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Time management for leaders and impact on productivity: A review study

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Abstract

Increased productivity, action, and results are oriented towards the objectives of the organization and rely heavily on effective time management, which is among the critical attributes of a leader. This article argues that time management should be treated as a key skill among leaders, with a focus on the need for reserving time for what matters, effective delegation, and resolution of overstrain. This article addresses multiple streams that present the phenomenon of time management as a problem of leadership, productivity, and emotional intelligence in a remote and hybrid era. How time management is perceived in different cultures and time management in a globalized world are examined as well. Additionally, this study illustrates a positive relationship between efficient time organization and the performance of the organization, including creativity and motivation among employees. With the criticism of the literature already available, the possibilities for the practical application of such strategies as planning a management process and consideration of the trends are presented in a more general way. This study emphasizes the changing landscape of leadership output while shedding light on how time management skills can be aligned with today's organizations.

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1. Introduction

Effective time management is one of the leadership skills that has become a necessity in the current complex and fast-changing organizations. As with any skill, it is important as it increases effectiveness, reduces the amount of effort placed into low-value activities, and reduces the chances of burnout. There is a growing trend among professionals to be able to perform in operational roles as well as being well-strategized, with the caveat that this often has to be done in a hybrid/remote

environment. Such issues present quite a new perspective towards considering time management as a competence that is comprised of multiple competencies.

This paper is guided by the research question, “What does the literature say about time management as a skill specifically for leaders?” and aims at expanding existing knowledge on the topic through a literature review. Key areas such as setting clear priorities, designing the strategy, enhancing motivation, productivity techniques, and highlighting the organizational value of efficient time management are addressed. In addition, the paper presents how technology, emotional intelligence, and cultural context shape leadership in a global context.

This review adopts an integrative approach to literature research and extracts best practices while outlining the limitations of the existing literature. The paper concludes by offering practical advice to leaders, outlines recent changes in the way time has been managed by leaders, and provides practical ways to improve organizational leadership.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation, the subject of this review, encompasses the major theories and constructs that explain how time management and leadership success are related. Drawing upon the known theoretical frameworks, this part also helps to outline the order in which this analysis is presented.

2.1. Self-Determination Theory

Effective performance and productivity are believed to stem from intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence, according to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Self-motivated leaders usually maximize time management because such leaders tend to spend most of their time on activities that advance their innate goals [1]. SDT further states that leaders with high competence and the assurance of autonomy in their roles tend to be more time-effective, as they are able to work towards achieving the set goals even without external factors driving them [2].

2.2. Goal Setting Theory

The main idea of Goal Setting Theory is that to enhance performance, a person should have high-difficulty and high-specificity goals. It has been stated that leaders who are good at setting clear, quantifiable, and time-bound objectives can manage their time more effectively, prioritizing the most important tasks and ensuring that their daily activities support their overall goals [3]. According to this theory, it is not merely the time that leaders are concerned with but also managing the energy and focus of their attention towards their goals, which is why this theory is related to managing time efficiently through setting goals.

2.3. Time Management Matrix (Eisenhower Matrix)

The Eisenhower Matrix, as explained by Covey [4] offers a method for prioritizing tasks in accordance with criteria of urgency and importance on the two-dimensional quadrants. This framework allows leaders to determine which matters are pressing, which ones are important, and which ones should be ignored altogether. Leaders who use this matrix, will probably do more activities that are likely to be connected to their goals and spend lesser time doing activities that are calling them but not important [4]. Research by Macan [5] supports this theory, which asserts that better time management and effective prioritization leads to greater productivity and less pressure on the leaders [5].

2.4. Cognitive Load Theory

Cognitive Load Theory Sweller [6] is however, in another, very useful category, theory that tackles how leaders apply their time and allocation to their productivity. It states that people have a finite amount of cognitive capacity to process information and that too much cognitive load could lead to a deterioration in performance. Thus, leaders in the mentioned studies restrained their time management so that they were not overloaded by simultaneous tasks, and instead waited for an optimal time to complete a task. Simple strategies like task fragmentation, performing only the most important task, and active rest as a recovery strategy do help to lower cognitive load and therefore enhance output.

