

LIFE AT THE TOP – A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CEO

As management consultants, we spend a considerable time dealing with chief executives of large and small organisations across a diverse range of industries and sectors. Consequently, we have many opportunities to examine the type of work and styles of management exercised by CEOs on a day-to-day basis.

Many overseas academics and writers such as John P Kotter, Henry Mintzberg, James Brian Quinn, Tom Peters and Rosemary Stewart have undertaken studies which look at a typical day in the life of a successful Chief Executive. You may find some of their findings interesting.

The average CEO spends only 25% of his/her time working alone. This time is spent largely at home, in flight or when commuting. Few spend less than 70% of their time with others and some spend up to 90% of their work time this way.

CEOs typically spend approximately 75% of their time in verbal communication. Most of a CEO's time with others is spent in short, disjointed conversations. Discussion of a single question or issue rarely lasts more than ten minutes. It is not at all unusual for a CEO to cover 10 unrelated topics in a five-minute interaction. 50% of a CEO's activities last on average less than nine minutes. Only 10% of a CEO's activities last for longer than an hour. Only once in every two days can a CEO operate for thirty minutes or more uninterrupted by subordinates or phone calls.

CEOs work long hours. The average CEO works just under sixty hours a week. Not many work fewer than fifty-five hours a week. Although some of their work is done at home, while commuting to work or while travelling, CEOs spend most of their time at their places of work.

An extremely high proportion of CEOs have a strong preference for 'soft' information such as gossip, hearsay and opinions, rather than hard factual information contained in reports.

These findings have important ramifications on the role and effectiveness of CEOs in the formulation and implementation of strategy for organisations.