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**Throw Out the Job Description!**



By [Theresa Welbourne](#)

**February 21, 2006:**  
**Focusing**

**too closely on your "job" can net poor results, writes CIO Update columnist Theresa Welbourne of eePulse.**

There is much strategic research showing that long-term competitive advantage for any firm comes from building internal resources that are not easily copied by the competition. Knowing how to build internal, company-specific strengths is key to any leadership position and it holds true for CIOs as well.

If you focus your employees purely on the "job" (as defined in a job description for example), then you are building a base of people resources whose skills can be easily imitated. You are not building long-term competitive advantage for your department or for your company.

The key to success is building a team of

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**IBM Business Values Solution Center**

This paper summarizes the results of the IBM Business Consulting Services CFO Survey, along with an approach and set of best practices to address these challenges developed with some of the leading and most innovative financial executives and companies in the world.

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What factors constrain growth? And what are the levers to drive it? A new study by the IBM Institute for Business Value suggests that limits to growth are often self-imposed and, as such, can be overcome. Successful growers break free of perceived constraints related to size, industry boundaries and geographic neighborhood. To achieve lasting, value-creating growth, companies must be all-around performers. Download this whitepaper to learn more.

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The CEO Study 2004 reports on the findings of a global survey of over 400 CEO's focusing on the most important factors that they need to address with their organizations. The survey finds that three key themes are top of mind for today's CEO: revenue, responsiveness and improving internal capabilities.

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While effective and successful CRM is not easy, it is necessary. Companies that align the goals of the stakeholder groups and expertly balance and prioritize their scarce resources to perform the key CRM approach steps, can improve their likelihood of CRM success from less than 20 percent to closer to 60 percent.

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Procurement performance is moving to center stage. This survey highlights several strategic imperatives that, taken collectively, are fundamentally altering the role of procurement - not only what is expected in terms of outcomes and performance, but also the type of

employees who spend time on their jobs but who also focus on non-core job behaviors that build department and company specific synergies.

In my last *Leadership Pulse* research study (a study that includes over 4,000 business leaders from around the globe), we examined five roles that are critical in any organization. The roles were defined in earlier research that I did in order to develop a simple way to measure performance at work.

The five roles are:

- **Job:** Reflects the basic core job one is hired to perform and is often well described in the typical job description.
- **Team:** Reflects responsibilities for ongoing and project-based teams.
- **Career:** Includes responsibilities to enhance career and skills.
- **Innovator:** Covers work spent to develop new ideas, create new routines or improve on process.
- **Organization Member:** Reflects work done to support company overall, when it is not part of the other roles.

We asked our sample of 378 respondents to let us know what percentage of their time they spend in each role. Overall, results are as follows: Job 45%; Innovator 19%; Team 16%; Organization 12%; and Career 8%.

Most of their time is spent in the core job role, and the least amount of time is

organization and individuals that excel in this new procurement environment.

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## IT Focus

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dedicated to their own careers. However, an examination of some of the sub-group differences bore the most interesting results.

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### **Low v. High**

In terms of firm performance, we ask respondents to rate their company's performance using a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 = very low and 5 = very high.

When the sample is split between the low performing firms (1 and 2) and the high performing firms (4 and 5), we find that the high-performing firm leaders in general spend less time on the job role (44% vs. 50%).

When examining only CEOs within the high and low performing firms, the results are even more striking: CEOs in high-performing firms say they spend 36% of their time on the job role, while CEOs in low performing firms spend 46% on average in the job role.

What do these findings suggest? High performing firms are characterized by leaders spending less time on the "core-job" role. The pattern for IT professionals was the same as those in the overall population of leaders.

IT managers in low-performing firms spent on average 48% of their time on the job role while those in high-performing firms reported spending 44% in the job role. However, more interesting perhaps is the difference in low- and high-performing firms when it comes to the team role.

In high-performing firms, respondents indicated 24% of their time in the team role, while in their lower-performing counterparts they reported only 16% of their time in the team role.

As the CEO of a technology company, I completely understand why the team role is so important to IT workers. First, it's critical for our company's success that the knowledge within this key group is shared by more than one person. When knowledge is shared, not only is the firm in better shape to withstand personnel changes, but overall technology ideas grow, and our product moves forward much faster than it would with many individual contributors.

Key to our success, however, is that our leaders value the time spent doing "team-based" tasks. It is not easy because if people are working in their team role, they are taking away from the job role.

If I were short-sighted, I would be very concerned that some new functionality I want to deliver to our clients is being delayed because the technology team is busy "not working" but just talking with each other.

There may be a lot of valid reasons to toss job descriptions, but the results of this study really is not one of them. The job role is critical for any organization; however, if you only focus on the job, the result will be lower firm performance.

Thus, we find that forward-thinking organizations should expand their language around roles at work and not only become less reliant on stagnant views of the "job," but open up dialogue about what roles are important and when.

It is critical that employees know how to spend their time. And if you really value non-core job roles, that you let employees spend time on those roles without doling out punishment as a result. Punishment happens when employees receive lower merit pay increases because they spend time on team, innovator, career or organization roles, and as a result, they get less "job" done.

Short-term goals can be accomplished with a focus on the job role, however, long-term growth, competitive advantage, and innovation are all a function of your management team focusing on a broader set of roles at work.

*Theresa Wellbourne, is the founder, president and CEO of [eePulse](#) and an adjunct professor of Executive Education at the University of Michigan Business School. If you wish to participate her ongoing leadership study, which is available to you at no cost, please register at: [www.umbs.leadership.eepulse.com](http://www.umbs.leadership.eepulse.com).*