

TIME MANAGEMENT - AN INSTRUMENT TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

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OPSOMMING

TYD is 'n belangrike faktor in die lewe van die mens - enersyds dien dit as 'n beplanningsmeganisme om jou daaglikse aktiwiteite sinvol te orden of om 'n projek met presisie te laat verloop, maar andersyds kan dit ook vernietigende kragte genereer indien 'n mens daarvoor beheer verloor.

In die proses van groei en vooruitgang in 'n dinamies veranderende omgewing, raak die tyd van bestuur nie alleen kosbaarder nie, maar ook skaarser en 'n era van "tydarmoede" word deur baie ervaar. 'n Verskeidenheid van onbeheerbare faktore mag hiervoor verantwoordelik wees, maar die gevaar bestaan dat die mens die greep op die beheerbare faktore mag verloor.

Die DOEL met hierdie artikel oor tydsbestuur is juis

- om behulpsaam te wees met die identifisering van "slaggate" wat tot "tydarmoede" aanleiding gee,
- hoe om tydverkwisting te voorkom of te hanteer en
- die toepassing van metodes en gebruik van hulpmiddels om effektiewe tydsbestuur te bevorder.

ABSTRACT

TIME is an important element in any persons life - not only as a planning mechanism to meaningfully organise ones daily activities, or to ensure that a project runs with precision, but also as a generator of destructive forces if control over it is lost.

In the process of growth and progress in a dynamic ever-changing environment, time not only becomes dearer to management, but also scarcer, and an era of "time poverty" is experienced by many. A variety of uncontrollable factors may be the cause of such problems, but a danger exists that those factors over which control may be exercised could be lost within the uncontrollable ones.

The objective of this article on time management is then

- to assist in identifying those "barriers" which lead to "time poverty",
- how to avoid and prevent time wastage and
- apply methods, and make use of ways to promote the effective use of time.

TIME MANAGEMENT - AN INSTRUMENT TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

TIME is an important factor in the life of man. On the one hand it serves as a planning mechanism for arranging your daily activities meaningfully or to let a specific project run with precision. but on the other hand it can generate destructive forces if man loses control over it.

Limited time is, however, symptomatic of the spirit of our times. and serves as cliché. No one can deny that life rushes along at an unparalleled rate and if time is structured and employed uneconomically, the individual will experience life as survival from day to day and will have to see, powerlessly, how he has to move as quickly as possible merely to remain where he is. A variety of uncontrollable factors may be responsible for this, but the danger exists that a person may lose his grip on the controllable factors as far as his life is concerned. One cannot help but wonder whether a person who occupies a position of leadership and is incapable of planning and organising his life meaningfully, is indeed capable of exercising control over subordinates.

Sufficient evidence exists that this distinctive and critical factor - to some extent unique among the other resources of the business - requires the highest degree of efficient management, but that management is sometimes unwilling to make a self-analysis in this respect or to take a close look at the causes of this injudicious management of time. As the inefficient management of time is a problem that revolves around the person himself, no instant solutions are available, and a solution that is acceptable to one person cannot be applied to another person per se. Each individual case requires a self-analysis and remedial material must be adapted and used accordingly.

For the purposes of discussion the subject will be dealt with practically and within a certain FRAME OF REFERENCE as far as possible.

First of all, it must be determined which aspects TAKE UP the individual's time and why the available time cannot be employed optimally. Secondly, it is important to exercise control over "ENVIRONMENTAL TIME". Thirdly, meaningful TIME PLANNING must be carried out and possible "block times" must be reserved. Fourthly, provision must be made for the necessary RECREATION AND DEVELOPMENT TIME.

ACTUAL OCCUPATION OF TIME

As a person cannot always identify the causes leading to limited time, it is important to carry out a survey periodically to determine what the actual daily occupation of time looks like - that is, by compiling a complete work cycle that represents ALL FACETS of the daily task.

When compiling such a list, one should not only rely on one's memory, but it is advisable to make a note of all activities, however small, and regardless of whether it is classified as a managerial or non-managerial activity, for a certain period. It is important that information be noted down immediately after completion of an activity to ensure correctness and completeness.

At the end of such a period the manager can classify the activities tentatively as follows:

- Activities that were not essential, that is, which could have been ELIMINATED without any detrimental effect to the business;

- Activities that could have been done equally efficiently by a subordinate, that is, activities which are suitable for DELEGATION;

- Activities that should mainly enjoy management's attention, that is, which are regarded as REALLY IMPORTANT and REALLY URGENT.

Trickett (62:4) emphasises the fact management sometimes finds it difficult to compile such a list and that some managers want to classify all tasks as important and urgent. It is therefore important that management should be able to distinguish with discernment between the concepts of important/urgent tasks and really important/really urgent tasks.

