sure you consider the outcome of your project and prioritise work that delivers that outcome safely. The client should be involved in any discussions if it involves a significant change.



Check yourself

You should be able to answer these questions easily after reading this sheet.

1. What sorts of jobs or tasks are always top priority?
2. What factors should you consider when choosing which jobs to do?
3. Why might you choose to do a difficult part of the job first and then move on to the easier ones in the afternoon?



Taking it further

These activities will deepen your understanding of this topic.

1. Brainstorm a list of changes you would like to make to your life. They should all be possible, but you should not be able to do all of them at the same time – you will have to prioritise. Changes could involve things like 'spend 30 minutes reading my textbook before bed each day', 'cycle to work instead of using the bus or even 'take up windsurfing or parachute jumping'.

Now carry out a reward-effort analysis. Which changes would produce the biggest benefit for the least effort? Are these 'low-hanging fruit' what you choose to do? Why? Why not?

2. Consider your place of work. Brainstorm a number of changes you would like to see to make it a better place to work (e.g. improved computers, cleaner washrooms, vegan food choices in the canteen). List as many as you can – and think about what other people might want.

Now carry out a reward-effort analysis. Which changes would produce the biggest benefit for the least effort? Are these 'low-hanging fruit' what you choose to do? Why? Why not?

Changes often involve other people. Explain to them the changes you would like to see and explain how you have ranked the various possibilities. Ask a colleague to do the same exercise – do they come up with the same ideas and prioritise in the same way? Can you perhaps link your ideas to produce a shared list?