2.5. The Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique, time management method, developed by Cirillo [7] advocates working in short, focused bursts, usually lasting 25 minutes, with a short break afterward. This technique assists leaders in minimizing interruptions and keeping their attention, which increases productivity. It has been demonstrated that taking a larger number of short breaks frequently enhances effectiveness and allows for the preservation of cognitive function across extended working periods [7, 8]. Leaders using this technique are capable of organizing their work in a manner that minimizes fatigue and fosters prolonged focus.

2.6. Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional Intelligence (EI) highlights the importance of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills in leadership. Top leaders are able to control their emotions, remain focused, and manage their time better under pressure. Such emotional regulation allows leaders to manage their tasks and avoid non-productive activities, which may improve overall output [9]. Furthermore, EI assists in allocating effort towards the management of team relations, which may influence overall time distribution and output.

2.7. Parkinson's Law

Parkinson's Law notes that 'work increases in proportion to the time given for its completion.' There are some time implications with this law in that it recommends leaders and employers set time limits for tasks if they are to avoid procrastination and taking on too much work. There is empirical evidence that backs this principle; leaders with time limits for tasks are more productive because they focus on getting a task done rather than dragging it out for no reason [10].

2.8. Flow Theory

Flow Theory, developed by Csikszentmihalyi, is the mental state when people are completely focused on an activity. Particularly for leaders, achieving a state of flow yields better results in terms of productivity and time management. Flow states are quite effective, especially when one is performing a relatively complex or creative task that requires persistence [11].

2.9. Energy Management

Energy management complements time management by addressing the capacity of a leader. Here, the focus is on the importance of pacing – working hard and then also taking time to recharge, so the person is productive over the long haul. When such leaders manage their energy appropriately, they can perform for long hours continuously without experiencing burnout [12].

2.10. Attention Management

Attention management concerns itself with ensuring that leaders' thinking abilities are directed towards things that matter, and these things are related to what the leaders wish to achieve and the strategy at hand. If attention is well managed, leaders will be able to make difficult decisions, create new ideas, and form better relationships with team members [13].

2.11. Temporal Leadership Theory

Temporal Leadership Theory directs attention to the importance of the leaders' role in managing time frames, timings, and transpiring events in and around. Done right, temporal leaders do not compromise with time but rather align the tasks to suit organizations' objectives. This theory stresses time orientation and effective communication as critical features of leadership [14].

2.12. Theory of Constraints (TOC)

The Theory of Constraints is based on the rule of maxims, which states that it is easier to find and control the cause that is stopping the progress of productivity. In leadership contexts, this may refer to doing something that may take up so much time that it could lead to excessive costs in relation to penetration [15].

2.13. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Originally, Maslow's idea of a pyramid was intended to explain and outline human motivation, but a very important feature of it is leadership as well. If a leader takes care of the basic needs of his or her people such as job security and professional acknowledgment, productivity in teams is bound to increase. Including this theory will remind stakeholders on the psychological factors impacting time and or output performance management in teams [16].

3. Literature Review

Effective time management is often viewed as an important aspect of leadership effectiveness. In other words, the ability of a leader to use time appropriately has an impact on strategic decision-making, responsibility enhancement, and organizational maintenance. A substantial body of literature has emerged over the years in analyzing the link between time management and leadership, including prioritization and its role in delegation, goal establishment, and organizational and technological influences.

3.1. Time Management and Leadership

The efficient management of time can easily be referred to in management as the leaders' role. Leaders who possess strong time management skills not only increase their own output but also promote efficiency among their teams. Time management is not a simple activity but rather an intricate skill that includes the determination of what is more critical, who should be assigned what, and managing oneself and goals. Every single one of them is instrumental for the systematic development of leaders who deal with complicated and dynamic undertakings while remaining true to their overarching missions.