After compiling and tentatively classifying the daily activities, a PROGRAMME OF ACTION must be planned on a more permanent basis. For this purpose Trickett (62:4-15) recommends that management uses an ACTIVITY ANALYSIS FORM in order to classify all activities according to the degree of importance, urgency, delegation and appointments. Although it can be designed to management's own taste and judgement, it should include the following steps, amongst others (Figure 1).

Step 1 makes provision for INTRINSIC (ESSENTIAL) IMPORTANT aspects and varies from VERY IMPORTANT to UNIMPORTANT.

Step 2 indicates the degree of URGENCY and varies from VERY URGENT TO NOT AT ALL URGENT.

Step 3 indicates the degree of DELEGATION and varies from aspects that must be dealt with mainly PERSONALLY to aspects where DELEGATION can be applied fully.

Step 4 indicates VISITS/APPOINTMENTS/CONFERENCES

After completion of this activity analysis form, management should be able to see clearly not only how time was actually spent in the past, but what should be regarded as really important and really urgent in future, and which activities can be delegated or postponed temporarily.

It is said that Eisenhower, former president of the USA, was a master of effective time management. He planned and organised his daily tasks in such a way that only the really important and really urgent matters landed on his desk. The rest had to be dealt with by his staff.

FIGURE 1: ACTIVITY ANALYSIS FORM

ANALYSIS OF ACTIVITIES

1. INTRINSICALLY IMPORTANT ASPECTS

Very important immediate atten- tion	Important requires attention	Less important can receive attention later	Unimportant Ignore
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2. URGENCY

Very urgent	Urgent	Less urgent	Time no factor
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3. DELEGATION

Personal attention	Delegate to	Delegate to	Delegate to	Delegate to
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4. VISITORS/APPOINTMENTS/CONFERENCES

Personal appointments	Appointments periodical	Scheduled conferences	Unplanned visits/ conferences	Other contacts
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Source: Adapted from Trickett, J.M., "A more effective use of time", California Management Review, Vol. 4, no. 4, 1962.

CONTROL OVER ENVIRONMENTAL TIME

In a study conducted by Moore (68:77-85), which involved more than 3 000 managers, the respondents had to indicate factors that would lead to the ineffective employment of time. Most of these factors originated in the immediate environment of the manager (hence the term environmental time) and are related to interruptions caused by unexpected visitors, disturbances caused by uncontrolled telephone calls, unnecessary and unstructured meetings, a large volume of "paperwork", etc.

Although the telephone is an important link in the communication network, it is also responsible for many disturbances in the manager's office. The public does not have free access to or contact with the offices of most professional people, but leading businessmen or persons in other responsible positions are content to let an unexpected visitor or telephone call interrupt an important meeting or interview at any time. It is important that persons in leadership positions have greater control over their environmental time. For example, instructions can be given to screen incoming calls from the manager's office at a certain time, or to put only really urgent calls through to him.

Unnecessary, unstructured and clumsy meetings and masses of paperwork in the form of reports and circulars, also have a detrimental effect on management's environmental time. Although it can be difficult to find alternatives for some of these "wastes of time", a reconsideration of the necessity for meetings and reports, as well as the effective planning thereof, can contribute much to the economical employment of the environmental time of management and staff.

MEANINGFUL PLANNING OF TIME BY MEANS OF BLOCK TIME

Persons in leadership positions are, from the nature of the positions they occupy, the leaders, the creative thinkers and the planners in their businesses/departments. These functions require a great deal of time and can only be carried out if effective time planning is used.

Many managers agree that meaningful planning of time is actually a relative concept and that planning procedures vary from person to person. In practice some managers work according to month programmes, others to week programmes, and some prefer to schedule activities on a daily basis. Regardless of the period preferred, it remains important that each manager gives high priority to the reservation of block times. By reserving block times the manager ensures that times are reserved every day for specific activities such as dealing with correspondence, discussions with heads of departments, making essential telephone calls, keeping appointments, and also that sufficient seclusion time be created for planning and creative thinking.

During such block times the manager is screened from his environment and the minimum disturbance or no disturbance, not only ensures high productivity but also that the work programme runs meaningfully and according to priorities. Apart from the reservation of block time, time for open communication, as well as compulsory and planned appointments/visits/meetings should also be allowed.

In Figure 2 an example of such a time plan is given.

