

EFFICIENCY IN TIME MANAGEMENT BY ACADEMIC

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INTRODUCTION

The only thing that makes a difference in people's performances in any organisation is efficient time management. This is truer of the academic who often have to accomplish series of tasks within a relatively short period of time. This being the case, lecturers have often complained of 'no time' to accomplish the innumerable tasks often assigned to them. One cannot agree less especially when we take a close look at the list of duties a lecturer is expected to perform. For instance, an average Nigerian lecturer is expected to teach students, prepare lecture notes, conduct tutorials, conduct tests, prepare examination questions, mark examination and test scripts, attend meetings, perform administrative functions, supervise students' projects, and most importantly, conduct research which is a sine-qua-non to getting promoted in tertiary institutions. It is this common phenomenon of insufficient time or 'the no-time-syndrome' among the academic that this little piece seeks to address by advocating efficient time management.

The first part attempts a definition of some key concepts, the definition of which will enhance a better understanding of the subject under consideration. The second section examines the challenges faced by academic that may militate against efficient and effective time management; while the third segment proffer likely solutions to the factors identified. In the concluding part, the paper re-emphasises that to achieve efficiency in time management among the academic, lecturers must set achievable tasks, prioritize the tasks, plan proper execution, do proper time scheduling, identify/avoid or reduce time wasters, and avoid procrastination.

KEY CONCEPTS DEFINED

Academic:- An academic has been defined as a person who works as a researcher (and usually teacher) at a University or similar institution¹. The meaning often ascribed to this word varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

¹ See <http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Academic>

For instance, in the United States, the term is synonymous with professor. The United Kingdom on its part uses various titles to depict the same word, such as fellow, lecturer, reader, and professor. In the other parts of the world, the term 'scholar' is probably the closer; while the Nigerian meaning of the word is closest to that of the United Kingdom.

Time:- This has been defined in various ways by different scholars. According to Ailamaki & Gehike (2003)², time is the quality of nature which keeps events from happening all at once. To Olaniyi (1998)³, it is a unique resource which is available to all at equal amount. It cannot be accumulated like money or stock-piled like raw materials. It cannot be turned on or off like machine or replaced like a man⁴. It is irretrievable. Ajayi (2007)⁵ also posited that time is a precious resource which must be well-managed along with other resources to achieve the goals of the school.

From all the foregoing one can say that time is the continuing progress of existence measured in seconds, minutes and hours. It is a measure of units to which everybody has equal opportunity, i.e. everyone gets the same amount every day, such that individual's efficiency as a function of time is measured by his ability to efficiently manage the time available to him.

Time Management:- This is another notorious concept that has received detailed definitions and elucidations from various writers. Few of these definitions will be examined. Sandberg (2001) defines time management as the efficient and effective utilisation of a lecturer's or an administrator's corporate time to achieve organisational goals.⁶ It is, he continues, the art of arranging, organising, scheduling and budgeting one's time for the purpose of generating more effective work and productivity. Obi (2003) opines in his work that time management involves identifying tasks to be performed, planning and scheduling organisational activities, prioritising such activities, allocating time to the tasks according to their degree of importance in enhancing productivity⁷. According to the popular website, wikipedia⁸, time

² Ailamaki, A. & Gehike, J. (2003). Time Management for New Faculty. SIGMUND Record, 32(2): 102 – 106

³ Olaniyi, W.O. (1998). Conceptual Approach to Educational Administration. Ondo: Patrick Ade Printing Press.

⁴ Ekundayo & Haastrup, T. (2010). Toward Effective Time Management Among Lecturers in Nigerian Universities. Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS) 1(1): 22

⁵ Ajayi, I.A. (2007). Issues in School Management. Lagos: Bolabay Publications.

⁶ Sandberg, J. (2001). Understanding Competence at Work. Harvard Business Review, (3): 24 – 28

⁷ Obi, E. (2003). Educational Planning in Contemporary Nigeria. Enugu: Computer Edge Publishers.

management refers to a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accompanying specific tasks, projects, and goals. Another website⁹ defines it as the process of scheduling and organising time to determine how much time is required to complete multiple direct and indirect tasks, and when such tasks are required. Lastly, the Business Dictionary defines it as a systematic, priority-based structuring of time allocation and distribution among competing demands.¹⁰

Even though many writers/authors agree to the use of the term ‘Time Management’, it has been variously argued that ‘Life or Self Management’ will be more apt. This argument is predicated on the fact that it is nigh impossible for any person to manage time; what can be managed is how to manage yourself when using the time which is available to you as to others in equal quantity. Towing this path of argument, Olaniyi (1998)¹¹ and Akomolafe (2005)¹² contended in their separate works that, *stricto sensu*, individuals are incapable of managing the time since the hands of the clocks continue to move beyond our control. They both agreed that individuals are only capable of deciding what to do with their own time and how best to organise their activities within the time frame available to them. In a likewise manner, Mary Ann Lansang also opined that time management is not actually about ‘managing’ time; rather, it is about setting priorities and planning our lives and time according to these priorities¹³. The Business Dictionary¹⁴ suggests the term ‘time budgeting’ as more apposite, predicating this on the fact that time cannot be stored, and its availability can neither be increased beyond nor decreased from 24 hours.