Prioritization remains the cornerstone of effective time management for leaders. How does this happen? Leaders go on assessing activities as per their relevance to the organizational mission, deciding what to do, when and for how long. In this scenario, an analysis of those activities that are both urgent and important, is very useful for leaders directing their time and energy [4]. The problem, however, is with the urge of giving priority to downsizing urgent tasks than looking at the bigger picture of what is important although it may not be pressing. Proper prioritization by leaders enhances the chances of achieving success in the long run as the focus is shifted to the tasks that are beneficial to the organization as opposed to just handling any pressing issues.

As a time management tactic, delegation also serves an essential purpose in the effectiveness of leadership. The ability to delegate frees someone up for other higher-order concerns, and it also engages the team members and aids in accomplishing

the mission of the organization. Leaders who master the skill of delegation are able to focus their efforts on making strategic decisions while simultaneously building trust and responsibility with their team members [17]. Delegation, therefore, is one of the important ways to manage excessive workload and improve the output of teamwork.

Besides prioritizing and delegating, goal-setting suffices as a time management aspect for the leaders. Such leaders that set goals can manage their time and effort in conformance to the organizational needs. The theory of goal-setting postulates that, in any leadership context, difficult pronouncements lead to extreme performance outputs [3]. For leaders, goals act as a guide, they provide clarity and meaning. It is also helpful for the leaders to come up with clear goals that can be measured because this helps in avoiding engaging in activities that do not help in the realization of the organization's goals in the future.

Lastly, another aspect of time management for a leader is cognitive load management. The cognitive load theory notes that leaders should be aware of their mental resources and capacity. Most of the time, leadership brings in cognitive load, which can impede the making of the right decisions and effectiveness [6]. Leaders who are strategic about their cognitive load by including breaks and knowing how to work intensely for a short time are able to be productive over long hours. The framing of cognitive load management within the broader time management practices can also assist leaders in combating burnout and promoting sustained high performance over time.

3.2. Challenges in Time Management for Leaders

In today's world, tremendous pressure is put on leaders to manage their time wisely. The wide range of areas that must be looked into by those in leadership roles usually comes into conflict with each other in the sense that there is a constant pull between focusing on day-to-day issues or having a long-range view. One common problem is taking on too many commitments, which creates a poorly organized set of activities. [Aeon and Aguinis \[18\]](#) note that leaders without clearly defined boundaries are also prone to multitasking, which diminishes their effectiveness while also creating greater cognitive demands (2017) [18].

Managing disturbances can be another big issue. Sudden unplanned events like an unscheduled meeting or certain emails and questions can completely take away a leader's attention [19]. Worked perfectly combines with Parkinson's law that work will expand to fill the time available to complete it [Parkinson \[10\]](#). Leaders who do not have restraint over interruptions can get trapped in so many little details that they are left with little chance of doing meaningful work.

As well as vice versa lack of time is not the only factor that also works against leaders, there is also emotional and cognitive exhaustion. As a rule, leaders are stressed for reasons of high-pressure performing roles, which can also lead to lack of effectiveness in making decisions. As is noted in theory of cognitive load, with the increasing amount of cognitive effort, there is less qualitative decision making [6].

If leaders don't focus on their mental health, there are risks of suffering from strain which in turn affects time management. [Goldsby, et al. \[17\]](#) further provide an explanation that integrating self-leadership strategies such as mindfulness and reflective practices can address some of the self-leadership vulnerabilities [17].

Last but not least, time management perspectives can be dominated by other factors, including cultural and organizational factors. Where organizations practice rigid hierarchy or micromanagement, even leaders who are supposed to be responsible for strategy execution can find it difficult to have independence in how they spend their time and the decisions they make. These contexts may not enable leaders to maintain effective time management, thus lowering their efficiency and productivity [20].

3.3. Productivity and Organizational Impact

Effective time management is not so much an individual skill as it is a key factor in an organization's success. Leaders who are adept at managing time can have a substantial positive effect on their team's productivity, nurtured by a culture of efficiency and high output.