FIGURE 2

TIME PLAN

(Week ending)

Time	Day	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
08h00 - 09h00		O	O	O	O	O
09h00 - 10h00		ST	ST	ST	ST	ST
10h00 - 11h00				ST		
11h00 - 12h00				ST		
12h00 - 13h00				ST		
13h00 - 14h00		S		S	S	
14h00 - 15h00				S		S
15h00 - 16h00				S		S
16h00 - 17h00		O	O	S	O	O
17h00 - 18h00						

O = open communication

ST = secluded time

S = scheduled time (obligatory and planned appointments/
visits/meetings)

RECREATION AND DEVELOPMENT TIME

One of the biggest problems that leaders have to contend with is to find time for recreation and self-development. The rate at which they have to move to remain "one step ahead" in this hard and highly competitive arena, means that for some a time plan is only a myth and that recreation and development time are also absorbed by a lengthened working day. In practice enough evidence exists that this abnormality not only leaves physical lesions, but is also to a large extent responsible for unhappy and even broken family lives.

To exercise leadership and to set the pace, it is essential to have a healthy mind in a healthy body. Consequently people in leadership positions

- must plan so that they have time for recreation
- must give some of their time to render services to the community
- must have ample opportunity to meet their family obligations
- must do justice to self-development by means of continuous study and reading.

THE CHALLENGE OF EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT - SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Persons in leadership positions may give the public and their colleagues the impression that they have a very important post, that they move at an inhuman pace and have an overfull work programme, because they have to run from one appointment to the other, the telephone rings

incessantly and there is a constant flow of people to and from their offices. Although such restlessness may create an impression of activity, it could be typical symptoms of inefficient time management. The uneconomical employment of resources inevitably leads to poor performance, and one of the most important and strategic resources of the business, its managerial talent, is not excluded from this economic principle.

Effective time management does not put an extra load on the shoulders of management but only implies a reappraisal as well as a meaningful planning of daily activities, which should be a big challenge to management. The manager should decide

- which activities are really important and really urgent and should be dealt with by himself
- which activities can be delegated to lower levels of the hierarchy
- which factors are the causes that time is not used economically
- how environmental time can be planned and managed meaningfully
- how the time plan should be scheduled in order to make time available for creative thought and essential appointments, but also for open communication
- how to maintain a healthy balance between working time and recreation time.

Various methods and techniques exist that can be applied with a view to efficient time management, but no technique can be implemented successfully if PERSONAL DISCIPLINE is not exercised. Personal discipline does not imply a change-over to another style of management or a metamorphosis of the management process, but merely meaningful and efficient planning as propagated in the frame of reference, and the application thereof on the basis of simple RULES OF CONDUCT. In this respect Trickett (62:4-15) makes the following suggestions:

- o Deal with one task at a time. The more diversified a task becomes, the more difficult it is to apply this rule. However, people in managerial positions know how frustrating it is to give attention to a number of aspects simultaneously, and to find that none of them have been finalised by the end of the day. It is difficult to apply this rule, but with the necessary self-discipline it can be learnt.

- o Complete an activity.

Dealing with documents, notes and letters takes up a great deal of management's time and therefore Trickett emphasises the golden rule that each document should, as far as possible, be handled once only. Take the document in hand, decide whether you should deal with it yourself or whether someone else should handle it, or whether it should return to the manager's basket at a later stage. If the manager decides to deal with it himself, he should do so immediately.

o Effective office equipment.

In order to exercise effective time management and a high level of administrative and organisational efficiency, supportive services and office equipment should be of good and tasteful quality. The following are some examples in this respect:

- If the manager has to deal with and finalise a large volume of paperwork daily, a dictaphone is essential.
- The atmosphere and furniture of the manager's office must contribute to a comfortable and attractive work environment in order to stimulate increased productivity.
- If discussions and meetings are held in the manager's office regularly, the required facilities should be provided in the office.
- If the manager often has to receive important guests in his office, an informal "sitting-room" atmosphere can even be created in the office.

o Take your secretary into your confidence.

The secretary, if well informed and correctly employed, is an important asset to the manager's office.

It is the secretary who plays an important part

- in creating a pleasant atmosphere in the manager's office

- in helping to plan his time environment economically
 - in scheduling and keeping up to date the time plan
 - in screening telephone calls and visitors and taking care that reserved block times are maintained and scheduled appointments are kept punctually.
- o Use "prime" time optimally.

This is a subjective concept which refers to specific times of the day during which a person's ability to think creatively and work enthusiastically are much greater than at other unproductive times of the day. For some the prime times will be early in the morning and for others late in the afternoon or in the evening. However, what is important is that each individual must use his prime time optimally, when the brain functions actively, tasks that require imagination and creativity can be dealt with, whereas routine work can be tackled in less active periods.

REMEMBER:

"Time is the stuff of which life is made" (Franklin)

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