

Effective Time Utilization in Management

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Abstract

In today's changing management environment, a high premium is placed on acting quickly and keeping pace. The most carefully made business decisions can become irrelevant and even disastrous if managers take too long time to make them. Time is the least known, least analysed, least utilized and least managed of all the factors of production. However, time utilization is an issue which is fundamental to job performance and productivity. Though difficult to define precisely, time cannot be changed, compressed, expanded, or re-ordered and because of this, time must therefore be used in the most optimum way possible. This involves time planning, delegation, and control of interruptions to simplification of personal communication. The value of time also determines not only the importance of time but also the cost of time. "Time wasted is naira wasted". The Pareto principle and the Parkinsons' law and other elements are important determinants of the value of time. Styles of time management to a large extent affect the managers' time in an organization. The suggestions, which are made, based on practical experience and discussions with professionals are good tips for more effective time utilization. This paper therefore recommends that time utilization should not be isolated from other activities of management. There must be a balance for improved performance and productivity.

Introduction

Time utilization is an issue which is fundamental to job performance and productivity. Effectiveness at work is a function of the individual's utilization or management of his or her time. To Drucker (1974:70) time is "man's most perishable resource". The single most important resource that we allocate from one moment to another is our own time. Time is therefore a unique resource. The supply of other resources can be increased but the supply of time is completely inelastic. Since time is a limiting factor, for an individual to be known as an effective manager depends largely on how he/she utilizes his/her time.

Time utilization in management essentially means effective planning, scheduling, making sound decisions, implementing and assessing activities in an organization to ensure goal accomplishment. The hallmark of an effective professional manager rests on his ability to manage time effectively.

The objective of this paper is to attempt to examine the existing approaches of time utilization and suggest ways of ensuring optimum and effective utilization

of available time so as to obtain maximum productivity and enhance the managers' effectiveness in the course of carrying out his tasks. With careful planning, effective time management, more rational appointment etc, this objective can be achieved.

The Meaning of Time

Webster Dictionary defines time as "the period during which action, or a process continues". Often we hear comments, as Agbato (1990:99) put it "I wish I have more time", "time waits for nobody" or "time will tell". It may be difficult to say what exactly time is. It is when one attempt to explain to another person what time is that one may come to terms with the inadequacy of his knowledge of time. Despite the difficulty in defining time, it is obvious that time is irreversible, it is successive and it is also transitive. Time cannot be changed; neither can it be physically stopped, compressed, expanded or even reordered. Time to many people is a moment when opportunity is at its highest. According to Maituranc (1998), such people put great emphasis upon good timing. The time when opportunity is most favourable has special significance to many. Advertising managers for example, tell us that there is nothing as powerful in industry as an idea whose time has come. If you can learn to recognise the right moment when it comes, and act before it goes away, the problems of life become simplified.

Time is simply "a measure or yardstick of seconds, minutes, hours, and years". When they think of time, they see a clock or a calendar; it has only one dimension i.e. during. This is the shallowest concept of time. No great masterpieces were created by those who gave importance to this concept. The tragedy of this concept of time is that it destroys initiative, discourages creative impulse, and leaves nothing to fill the time allotted to it. If we have a full week to perform a task, it will take a week. If we are given ten days for its completion, it will consume ten days, and if it is twenty days, it will take twenty days and so on.

Whatever may be one's views about time, one will also concede that whoever is important, time is also important to him. Time and attitudes towards life are closely related. This relationship has brought about the reorientation of man's perspectives away from the older view of time as unlimited, cheap, and reoccurring to those attitudes that characterize us today that time is limited.

The Use of Time

The starting point for improving one's utilization of time is to appreciate what his or her working time is worth (i.e. the cost of time). To Maituranc (1998) successful people spend their time doing things that people who fail are unwilling to do. The average person finds it easier to adjust to the hardships of failure than to spend the time adjusting to the sacrifice that lead to success. It means little to have goals and destinations in life unless there is a time schedule attached to each.

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Only then we can start moving towards these goals and arrive at the destination.

People generally fall into two categories: first there is the disenchanted group, which is always going to start something tomorrow. Then we have that wonderful group which is ready to go right now. For them there is no tomorrow. The first group has both tomorrow and time to kill. But killing time is not just a crime it is murder! If one must kill it, one should work it to death". Whenever somebody say; "I don't have time", all that the person is saying is that, there are other things more important to him. Each day must be filled with things to be proud of. Unless we are ready to start right now, regardless of our good intentions, this time tomorrow, this time next week, this time ten years from now we will still be bogged down.

Time management should be a challenge to all. The proper use of time determines the failure or success of the average personnel today even more than his knowledge of his or her product, service or profession. The proper organization of time is certainly one of the first items on any formula for success. The most difficult task ever found among groups is that of getting people to organise their time. This is why every individual must spend some time at the beginning of the week planning, in detail, the exact schedule for that week. It is with this in mind that we can identify and discuss the various issues in time management.