The same correlates with the effect of various leadership styles on the productivity of the members of an organization, where leaders endowed with a better sense of time are able to create better structure and goal focused spaces for their subordinates [21].

Organizational productivity is notably increased with time management as it promotes clear goal alignment to all team members. When leaders structure their goals, the leaders ensure that the teams' work is geared towards updated and relevant organizational goals. This is supported by theory of goal setting, which states that people perform better when given specific challenge related goals [3]. Focusing on such activities enables leaders to maximize the use of resources and improve the organizational performance.

Moreover, regular progress checks and feedback contribute to avoiding slacking and promoting improvement as well. In the meta-analysis, it is revealed that time management organization is crucial not only for the improvement of personal time management but also for the effectiveness of teams and the entire organization [22]. Time management, when applied correctly encourages a culture that promotes work and reduces any time wasted in unnecessary and ineffective activities.

The effective management of time becomes even more productive with the available technological gadgets. Project management systems and time management devices, for example, allow leaders to supervise progress, organize workload processes and detect delays. The use of technology in any organization is beneficial since it makes it easier for leaders to make decisions and improve their operations, thereby leaving them to focus on the core activities of the business [23].

3.4. Technological Influence on Time Management and Productivity

The integration of digital means of accomplishing tasks has caused a paradigm shift in time management by offering leaders benefits that were unheard of in the past. The real time effectiveness of such activities as resource consumption, task

completion status, and time spent on activities is well espoused in project management software applications and time management tools such as Asana, Trello, Toggl and Rescue Time respectively. Tools such as these allow leaders to grasp the fullness of their work, and as a result, they apply the use of data analytics to improve the efficiency of time allocation [18].

Likewise, automation technologies help to lessen the burden of manual work. By influencing how these regressive undertakings, such as scheduling, reporting, and even internal communication, are carried out, leaders are able to create some breathing space for themselves to engage in more tactical activities. The role of such systems with respect to saving time was examined, and it was found that such an effect is observed in organizations with a high level of organizational bureaucracy [24]. In addition, predictive tools that fall under the umbrella of artificial intelligence (AI) assist in crisis a version strategies by giving leaders leeway to manage contingencies, thus restructuring their timetables ahead of time.

On the contrary, technology poses its own set of impediments, notably, interruptions emanating from technological devices and overload of information. The persistent online presence due to emails, instant messaging, and notifications may cause a leader's attention span to break in pieces and consequently inhibit the ability of such a leader to engage in deep concentration activities [19]. To combat this, leaders need to find a middle ground by identifying roles and responsibilities and using focus mode where possible.

3.5. Cultural and Global Perspectives

Time management practices vary based on cultural and geographical backgrounds. Different cultures regard time differently, which in turn influences the way a leader prioritizes and allocates their time. For instance, punctuality and efficiency are highly valued in the West, to the extent that even the high-rise buildings contribute to the heavy congestion of the city. In contrast, in some Eastern regions, social bonding is considered most important, even if it requires more flexible time management [25]. It is quite obvious that a leader operating in a multicultural environment has to tread these waters very carefully to work effectively with others.

The situation is further complicated by globalization and the rise of virtual teams. Leaders have to deal with time issues and timelines in multiple countries; this is often difficult as it means that the global due dates and meetings will potentially interfere with their work schedules. An example is provided on how such situations may increase the number of hours worked, which leads to stress and inefficiency unless otherwise controlled [26].

Also, the growth of the hybrid or fully remote workplaces led to the transformation of the approach to time management. Now leadership is about maintaining the right balance between flexibility and productivity, and this poses a challenge since the employees do not have to be at the same place at the same time [27]. The new style of work compels the leaders to think on how to perform their supervision without being in office all the time by using measures such as performance checks and assessments over the internet.

