EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Time is one of the most valuable asset available to man. Sadly however is the prevalent lack of time management culture in many societies especially in developing countries including Africa. This paper takes a look at the concept of time management and how it can be practiced to improve organisational efficiency and effectiveness drawing from evidence in literatuure. The paper concludes that most developing countries particulary those of Africa must address and improve the use of time at all levels including organisation to fast track its rate of development.

Keywords: Time, Time Management, Selm Management, Efficiency, Effectiveness

1.0 Introduction.

The increasing pace of life occasioned by such factors as growing competition in all spheres including the political space is creating increased time pressure on mankind (Hessing, 1994). This is often expressed by doing things faster (acceleration), contracting time expenditure (e.g. eat faster, sleep less) and compressing actions (e.g. making a phone call while eating) (Garhammer, 2002). The situation is even worse with women (especially mothers) many of who have to cope with compliance with workplace schedules combined with household needs (Hessing, 1994). Empirical evidence shows the existence of a positive relationship between use of time and key outcomes such as physical health, psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, productivity and effectiveness (Chang and Nguyen, 2011; Adebisi, 2012). Adebisi (2012) found a positive relationship between effective time management and organisational performance. These have made it imperative for every individual that is striving for effectiveness to adopt techniques that will optimise the use of time.

If effective time management is essential for everybody, it is even more important for personal assistants (PAs). According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) United Kingdom (2013), Personal Assistants help their principals make best use of their time by carrying out the following activities: devising and maintaining office systems such as filing and data management; arranging travel, visas and accommodation and, occasionally, travelling with the principals to take notes or dictation at meetings or to provide general assistance during presentations; and screening phone calls, enquiries and requests, and handling them when appropriate. Other roles performed by PAs include: meeting and greeting visitors at all levels of seniority; organising and maintaining diaries and making appointments; dealing with incoming email, faxes and post, often corresponding on behalf of the their principals; taking dictation and minutes; carrying out background research and presenting findings; producing documents, briefing papers, reports and presentations; organising and attending meetings and ensuring their principals are well prepared for meetings; liaising with clients (constituents), suppliers (staff of the National Assembly, printers etc) and other staff (other legislative aides etc). Other

roles may include: carrying out specific projects and research; responsibility for accounts and budgets; taking on some of the manager's responsibilities and working more closely with management; deputising for their principal, making decisions and delegating work to others in the principal's absence and being involved in decision-making processes. A close looks at these functions suggest that all effectiveness seeking PAs must possess time management skills.

The objective of this paper is to train participant on the concept of time management and contemporary time management techniques that will make them more effective as PAs to honourable members of the National Assembly. The paper is divided into thirteen sections and subsections: Introduction, the concept of time management, benefits of time Management, time management techniques; creating effectiveness supporting environment, goal setting, establishing priorities, ABC method, The Pareto Principle, Eisenhower method, keeping task lists and computer based time management tools.

2.0 The Concept of Time Management

Time is the most precious asset available to man (Kohn, 2000). This is because time is a myth; an asset that cannot be recovered stored or transferred (Adebisi, 2012). Every activity human activity is carried out using time; also, most human activities are time bound. For example, most tasks are expected to be carried out within a time limit. A late report can adversely affect the popularity of a politician, for instance. Time is also limited in supply; we only have twenty four hours in a day, 7 days a week etc. The supply of time is therefore perfectly inelastic. Due to this nature of time, the need for its optimal use is imperative. Time management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity (Buck et al, 2000).

The term 'time management' itself is misleading (Claessens, 2004; Peel, 2007). This is because of the inelasticity of its supply. Time management in its real sense mean the process of controlling time; which is practically impossible. What is possible is self-management aimed at achieving multiple tasks within a limited time. However, for the purpose of this paper, we stick to time management rather than self management.

