

A I R

Introduction

Being able to do more than one thing at a time is far, far harder than popular culture would have us believe. All too often when we try and multi-task we simply end up reducing the quality of each of the things we're doing.

This is particularly true of taking time off and time spent in personal/professional development. Motivated by guilt and a fear that when we get back to work 'proper' things will be out of hand we often try and kill two birds with one stone. We try, for example, to combine downtime with self-improvement.

The evidence is, however, that (as long as it's done within common-sense limits) we're actually better off sometimes getting away from 'working' altogether sometimes, so that when we return to work we're fresh and, therefore, more productive.

What are the three Frames?

What we do with our time splits into three groups of activities: I'm going to call these Frames. They're not 'boxes'; they're not closed in any way - they're frameworks onto which we can hang things.

The first of these Frames is called **Act**, the second **Inform** and the third **Restore**.

Act

Nothing happens if you don't act. **Act** is the Frame in which you do things - when you do the stuff you think of as 'what you do'. If you're a manager, it might include making presentations, writing a report or hiring and firing. This is the Frame that most people think of when you ask them what they do and it's the Frame most people think of immediately when you talk to them about being productive.

Of course, it's not possible to just **Act**. In order to do things you need to know what you're doing and why you're doing those things.

Inform

This is the Frame when you learn - it's where you figure out what to do and how you should be doing it. But it's bigger than that because knowing on a technical level isn't enough in today's world. If all you *know* is how to do things there's a significant chance that you're going to do the wrong things.

You might do things well, you might do them efficiently, but it's not going to help. No matter how fast you drive, if you're driving the wrong way you're not going to get there any faster.

Reading this document qualifies as working in the **Inform** Frame. :)

Restore

This Frame is probably the least understood of the three. **Restore** isn't just 'rest': it's not downtime (though it might *include* downtime, certainly).

Restore might include play, or a holiday, or sleep. Or it might mean going to the gym or reading or going to the theatre or for a night out dancing. The point is that this Frame includes the things which charge up your mental batteries. You need to **Restore** your soul as well as your body.

Finding the balance

The great thing about it from the **Act** point of view, is that if you do the right amount of **Restore**, you'll get more done when you move back into **Act**.

Finding the balance is important. With too much time in **Act** you'll burn out and your work will suffer - you'll make mistakes and you'll snap at the people around you. Too little **Act** and you'll not get enough done.

Too much **Inform** has its pitfalls too... you might know everything but you'll *achieve* nothing. **Inform** can be a substitute for moving into **Act** if you're anxious about how to **Act**. (Beware of that - procrastination can be a real problem!)

Too much **Restore** and you might be the best surfer in your city, but you'll not change the world. Too little and you'll lose your edge and start to be unhappy/unproductive.

But the great thing is, that if you do the right amount of **Restore**, you'll get more done when you move back into **Act**. How you find the balance is tricky, but it's worth it!

How you find the balance between the two is tricky! It's something to work on, individually.

What do the Frames consist of, for different people?