Optimum Utilization of Time

Time cannot be stored or amassed. If time is allowed to pass without serving any purpose, it becomes a resource lost forever. For an effective management, there are certain basic issues that must be considered. Boone and Kurt (1990:188) identified some of the basic issues as planning, organising, directing, and controlling. Others are delegation, simplification etc.

(a) Time Planning

A lot of people often complain that they don't even have the time to plan or worse still that they do not even control their own time not to talk of planning it. The only way to save time is to find little time to plan. The components of planned time include quarterly objectives, weekly plans and daily activities.

What is essential when we talk of quarterly objectives is to list major objectives for the quarter. Then beside each objective indicate the start date, due and appropriate number of days or hours for completion. The major objective is then broken down into primary components in order to put (plan) a working time frame. The objectives are then placed according to priority on a daily basis. Once your time is planned, you will surely not waste time on thinking of what to do. You will definitely have a deadline on all you do. You will easily know whether you are working according to plan hence you can measure performance.

(b) *Delegation*

According to Nwachukwu (1980:84), delegation is the organizational process that permits the transfer of authority from superior to subordinate. It is the process whereby superiors assign duties to subordinates and give them the authority to carry out these tasks. Without delegation, personal effectiveness of the superiors and the subordinates are left redundant. Delegation increases motivation of subordinates by actually making their task more interesting and challenging. Many superiors shoulder the work best done by subordinate, and that takes a lot of his time. For any delegation to be effective the following points must be noted: -

- (i) The superior must express confidence on the general abilities of the subordinates
- (ii) The superior must realise that at the beginning, little mistakes must occur, so the subordinates must be encouraged to learn from the mistakes
- (iii) The superior must avoid giving a subordinate responsibility without adequate authority.
- (iv) There must be an established feedback procedure to monitor results.

Effective delegation therefore, does not come easily and there is no doubt that it is an important skill in its own right, carrying with it a number of specific requirements. These include identifying whether delegation is really needed, what to delegate, how to delegate, and when to delegate. Delegation is a way of doing less. It saves time for the delegation officer. Indeed, delegation saves time and is one of the basic and most important issues in time utilization.

(c) *Control of Interruptions*

Interrupting elements in any organization are visitors, telephone calls, and inadequate delegation etc. Visitors who are not in that day's programme constitute a major time wasting element. A way to discourage drop-in-visitors is by standing up and meeting them at the door and announcing that you are too busy and either schedule a meeting with them or tell them that you can only spare them five minutes. The telephone constitutes another time waster. Here a plan could be developed to screen delegate or consolidate calls. In calling out, you must organise yourself and be prepared to talk. You should also enquire from the person you are calling the best time to call him. Keep the lengths of the call to a minimum.

(d) *Meetings*

Meetings if necessarily prolonged could become a major time wasting element in an organization. Meeting should be designed to meet a specific purpose and should never be called simply because its time to have a meeting. The agenda of the meeting must be clearly stated and issues discussed promptly without digression. Meetings should be arranged prior to natural breaks to reduce the tendency to "fill the time available" or to drag on endlessly.

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(e) Segmentation

This element of time management requires that you separate the controllable time and the time that is not at your control. The uncontrollable time is the time consumed responding to events and people with their respects, demands, and problems. It is also referred to as job-imposed time, required time, fixed time or response time. On the other hand, there is the time a manager can control – called controllable time, self-imposed time, disposable time and discretionary time. For anyone to be effective in whatever one does, there is the need to make available more of this controllable time.

(f) Isolation

The most definite form of separation is physical isolation from the normal workplace. The manager may have more than one office. What is involved here is an effort to consolidate chunks of uninterrupted time in order to think more deeply about organizational problems. Another alternative is to use one office but insists that at some time no one sees you. There must have been noticing notices on some doors such as "no visitors before 10.00am, 2.00pm" etc though this is hardly followed. This is because such withdrawal creates personal animosity. The associate who calls with a matter that is important to him may be offended when he is denied entry before the time stipulated on the door.

(g) Simplification

This technique suggests that the individual should present his matter in a simple form. It saves a lot of time since the listener or the reader may not require further explanation that may waste a lot of time simplification of personal communication either oral or written helps managerial process. Grouping outgoing communication and incoming communications save a lot of time. Handling correspondence only once and responding immediately makes a lot of sense

The Value of Time in Organizations

We often speak of the value of time, its importance and cost. Yet we seldom calculate the cost of time in a meeting or a workshop. If we come up with a naira figure per minute we will realise that for every minute we waste we lose that much money. This places a heavy burden of responsibility on the organizations to plan every minute of the activity in an optimal way.