There is no consensus in literature as to how Time Management should be defined (Claessens, 2004). While Lakein (1973) suggested that time involves the process of determinacy of needs, setting goals to achieve the needs, prioritising and planning the tasks required to achieve these goals, other management scholars opined that it is a technique for effective time use, especially having enough time to accomplish the many tasks required (Orpen, 1994; Slaven & Totterdell, 1993). However, for the purpose of this paper, we adopt Claessens (2004) definition of time management: behaviours that aim at achieving an efficient and effective use of time. These behaviours are categorised into 3 components:

- awareness of here and now or past, present, and future and self-awareness of one's time use (attitudes, cognitions) which help to accept tasks and responsibilities that fit within the limit of one's capabilities.

- instructions or tools aimed at preparing to use time efficiently (setting goals, planning tasks, prioritising, making to-do lists, grouping tasks)
- Providing a structure for managing time and self monitoring, which allows for a feedback loop when working on tasks and limiting the interruptions by others.

The practice of time management dates back to the days of the Industrial Revolution of Europe (Adebisi, 2012). Prior to the industrial revolution, most people led simple one-dimensional lives as small-scale farmers, artisans etc. The concept of time management at this time depended on weathers, seasons, daylight etc, For example, daylight hours determined work hour. The sun and the moon determined time keeping. The industrial revolution, however, popularised the use of machines in factories and electricity rendering the concept of daylight hour insignificant. The invention of mechanical clocks further made it possible to manage time more effectively. This was further strengthened by the shift from agrarian to industrial economies, development of postal services and telegraphs and the popularisation of the views of scholars and popular politicians such as Isaac Newton and Thomas Jefferson. Benjamin Franklin's statements 'Time is Money' and 'time is the stuff of which life is made' inspired people to take time more seriously. The popularisation of Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management further established the practice of time management. He laid the cause of inefficiency to his workers' tendencies to work slowly, without any incentives to work fast. He advocated establishing specific work targets and paying workers for the tasks and goals met. This mandated better usage of time and became the basis for modern time management approaches (Nayab, 2011). Stephen Covey (1994) in his popular book, 'First Things First' identified four generations of time management approaches that are in use since World War II:

- **First generation:** The use of traditional and rudimentary approach based on clock-based reminders and alerts.
- **Second generation:** The use of planning and preparation of work schedules and events, including setting time-based goals.
- **Third generation:** Prioritisation of various tasks and events, and controlling tasks using schedulers.
- **Fourth generation:** The fourth generation of time management approach is the contemporary approach. This approach, like the third generation approach, aims at prioritising various tasks and events, but aims at prioritisation based on importance of the task rather than the urgency. This approach also concentrates on the efficient and proactive use of the various time management tools.

3.0 Benefits of Time Management
Peel (2007) identified four key benefits of effective time management:
First, time management is an important tool for stress reduction. This is because, with an effective time management method in place, important tasks are completed on time leading to less frustration and more inner peace
Second, good time management methods help in the achievement of work-life balance. This is because an effective time management strategy will leave the user with more time and energy for work, home, family and self.
Thirdly, productivity improves with a more efficient and effective use of time.

Fourthly, the application of time management enhances the achievement of individual and by extension, organisational goals. Other benefits of time management are:

- **Enhancement of individual punctuality and discipline:** With time management skills, the individual learns to work when it is actually required. He/she knows how his/her day will looks like and eventually works accordingly leading to an increased output.

- **The Individual becomes more organised as a result of effective time management**. Keeping the things at their proper places minimises the time which goes on unnecessary searching of documents, important files, folders, stationery items and so on. For better time management, individuals keep their workstations, study zones, cubicles, meeting areas clean and organised. People learn to manage things well as a result of Time Management.

- **Morale and confidence booster**. As a result of Time Management, individuals accomplish tasks within the stipulated time frame, making them popular in their organisation as well as amongst their peers. People who understand the value of time are the ones who manage to stand apart from the crowd. Individuals who finish off work on time are looked up to by others and are always the centre of attention everywhere.

- **Realisation of goals and objectives within the shortest possible time span**. Managing time effectively helps employees to meet targets way ahead of deadlines and finish off task just when it is required.

- Effective Time Management helps an employee to reach the pinnacle of success quickly and stay firm at the top for a longer duration. An employee who works just for the sake of working fails to create an impression and is never taken seriously at work. Effective time management plays a pivotal role in increasing an individual's productivity. Output increases substantially when people manage their time well.