Aside the minor technical argument highlighted above (about time not being manageable in the strict sense of it), all the writers are in tandem that time management has to do with some self-controlling, self-organising, self-managing and self-regulating so as to make an optimum and productive use of the time available to each individual. Time management can therefore be loosely defined as managing our time to waste less time on doing the things

⁸ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_management

⁹ ctal-martin.com/AdultLearner/Resource05.html See also:

http://www.google.com.ng/search?hl=en&biw=1366&bih=653&defl=en&q=define:Time+management&sa=X&ei=rXstTevOGJCJhQf_58iPCQ&ved=0CBgQkAE

¹⁰ See <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/time-management.html>

¹¹ *supra*

¹² Akomolafe, C.O. (2005). Principals’ Time Management Abilities in Secondary Schools in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning*, 5(1): 58 – 67.

¹³ Mary Ann Lansang (2003). *Time Management* in INCLLEN Leadership and Management Programme: Module 3 Version 1 p. 3

¹⁴ *supra*

we have to do so we have more time to do the things we want to do. It is better conceived of as a set of time management skills, such that once we master the time management skills, we'll be more organized, efficient and happier.

TIME MANAGEMENT BY ACADEMIC: CHALLENGES

Not many lecturers can effectively and efficiently manage their time to accommodate what they have to do within a 24-hour timescale. This may not be a result of their laziness or slothfulness alone: it may equally be aftermath of phenomena over which they have little or no control. These are the challenges that are likely to affect lecturers' efficiency in time management. Some of them will be discussed under this head.

The first major challenge is that lecturers appear to be over-tasked. As stated in the introduction, an average lecturer in a Nigerian university or other tertiary institutions is expected to teach, prepare lecture notes, take tutorials, conduct continuous assessments for the students, set examination questions, supervise final year students' projects, mark scripts, etc. In addition to all this, such a lecturer, if he desires promotion, must embark on periodic productive and original researches in his field, the outcome of which must be published. Besides, he is equally assigned some administrative duties such as being on a departmental panel, acting as level adviser to students, attending departmental/faculty meetings, and if such a lecturer is an HOD or a Dean of the faculty, attending several other meetings outside his department and faculty, and even outside the school.

Managing one's time amidst labyrinth of activities highlighted above is not an easy task. Some lecturers become confused in the face of such deluge of tasks and, since we are not equally gifted, find it difficult to efficiently manage their time.

Secondly, efficient time management may be disadvantaged by outside engagements personal to a lecturer: be it social or family. Being part of the society, a lecturer might be inundated with social responsibilities arising from both his friends and families. He has tasks to attend to at home; he must visit friends; he needs to attend friends' and family's parties; a woman lecturer will have some domestic chores to attend to at home; a yet-to-marry man or woman lecturer will also dissipate some time on his/her relationship; and other

commitments such as in the mosque or church or other organisations will all want to have a bite at the ‘insufficient time’ available to the lecturer. The outcome is a confused lecturer struggling with giving effect to his planned schedules on an everyday basis.

The third and last point is indiscipline. This is rampant as some lecturers do not know where to draw the line between ‘what to do’ and ‘what not to do’. Some lecturers attend all meetings; join all organisations that come their ways; pick all calls to their mobiles; gallivant on social networking websites such as facebook, twitter, yahoo messenger, etc.; receive visitors at any time within the working hours; and several other time wasting habits. Indiscipline such as these robs lecturers of their productive time, and the effect is lack of time to attend to much more important matters. It is important that members of the academics are self-disciplined as indiscipline is the main bane of effective and efficient time management.

TOWARD EFFICIENT TIME MANAGEMENT BY ACADEMIC

It is important to understand and imbibe the strategies necessary for efficient time management in the academic, since this will go a long way in enabling us to ascribe more time to important and urgent tasks and less time to frivolous and postponable ones. The strategies/time management skills that will be examined here include: task setting, prioritising tasks, planning execution of tasks, embark on time scheduling for each task, identify/avoid/reduce time wasters, avoid the cluster-desk-syndrome, and avoid procrastination. All these will be discussed in *seriatim*.

Task Setting:- For there to be a proper and efficient time management, a lecturer must set tasks which he/she intends to accomplish within a given period of time. This is advantageous in the sense that setting goals/tasks motivates the task setter to do better. There is always a spirit of ‘I have to complete these tasks within this time’ where tasks are set before hand. However, we must sound a note of warning here: tasks to be set must be realisable ones. Do not set superfluous tasks. In other words, the tasks must be higher enough to motivate you, but must not be too high to set you on failure.