If we learn to calculate the cost per minute for all our activities we will realise the tragic waste of the organizations sources when we misuse the time spent during conferences seminars, and meetings. Gathering and organizing people are very serious matter that requires time, good decision and resources. In trying to determine the value of time, its importance and cost, it is important to briefly discuss two important time tamers. These are seen in (a) the Pareto principle and (b) the Parkinson law

(a) *The Pareto Principle*

The Pareto Principle, (also known as the 80/20 concept) states that "the significant items in a given group constitute relatively small position of the total items in a group". In other words, "80% of one's goals can be achieved in 20% of one's time if one works on those tasks that are critical to the completion of the overall project and avoid those that contribute little to the outcome". The manager is expected to apply this principle by recognizing and listing the 20% of the items that are likely to yield 80% of the expected results. He should then act on them first.

(b) *The Parkinson Law*

The Parkinson Law, according to Parkinson (1986) in Mullins (1986:389) is the law of "Rising Pyramid" i.e. "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion". Under this law, it is generally recognised that: "it is the busiest person who has time to spare". Managers are therefore, required to set deadlines for each job and work toward the deadline.

Inclusive in the value of time, are time wasting elements. To Agbato (1990:100) some of the time wasting elements includes: wrong emphasis on priority, ineffective (or no) delegation, fear of being wrong, ineffective meetings, interruptions, failure to be systematic or orderly, poor communication, pride, fatigue etc.

Time Management Styles

People in the professional jobs differ greatly in their time management styles and approaches. Some evolve time habits suited to their persons, values and attitudes as opposed to others. Some have greater job demands on their time than others. However, it is pertinent to examine some typical characters and their attitude to time management. To Maiturare (1998) some of the typical characteristics are:

(a) *The Workaholics*

Under this style, individuals work non-stop throughout the day regularly into the evening and weekends. They have few strong interests outside work and believe that the job is also a hobby. They consider that everyone else should work just as hard. The workaholic does not make a good manager. Where a manager must set priorities, a workaholic must do everything. A manager must be patient in gaining the commitment of others, in order to multiply his efforts. But the workaholic has little or no patience with others and works unending hours to make up for their perceived lack of commitment.

(b) *The Willing Horse*

He is the type similar to the workaholic; he cannot say no to a request. Each day is filled to overflowing; trying to meet all requests and the result is sometimes that jobs get done but quality and productivity often suffer. As with all willing horses

there is a danger that excessive strain will break them.

(c) *The Efficiency Experts*

The efficiency expert may have been trained in work-study using a stop watch at some stage in his career. He rushes out from one job to the next and takes pride in handling six jobs at the same time.

(d) *The Procrastinator*

He always puts off making decisions and needs mounds of information and further facts before any decision can be taken. He is often articulate and difficult to put down and sometimes gives the impression that the purpose of work is to ensure that nobody can ever possibly prove him responsible for any mistake. If you procrastinate, the work keeps piling up. You do not know what tomorrow will bring. A good practice is to do any task on the spot if it takes five minutes or less. If it takes more than five minutes, schedule it according to its priority. This golden rule can make you a great achiever in life.

(e) *The Crisis Manager*

This is someone who works continually from one crisis to the next. As he is ruled by the Morning Post and the Telephone. 'Firefighting' and mushroom time management also describes this style. The crisis manager never has time to plan work to avoid panic; he rushes jobs because he is too busy dealing with crisis. In most works situations, this style is debilitating and should be avoided.

(f) *The Socialist*

The type spends a lot of time chatting with everyone willing to listen. He often finds reasons to go far a walk around the premises and keep in touch with a wide range of contacts. He is highly active on the grapevine and in organised social events. All these management styles affect the manager's time in organizations.

Suggestions on how to Utilize Time Effectively

An investment on time should yield the best positive return. It is suggested here that managers should utilize their time effectively by doing the following: -

- a. Develop a time log. Plan your day each morning by writing down the things to do and check them off as they are done.
- b. Learn to say no to time wasting activities.
- c. Always have a pencil and paper or a small notebook in your pocket so that you can jot down plans and ideas during spare time.
- d. Avoid a late start.
- e. Plan rest times.
- f. Enforce self-discipline.

- g. Utilize spare time by reading, memorizing, or doing something constructive.
- h. Always give clear instructions to subordinates.
- i. When you make an appointment, be sure that both parties understand the exact time.
- j. Ensure regular maintenance of equipment.
- k. Adjust your traveling time to the distance involved, making reasonable allowance for the unexpected, so that you will arrive at the appointed time.
- l. Avoid people who are thoughtless and selfish enough to steal your time.
- m. Do not make a trip in person if you can accomplish the same through a letter or a telephone call.
- n. Avoid excessive management of past.
- o. Delegate effectively. Do not take valuable time from own business or profession to do a job that could be done better by others at much less cost.

Conclusion

There is a growing interest in time utilization in dynamic organizations. Effective utilization of time should not be viewed in isolation from related activities of management such as leadership, delegation, coordination, planning etc. Time utilization needs to be balanced against potential benefits. One of such potential benefits is to enable managers not only to be successful but also to be good planners and leaders – the essential ingredients needed for improved performance and productivity in organizations.

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