- **Improvement in Planning and Forecasting**. Individuals learn to plan things well and know where exactly they stand five years from now.

- **Stress Reduction:** Research says that individuals who accomplish tasks on time are less prone to stress and anxiety. Remember there is no point in wasting time and rushing later. Finish off pending work on time and then you would have ample time for your friends, relatives and family members.

- **Time Management enables an individual to prioritise tasks and activities at workplace**. It is foolish to stay overburdened. Do not accept anything and everything that comes your way.

- Time Management helps an individual to adopt a planned approach in life. (Management Study Guide, 2013)

4.0 Time Management Techniques
4.1 Creating an Effectiveness Supporting Environment
The first step towards developing and implementing an effective time management strategy is to create an environment that will support individual effectiveness (Kohn, 2000). This is done by

- Getting organised. The individual should maintain a tidy and well organised work environment. An effective filling system must be in place for easy retrieval of documents.

- Effective delegation. Where delegation is impossible, prioritise in order of importance
- Protect your time through insulation and isolation. Avoid time wasters Key time wasters include: attending to unimportant issues, socialising, poor communication, incomplete information, living tasks unfinished, unnecessarily long meetings etc. Effective time management requires the ability to give priority attention to only important issues.
- Recovery from bad habits such as procrastination

4.2 Goal Setting

Goal setting is crucial in time management. When an individual is goal oriented, he/she will likely manage his/her time more effectively. Goal setting gives focus to where an individual will channel his/her time, energy and resources. To effectively manage your time, set long range and short range goals with key step to be taken to ensure their realisation. As a PA to a member of the House of Assembly, set goals of what you intend to achieve during your term in office. Break these goals into medium and short range objectives. Then list out key tasks that will lead to the achievement of these objectives. Let your goals be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound. Remember the saying,' if you don't know where you are going, anywhere will take you there'.

4.3 Establishing Priorities

It is absolutely important that you set priorities among these tasks. People often set priorities on the basis of path of least resistance, default and inspiration. These methods increase the likelihood of achieving less important goals at the expense of important ones. However, there are several priority selection techniques that can be adopted.

4.31 ABC Analysis

This involves categorising priorities in the following order:
- A - Tasks that are perceived as being urgent and important,
- B - Tasks that are important but not urgent,
- C - Tasks that is neither urgent nor important.

Priority attention is given to goals listed as A and B. Research of high-performing organisations suggests that the most successful people spend 65 to 80 percent of their time on activities that are "important, but not urgent." The typical person spends about 15 percent of his or her time on those activities and much more (50-60 percent) on putting out fires for "urgent, but not important" activities such as interruptions and handling other people's priorities.

4.32 The Pareto Principle

Also known as the 80/20 rule, the Pareto Principle is one of the most helpful tools in time management. Propounded by an Italian Economist Vilfredo Pareto in 1895, it is a principle that has gained enormous popularity in management. Pareto noticed that people in his society seemed to divide naturally into what he called the "vital few"; the top 20% in terms of money and influence, and the "trivial many," the bottom 80%. He also discovered that virtually all economic activities are subject to the Pareto Principle as well. The rule says that 20% of an individual's activities will account for 80% of his/her results. This means that in a list of ten tasks, two of them will

contribute over five times what the other eight will, even when all of them will require equal time to complete. Thus for effective use of time, the individual should focus first on these vital 20% before others. Studies have also shown that these vital 20% are often the most difficult. Therefore, no matter how difficult the vital 20% are, the individual must work on them first before the trivial 80%. Before any activity is carried out, the individual must ask him/herself the following question: is this among the vital 20% or the trivial 80%. The ability to choose and carry out activities among the vital 20% will determine how effective the individual will be (Reh, 2013).

4.33 The Eisenhower Method

This is a method of prioritising tasks developed by a former president of the US; Dwight Eisenhower. As a former general in the US army, he led the invasion of France to eject the Germans during the Second World War. He devised the Eisenhower method to effectively control the over 2 million soldiers under him (Fluent-time Management.com, 2013).