3.6. Remote Work, Hybrid Environments, and Leadership Productivity

With the global pandemic prompting the movement to location-independent and hybrid working structures, the perception of organizational time control has undergone a paradigm shift. Nowadays, leaders face the problem of dealing with teams that work from distributed locations while the leaders still expect high levels of productivity and engagement from them. Working from home means that such individuals cannot do without digital communication, interactions, and even task management [22].

One of the main issues faced in telecommuting situations is losing the sense of a team, its inner core, and, thus, preventing the individual feeling lonely. Periodical virtual meetings and check-ins facilitate the alignment of the team members and help them remain focused. Nonetheless, caution should be exercised against the dangers of too many scheduled meetings that can contribute to the overconsumption of virtual meetings [24]. The leaders have to find this equilibrium where members have to present the need for the meeting without wasting everyone's time.

Additional challenges are brought about by hybrid environments which integrate physical attendance and remote working. Leaders should also take charge of teams in which some members are in the same physical location while others are geographical distanced. This, in turn, calls for the establishment of communication modes and fair assignment of duties so that all members, irrespective of their geolocation, participate fully. Such hybrid work arrangements can lead to a higher level of productivity than either work sitting in the office or working from home alone through a productive approach [23].

3.7. Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Time Management

The importance of emotional intelligence (EI) is evident in the management of time. Members of a team that is emotionally intelligent work towards the achievement of the goals without hindering each other's productivity. Self-regulation, empathy and social skills are some of the EI competencies used by leaders to cope with stress and interpersonal relationships in the work environment, especially in high level positions that perform high demanding roles [9].

Another core aspect is self-awareness, which enables leaders to assess the effectiveness of time management in executing their roles. This is where a leader evaluates his weaknesses and strengths in that specific behavior and works towards changing the attitude with more positive actions to increase efficiency. For example, an executive who has a tendency to procrastinate can utilize time-blocking methods to facilitate adherence to schedules; self-sabotaging leaders who do not want to delegate can at least focus on trusting their teams.

In addition, empathy and social skills contribute to effective time management in that they enhance teamwork. Leaders who appreciate the needs and insights of their team can assign the right tasks that maximize the use of time on the right activities. That helps increase the teams' output and creates a better working environment, which minimizes stress and burnout.

4. Critique of Existing Research

Despite the considerable body of evidence in the fields of time management and leadership, certain gaps and limitations are evident in the existing research. Most of the studies conducted are concerned with the adoption of time management approaches. However, the sustainability of these approaches in diverse organizational contexts is not well articulated. This creates gaps for longitudinal investigations that examine the health of these practices over a reasonable span of time.

The other constraint in the current literature is that too much attention is paid to aspects of behavior, such as challenges associated with goal setting and issues of prioritization of work, without due regard to broader inter- and intra-organizational aspects. For example, time containment abilities differ across leaders due to differences in organizational culture and policies [20]; however, limited studies exist on how such time containment capacities can be created through structural changes. In addition, most of the studies are Western-centric, and hence there are only a few studies looking at the effects of culture on time management practices outside the Western world.

A lot of studies are being conducted around time management and the use of technology, but most of them tend to overlook some of the negatives that may come with the use of technology, such as digital burnout and issues of privacy. For example, efficiency gains from technological tools are praised, though they do not emphasize the psychological and moral issues arising from their use.

Moreover, although it is understood that components of Emotional Intelligence are critical in relation to time management skills [9] very little exists in the literature that aims to draw connections between EI and productivity. It would be useful to conduct further investigations to confirm the above correlations specifically in high load and fast changing environments.