Prioritising:- Another indispensable time management skill is prioritisation of tasks. After the tasks meant for a particular period have been set, it is equally essential to prioritise the order in which the tasks are to be executed. This is because time management is not about getting more done; it is about doing the

important things. Prioritisation may cover tasks meant for a day or week or month or the whole semester. Underscoring the importance of this skill, Akomolafe (2005)¹⁵ stated that the key to effective management is to use proactive thinking. In a similar vein, Olaniyi (1998)¹⁶ posited that managers need to set short and long-range goals and allocate specific blocks of time to each. In doing this, another writer¹⁷ suggested that prioritised tasks be further subdivided into essential, important and optional tasks. According to her, the manager should embark on the execution of the tasks in the order outlined. A complementary factor here is revision. It is advisable to review tasks continuously to make sure you have the most important tasks taken care of first.

Planning:- This encapsulates the whole process starting from task-setting to task execution. After setting the tasks, a good time manager must visualise the end results; break large tasks into weekly and daily priorities; detail the steps to completion; and be prepared for barriers which must be dealt with in a calm and mature manner. For a lecturer, this will mean that he/she must plan how to distribute his time between the various tasks ahead of him/her, doing the important ones first while leaving out the less important ones. The attitude of some lecturers who fail to attend classes for no good reasons than personal reasons is a negation of this concept. The effect is inability to cover class syllabus or a rushed and inefficient treatment of the various topics. Where lecturer's time is properly planned, such occurrence will be a rarity.

Proper Time Scheduling:- Good time management involves keeping a schedule of the tasks and activities that have been important.¹⁸ It is not in doubt that keeping a calendar, daily planner, weekly planner, or the use of electronic devices such as PDAs and other sophisticated phones to itemise tasks meant for each day/week/month are all helpful means of staying on the tasks. To this end, writers have suggested the use of Personal Time Analysis Charts (PTAC). According to Oluchukwu (2003), PTAC will show the various activities the lecturers spend their times on. Also advocating for the use of the PTAC, Akomolafe (2005) and Ajayi (2007) opined that such a chart will help individuals to study the use of their time and on the basis, prepare a more useful personal time tables for their activities during the day and each week.¹⁹ Proper time scheduling will help a lecturer to eliminate dead hours. In

¹⁵ Supra

¹⁶ Supra

¹⁷ Mary Ann Langsan at p. 4 – 5

¹⁸ Ekundayo & Haastrup, T. (2010) at p. 23

¹⁹ Ibid. at 23

scheduling time, it will be to the advantage of a lecturer to put more tasks during the daylight hours. It is equally helpful to plan in blocks of one hour: say mark 15 scripts in 50 minutes and take a 10-minute break.

Dealing with time wasters:- These are activities which unnecessarily occupy your time. It is important to first identify those time wasters, avoid them (if possible) or reduce them. Defining time wasters, Ajayi (2007) wrote that it is something that occurs during lecturers' corporate time that is not necessary to the day or an activity that consumes more than necessary time.²⁰ Akomolafe (2005), Ajayi (2007) and Hassanzabeh & Ebadi (2007) identified the following as time wasters in every formal organisations: disorganisation, unclear goals, conversation in the office, too many personal phone calls, disjointed processes, no routine, poor planning, junk emails, drop-in visitors, unscheduled meeting with super-ordinates, inability to say 'No', etc. Since time wasters are barrier to effective time management, it is essential that each lecturer identifies his/her time wasters with a view to eliminating or reducing them.

The cluster-desk syndrome:- A common phenomenon among lecturers is a clustered desk. A lot of time is wasted many a time in looking for materials on such a desk. Where a desk is neatly and properly arranged, a lot of time will be saved and this, invariably, will impact on the efficiency of time management for such lecturer.

Procrastination:- Procrastination is a thief of time. It involves putting off work, postponing decisions, and not starting or finishing tasks. Statements common to procrastinators include: 'I work best under pressure'; 'the day is still young'; 'there is still more time to do the job' etc.²¹ According to Olaniyi (1998), Ajayi (2007), procrastination may occur as a result of poor utilisation, lack of concentration, fear and anxiety, personal problems, among several others. For there to be efficient time management, lecturers should avoid procrastination as it robs them of precious time needed to accomplish the performance of the various tasks lying before them.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown from the foregoing analysis that people in the academics nowadays are inundated with too many responsibilities. We have further

²⁰ Ibid. at p. 23

²¹ Ibid. at p. 24

shown that even though these responsibilities are overwhelming, a lecturer with an effective and efficient time management skills can still conveniently perform those duties. Some of the skills identified include setting achievable tasks, which tasks must be prioritised for the purpose of execution by doing the first thing first. To achieve this, a lecturer must plan ahead and must break down tasks into his time schedules so as to accommodate a quantum of task within a quantum of time. More importantly, lecturers must identify their time wasters and work towards total eradication or reduction. Procrastination, which is said to be the thief of time, is another factor which robs lecturers of efficiency in time management. There is therefore a need to stop procrastinating. What need done must be done at the right time intended for it to be done.

It is strongly believed that if all these skills are rigorously observed, the efficiency of time management by academic will equally be improved. There will also be a drastic reduction in lecturers' complaint of 'no time' and the entire academic system will be the better for it.