To apply the Eisenhower method, the individual will pick items from the list of tasks and goals to be achieved and answer the following questions: Is it urgent? Is it important? According to Eisenhower, what is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important. These items are then listed in the appropriate quadrant in the diagram below:

	Urgent	**Not Urgent**
Important	Emergencies Deadlines Some calls **2**	Constituency service activities Exercise **1**
Not Important	**3** Interruptions Distractions Other calls	**4** Time wasters Trivia

Quadrant 4 (Not important and not urgent): Listed here should be time wasters such as face book, blackberry pinging etc. The individual should not devote any time to activities in this quadrant because they do not contribute to the achievement of his/her goals.

Quadrant 3 (Not Important and Urgent): Listed here includes incoming phone calls, answering e-mails and interrupting colleagues. The individual should devote less time to items listed here since they are not important to the individual's goal attainment...

Quadrant 2 (Important and Urgent): These include emergencies, troubleshooting etc. These items are vital to the attainment of the individual's goals and therefore should receive prompt attention.

Quadrant 1 (Important and not urgent): Items here may include building quality relation with other people, doing actual work to progress towards a goal etc. These items should attract most of the time of the individual.

4.4 Keeping Task Lists

An effective technique in time management is the keeping of task lists also known as to-do lists. This is a list of intended activities and tasks in order of importance. This ensures that the individual keeps track of all important activities to be done. Prioritisation of tasks in order of importance ensures that the individual gives due attention to important ones, while leaving the less important ones for later. Task lists have been proven to be effective against work overload and improved organisation of work and reliability and productivity of its users.

There are two major steps in preparing a task list:
- Step 1: Write down all the steps that you need to complete. Large tasks should be broken down into smaller action steps. Ideally, each task or action steps should not take longer that two hour to complete.
- Prioritise these tasks into urgent and important using the Eisenhower method, ABC method or Pareto Principle. Where too many tasks have high priority, the individual should go through them again and demote the less important ones.

The tasks list is then used by acting on them in order of importance. As each task in completed, it is ticked off of struck through. If the individual's tasks are largely independent, the task list should be short and completed within a day. For individuals in operational roles whose tasks are large and dependent on the action of others, longer-tem lists become imperative. PAs of legislators carry out both independent and dependent tasks. Thus it is advised that weekly task lists are compiled and broken down into daily action steps (Mankelow and Carlson, 2013).

4.5 Computer Based Time Management Tools

The turn of the nineteenth and most past of the twentieth century saw the use of papers, diaries (both manual and digital), alarm clocks etc as tools of time management. However, breakthroughs in electronics and information technology saw the proliferation of the use of computer based time management tools and software. Today, there is a number of computer software that is available for time management. Below is a list of some of them
- **Word Processors:** such as Microsoft Office has proven to be a useful tool for time management. With Microsoft office, task lists are easily compiled and managed. Microsoft Excel is also used for this purpose.
- **Microsoft Outlook**: This contains easy-to-use features that helps users compile and prioritise tasks
- **Emails:** Most standard free emails such as Yahoo and Gmail have features that are used for time management. When synchronised with most 3G mobile phones, reminder alerts and alarms can be a very useful tool for managing time
- **Microsoft Project**: This is a very useful tool for time management.
- **Online Time Management Tools**: There are many easy to use online time management tools to choose from one of which is http://www.rememberthemilk.com/. This online tool synchronises with mobile

devices such as 3G phones, email account, ipads, tablets etc. Others include http://www.toodledo.com/ and http://todoist.com/.

- **Mobile Devices:** Such as phones, tablets and ipads also have powerful time management features

Conclusion

Time management is the process of influencing an individual's key behavioural dimensions to complete as many tasks as possible within a given time period. Such behavioural dimensions include time consciousness, organisation of work, strict discipline and continuous application of time management techniques as a habit. According to Benjamin Franklin, time is money. Thus efficient and effective use of time is a condition for personal effectiveness and individual productivity. What often separate high from low performers is time management. Thus time management is a must for everybody seeking excellence and success.

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