

TIME MANAGEMENT: AGENDA FOR MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS

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Introduction

One of the most important and indispensable resources which every manager or supervisor uses in the course of the performance of his job is time. It is a unique resource not only because it is scarce and irreplaceable, but because it is the one commodity which cannot be bought or sold (Drucker, 1961). In the present knowledge economy, there is so much to do but with relatively little time to accomplish them. Hence, corporate time and therefore the time at the disposal of managers is very limited. Perhaps the only option available to managers and their subordinates is to effect a judicious time management, otherwise they will lose time.

Time management is defined in this paper as the "organizational or individual capacity to be so organized as to optimally achieve objectives within given periods of time". Time management does not necessarily involve working harder but working smarter, reducing waste of energy and effort. Until time is managed, nothing else can be effectively managed in the organization (Le Boeuf, 2001)

The purpose of this paper is to analyse time management as a critical variable for determining managerial effectiveness in the organizational context. The remaining aspect of the paper is divided into four sections. The first section examines the determinants of one's ability to manage time while the second identifies the obstacles to effective time management. The third section suggests strategies for improving managerial effectiveness in the use of time, while the fourth concludes the paper.

Determinants of ability to manage time

There are generally two factors which influence organizational members in their ability to manage time. These include:

- (a) **Individual Gift or Aptitude:** Gifts and aptitudes differ from one person to another. Individuals tend to perform better in areas of work in which they possess the aptitude. For example, five business graduates may be employed by the same organization, but are not equally gifted. Some of them may be good in numerical skills because they are talented in the use of numbers, while others may be good in qualitative skills because that is the area of their natural strength. While it may not always be possible for one to secure a job in which he has a natural gift, it saves time and energy for one to specialize and do the job in which he has a natural talent.
- (b) **Education and Training:** Education and training prepares and equips individuals with the right skills and competencies to perform well. One of the reasons some employees commit errors and have to re-do a product/service or assignment is lack of proper training and/or education. Some managers possess the educational qualifications but lack the appropriate practical skills required to perform in the world of work. This is where training becomes a necessity to bridge



the gap between level of actual performance and the expected level of performance. It is therefore a truism to state that proper training and education are important denominators for faster and smarter performance using time more efficiently.

Obstacles to effective time management

At one time or the other, managers are faced with obstacles which impede their capacity to utilize time as they would normally want to. People and other forces demand their attention and distract them from doing what matters most. When that happens, productivity drops and both the individual members and the organization suffer the consequences. These obstacles are often referred to as time robbers or time wasters. As indicated in Table 1, time robbers can be classified into two separate groups – those imposed on the worker and others that are self-inflicted (Yalokwu, 2006: 624).

Table 1: Common Time Robbers

Imposed from outside	Self-imposed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interruptions - Unclear job definition - Unnecessary meetings - Poor communication - Equipment failure - Disorganized boss - Red tape - Conflicting priorities - Low company morale - Untrained staff - Peer demands - Mistakes of others - Lack of authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Failure to delegate - Poor attitude - Personal disorganization - Absentmindedness - Failure to listen - Indecision - Lack of self-discipline - Procrastination - Clustered office - Unclear personal goals - Perfectionism - Poor planning

Not all the above time robbers are avoidable. Some, like meetings organized by top management and lack of authority may be beyond our control as supervisors. Others just creep into our lives and before we know them, time is lost. When we realize that the opportunity cost of losing corporate time is very high, efforts must be made to proactively monitor the use of time to increase productivity and managerial effectiveness.

Time management strategies

The management of time within the organizational framework can be effectively done using the following strategies:

1. **Become more time conscious:**

The first step to becoming more time conscious is to undertake a critical analysis of how time is spent. Without such information, making determination of which work habits and patterns to change is difficult. A nice way to find out how much time is spent on various tasks is to keep a time log. This procedure involves maintaining a diary of actual time use for several days. Each hour is divided into 15-minute or 20-minute blocks and a record is made of the activities for each interval. Several days of such record keeping can provide a sufficient number of observations for proper analysis. A supervisor can then summarize the findings from the log and determine what he or she could do to make better use of time.

2. **Set challenging goals:**

Manager should set clear and challenging goals with deadlines as to when such goals are to be achieved. Adherence to deadlines can motivate them to work smarter. But deadlines must be realistic; otherwise they cannot be used to appraise performance. Proper goals with deadlines help supervisors avoid procrastination.

3. **Formulate action plans:**

The preparation of a list of tasks necessary for goal achievement is a sine-qua-non for better time management. Action plans act as maps to reach the desired results. Action steps should be set and deadlines for completing each step be specified in a manner to produce a periodic measurement of progress.

4. **Identify and control time robbers:**

From the analysis of the time log, time wasters can be identified. To do a good job, the supervisor should ask questions such as:

- Which time wasters stem from my own style of management?
- Which time wasters are caused by others?
- Which ones can be controlled or eliminated outright?

This way, the supervisor would be able to eliminate such self-imposed time robbers as lack of self-discipline, lack of proper delegation, procrastination, failure to plan in good time, and indecision as well as control others such as incoming telephones, unnecessary meetings and conflicting priorities.

5. **Develop time budget:**

A time budget is a personal planning tool for allocating time for specific tasks. Its function is to make time more productive and profitable through efficient scheduling. In scheduling time in a time budget, it pays to schedule in writing, focus on key objectives and priority items, schedule important or difficult tasks early in the day, group related items where possible, build in flexibility for unexpected events and include thinking time.

6. **Establish and update priorities:**
Priority should be given to tasks that are both urgent and important while others will follow. But priorities are not set in stone; they can be updated as and when environmental and other changes demand such. Since it is impossible to know what the next day might bring, every manager should have his list of priority tasks for each day, but should be ready to update the list as the day progresses (Steffen, 2001:215).

7. **Train and delegate subordinates:**
Supervisors are often saddled with much work that they hardly have time to rest. Well planned delegation can make time for the supervisor to have breathing space to do other important and valuable tasks. Periodic training of subordinates including secretaries and personal assistants can make delegation much easier, and at the same time prepare the staff concerned to take higher responsibilities.

8. **Plan to be unavailable:**
In order to gain periods of uninterrupted concentration, a manager should arrange to be unavailable to callers and visitors so that he can work on his own priorities. A quiet hour should be set, during which no interruption is permitted except for emergencies. Quiet time if well organized can generate more time for greater results and quality work.

Conclusion

In the foregoing sections of this paper we have seen how important and difficult time management can be. We have also suggested some strategies that supervisors and managers can adopt in order to become more effective in the achievement of organizational and individual goals. One thing is true. Time management demands consistent and persistent planning, even on daily basis to leverage more time for the growing corporate demands. With conscious effort and the will on the part of the manager, coupled with the cooperation of all concerned, managing corporate time can be a successful activity.

References

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