

Allo SBT | The About Series

About Time Management:

Time management is the skill of being able to organise and allocate time to activities, situations or tasks in such a way that time is utilised effectively and the required result is achieved without wasting time or being way-laid.

Managing time better is never a question of finding more of it. The maxim, "work smarter, not harder" is seldom given sufficient attention, because nobody has the time to think about it. However, time management is crucial and the perception of time as a valuable asset cannot be denied neither can the systematic structuring of it to conserve resources and maximise productivity be undermined.

Time management is the function required to maintain appropriate allocation of time to the overall conduct of a project through the successive stages of its natural life-cycle, (i.e., concept, development, execution, and termination) by means of a process of time planning, time estimation, time scheduling, and schedule control. It is the use or change of a system and/or characteristics in an organisation or person to maximize efficiency and optimise productivity.

Time management is especially important when a business is looking to implement strategic change. In this case, the time available for change and the ability to manage this time becomes of utmost importance. For example, a business facing immediate decline in profits as a result of a drastic change in its markets has quite a different context for timely change compared with a business where the management may see the need for change as futuristic, maybe even several years to come, and as such have time to plan and manage the change process.

Since the speed of change is important, the time taken in pacing new ideas in an organisation is also important. This is due to the fact that within an organisation with high rates of innovation of new products, these new products would not be brought on stream when old products become redundant; rather the rate of new product innovation is paced such that new products and ideas come to being even when existing ones are successful.

Time management is also helpful to managers in that it enables them synchronise their managerial objectives with the pace of emerging opportunities and with other parts of the company. Managers can therefore allocate time to the process of a product being delivered to its customers, and hence take advantage of being market leaders. It can also allocate time to product completion and the product life cycle, so that it is able to move quickly into new opportunities.

A very interesting aspect of time management is a concept called just-in-time management (JIT). JIT is a principle of production and inventory control that calls for immediate movement of raw materials, component parts, and work-in-progress. Goods arrive when needed (just in time) for production or use rather than becoming expensive inventory that occupies costly warehouse space. Warehousing tends to be minimal or non-existent; and goods must arrive around the time it is required.

JIT can also be described as a strategy that concentrates on making quality products, in the appropriate quantity, when it is required. This strategy exposes waste and makes continuous improvement possible. It helps to reduce inventories by working closely with suppliers to co-ordinate delivery of materials just before their use in the manufacturing or supply process.

Just in time is especially useful for manufacturing processes. A good example is a car manufacturer that operates with very low inventory levels, relying on his supply chain to deliver the parts needed to build cars. The parts needed to manufacture the cars do not arrive before nor after they are needed, rather, they arrive just as they are needed. This inventory supply system therefore represents a shift away from the older 'just in case' strategy where producers carried large inventories in case higher demands had to be met.

To optimise your time management skills therefore, the first thing you need to do is plan. Plan your day, plan your time, and plan your activities. The first step is to determine which hours of the day you are most productive. Then schedule the days and weeks ahead, take account of all your commitments including your social commitments. Scheduling enables you document your obligations. It also makes you form a routine or establish a pattern so that even your spare time is put to its best use.

If you have a large assignment or a huge project to complete; regard it as a huge chunk of time you have to slit up. Divide it into smaller pieces separated by breaks, meals and other commitments. Make an estimate of the time needed to complete each chunk, and then construct a schedule around these estimates. Just as a day must go on, so must the assignment go on. Postponing it will only make it a more daunting task, and harder to sit down and accomplish.

Breaking your work tasks into smaller bits enables you take appropriate short breaks in between. This keeps you from getting fatigued and "wasting time." This practice is efficient because while you are taking a break, the brain is still processing the information you are currently working on.

You should also tackle the difficult tasks or projects first. This is because for most people, when the brain is fresh, you are able to process information faster and assimilate better; hence finish your task quickly leaving time for you to relax.

There will also be smaller obligations that need fulfilling. Create the time to do them and optimise the time involved. This will help you get the smaller issues out of the way and enable focus on the more demanding ones.

A good question to ask yourself is if you are doing too much. If you have scheduled a long list and are constantly unable to get to the bottom of your list, then you feel overwhelmed. You will need to cut out the unnecessary tasks and set yourself realisable targets and time frames which are achievable.

Your work environment should also be right for you. This environment can change or you may have more than one place to work; the important thing is to be in control of it. This is the only way you will be able to sit down and work efficiently. It is also necessary for your workspace to be neat and spacious. By spacious, I mean not clustered. It should also be comfortable, happy, focused and positive. You can then decide for yourself whether a quiet and serene environment, or rather a loud or a conservative environment works best for you.

Another crucial aspect of time management is the ability to focus. This determines how productive you will be even during the time you have allotted to work. As much as possible, avoid interruptions. This disturbs your train of thoughts and you might actually lose track of ideas or completely forget them. You should also learn how to close the door, to say 'get lost' politely, to unplug the phone and even ignore the door bell. Learn to control your mind. Avoid day dreaming even if your date is extremely gorgeous. You are better off using the time for work effectively and efficiently because it puts you in a good mood and you feel accomplished and ready to go for your date which most likely will consequently be wonderful.

You should also make room for entertainment and relaxation. This is because you need to have a social life; that is, you need to have a balance in your life. This makes you feel fulfilled and achieve more when you set out to complete a task because you feel alive and fresh and you don't feel like you are missing out on anything. Hence, your ability to focus on your work better.

Make sure you have time to sleep and eat properly. Sleep is often an activity (or lack of activity) that many people use as their time management "bank." When there is a need for a few extra hours for studying or socialising, then you withdraw a few hours of your sleep. Doing this makes the time you spend working less effective because you will need a couple hours of clock time to get an hour of productive time. This is not a good way to manage oneself in relation to time.

It is said that a lot of people especially men cannot multi-task. However, as much as possible, try to combine activities. If for example, you are spending time queuing for tickets to a concert or driving, you can use this time to reflect on some work duties you didn't quite understand or to think about possible ways of getting more resource materials for your project.



It is also a good reference point to use other people or outside sources as a model. You must however, be sure that your model works before implementing it. It should be tried and tested and you must see the returns already in the outside source before even considering imbibing it. More importantly, make sure it matches your style, suits your objectives and it is achievable in your own circumstance. It is also important that the technique makes you feel fulfilled and as a result happy.