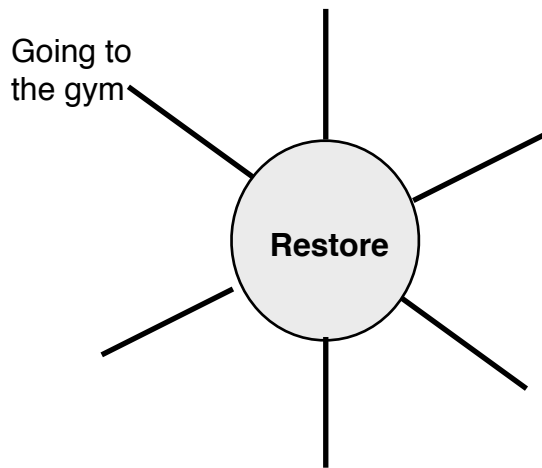
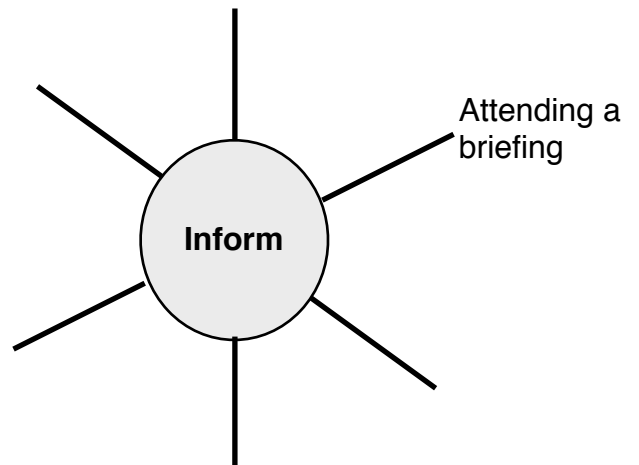
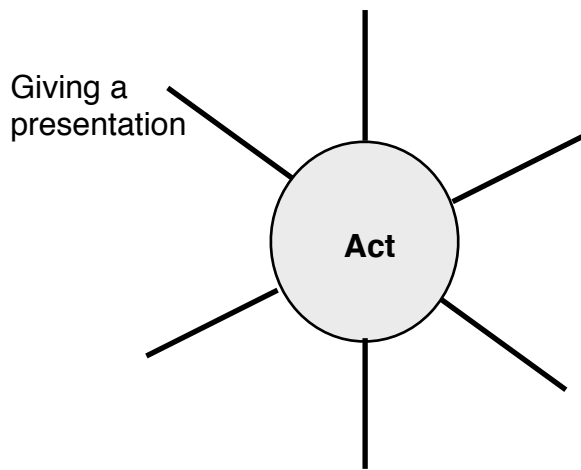
Different people will have different things to put in each of the three Frames but never the less it can be very helpful to look at some of the more common activities that fall into each of the three.

Exercise 1

For each of the three Frames decide what activities might be included. The figures below gives an example to start you off but you may not agree with them. What is a Restore activity for one person may very well be hard work (an Act) for another.

Some common sense is needed as it's also possible that some activities are genuinely common to two frames, but this is much less common than people generally suppose.

The first of these Frames is, generally, the easiest for people to populate as it's what they spend most of their (working) life doing.



Taking stock of our time

There's no magic formula for how much time we should spend in each of **Act**, **Inform**, **Restore** that can be worked out in advance. Obviously everyone's different, but the next exercise helps unpack what we're doing and where we might want (or need) to spend more time.

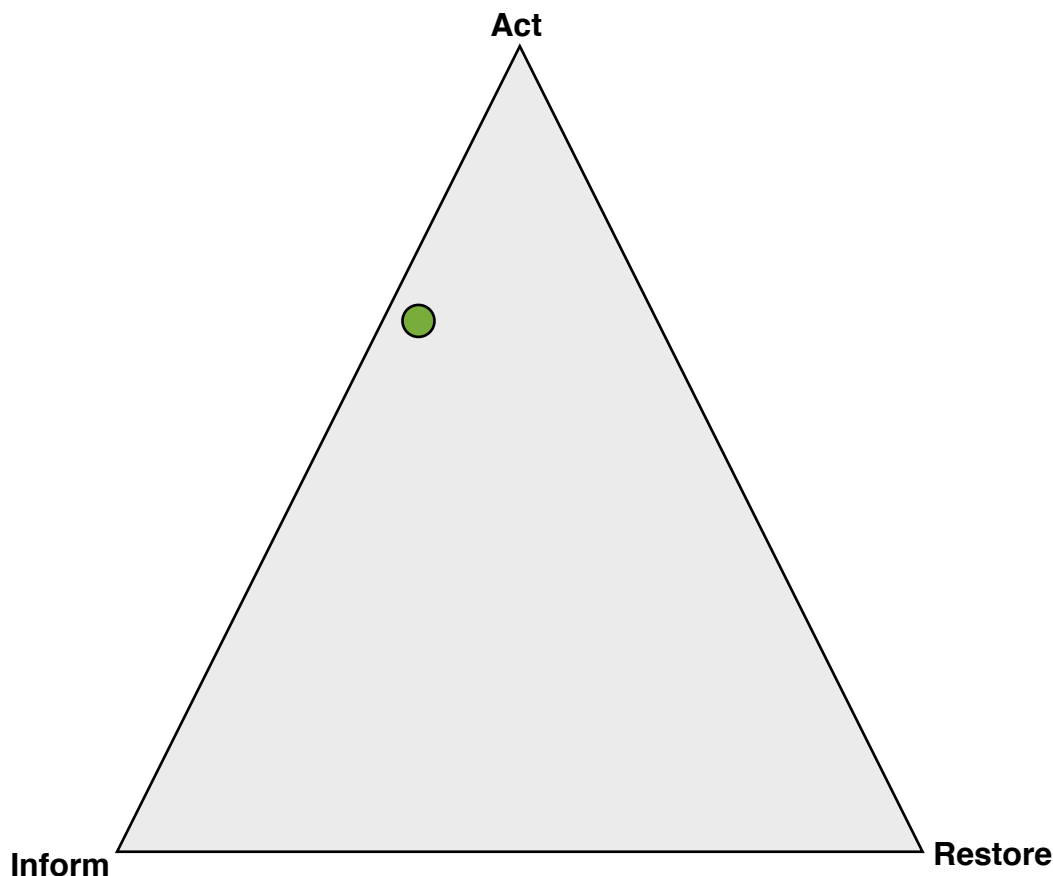
You can do the exercise for different time-frames; it's written down here for days in the last week as an example, but you can also use it for hours in a day and so on. For best effect it's best to do the exercise several times over a month, say, so that you can see a pattern more easily.

Exercise 2

For each day in the last week, spend some time considering whether day was spent mainly in Act, Inform or Restore. No doubt you'll find at least some days were a bit of a

mixture, so if you can do so get a 'feel' for what sort of percentages of the day were spent in each of the three Frames.

The three-way graph below gives a very useful way of representing your results - although there are obviously different ways that you could use. Simply place a cross in the triangle in a position that most represents the feel you have for that day. For example, if you feel the day was 'mainly **Act** but with a bit of **Inform** - but almost no **Restore**' your cross would go in the location marked with the small green dot. The more of each of the Frames there is, the closer your mark should be to it.



What to do next

Used like this, AIR isn't designed to solve your problems. The next step, of course, is to look at the specific tools and techniques which can be applied to each Frame after using AIR to explore specifically what's needed.

For instance, Time Management training should be split between tools for **Act** (being more efficient, getting things done) and tools for **Inform** (figuring out what to do next, setting targets and priorities). All too often approaches to things like Time Management fail to

improve productivity because they concentrates on the **Act** Frame, not the **Inform** one - simply allowing clients to do the wrong things faster!

Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution is another good example.

Dealing with a conflict in the heat of the moment requires a clearly understood set of tools that can be taught, practiced, assimilated and applied. These are clearly **Act** tools. Unfortunately, by their very nature, these tools can often get in the way of looking at the longer-term issues of *why* such crises are occurring in the first place. It therefore *reduces* the chances of the necessary work on the broader issues of ‘Conflict Management’, which are in the **Inform** Frame - looking into causes and what can be done about them.

The following table might be useful in this context, showing how other areas of training fit in the AIR system.

Frame	Areas to develop	Examples
Act	Efficiency tools, including training in specific skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentation skills development • email/ICT system use • assertiveness & confidence tools application • efficiency tools training • physiological stress control • report writing training • crisis management techniques guidance • conflict resolution technique teaching • team development • improving skills specific to individual jobs
Inform	Strategic thinking techniques; creativity tools; information gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prioritisation techniques training • receiving ‘secret shopper’ reports • research tools development • training in non-linear thinking methods • problem solving tool training • networking with peers • conflict management initiatives • MBTI and other psychometric assessments • business/performance coaching • attending briefings • report-reading/statistics training • performing background research
Restore	Resilience training; stress management tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practicing psychological stress control methods • flexible working initiatives • developing hobbies • physical exercise • personal coaching • taking lunch breaks and time off

The list in the table isn’t comprehensive - it is included here at least as much to illustrate the AIR principle as it is to look at what training and development can take place. Nevertheless, it illustrates very effectively the importance of looking carefully at issues in a wider context.