5. Recommendations for Leaders

Considering the comprehension mainly gleaned from existing literature, enhancing the management of time seems to be another appropriate strategy:

1. **Promote the use of a Prioritization Framework:** It is vital that the leaders learn how to develop the frameworks of Prioritization. With time-leadership frameworks advocated, such as the Eisenhower Matrix and Covey Time Management Framework, it becomes easy for leaders to separate the urgency of completing tasks from understanding which ones matter to the organization.
2. **Make Good Use of Technology:** Technology offers many tools, for instance, project management software, which could speed up work. However, leaders must be careful about such things due to digital overuse. The use of time-blocking and other applications meant to help enhance focus can be used effectively to help people balance being connected and working deeply within themselves.
3. **Cultivate Emotional Intelligence:** Enhancing the ability to manage one's emotions and those of others by acquiring competencies such as self-awareness and empathic concern can help leaders manage stress and relations better leading to improved time management [9].
4. **Encourage a Healthy Organizational Ethos:** Organizations must establish settings that facilitate effective use of time. This includes offering skills development opportunities, allowing flexible working hours, as well as discouraging overburdening employees with multiple tasks at a go.
5. **Encourage feedback loops within the organization:** Incorporating time management in the performance appraisal systems of the staff helps the optimum level of practice over time. Areas of weakness are addressed through regular feedback [22].
6. **Ensure attention is given to both the immediate goals and the strategic vision.** However, leaders need to ensure that the day-to-day running of the organization's operations does not hinder the achievement of the broader vision of the organization. Periodic strategic retreats or planning sessions can help in achieving this [17].

6. Future Trends in Time Management and Leadership

Time management, as well as time leadership, is undergoing evolution due to technological innovations and changes in the methods of work. One of the trends is the incorporation of AI within the scope of time management systems. Such systems can analyze work patterns and suggest more personalized ways of organizing one's schedule [24]. These tools will not only address the challenges posed by modern leadership undertakings but will also be very useful in time management.

Additionally, there is a growing perception of overall well-being. It is noted here that higher-level executives understand the importance of work output over time and thus take care of both mental and physical wellness. This concept has been on the rise as it takes into consideration not so much the factors of time management as the factor there of energy management [28]. The practice of organizing an individual's work in accordance with his or her biological clock not only helps in increasing focus at work but also minimizes the risks of burning out.

In the future, hybrid systems as well as full remote working, will determine the way working time is managed. As these models of work thrive, the best ways on how to achieve justice while flexibility is upheld will be worked out. The virtual work socialization and team-building processes will turn out to be the most enhanced type of collaboration across distances, allowing for better functioning of global teams [23].

Finally, due to the growing diversity and global nature of many organizations today, cultural intelligence will be a key contributory factor in effective time management. Leadership skills will encompass time management because different time cultures and practices will be encountered in various contexts; thus, more adaptability will be required.

7. Conclusion

The ability to manage time efficiently is one of the fundamental principles that guide leadership and can not only improve individual productivity but also the overall climate and performance of the organization. Today's leaders must contend with change and technology while juggling even more tasks than before. Hence, the management of time cannot be treated as a functional skill alone. It has developed as a core element of strategy. Effective leaders wisely choose activities having maximum impact, delegating tasks efficiently, and/or making use of technology in order to enhance the flow of work.

The reviewed literature highlights many facets of time management – cognitive, emotional, and organizational. It is worth noting that there are many other strategies, such as the setting of goals, time-blocking, and the Pomodoro Technique, which serve to enhance one's focusing and efficient working skills but do not justify the absence of emotional intelligence and organizational culture. In this way, emotional intelligence involves skills allowing a leader to cope with stress, work with others, and be flexible enough, thereby allowing effective time management. Similarly, organizations are key in influencing the time management approaches of their leaders by fostering an environment that allows such culture, providing resources, and supporting them in developmental activities.

However, the path to managing time effectively is not an easy one. From interruptions, including digital distractions to managing global and heterogeneous teams, leaders face a host of challenges that could trip them. The increasing inclination of people towards remote or hybrid work brings in additional complications in the sense that leaders have to shift from previously held notions of time management to new ways of working and communicating with one another.

In the long term, the development of technologies geared towards artificial intelligence and data analytics will enhance how leaders manage their time as a result of offering personalized insights and recommendations. With these technologies and the increasing focus on holistic well-being, the maximum use of time management will also mean management of energy, direction or focus, and mental health besides scheduling and task management. The leaders who will adopt these changes and the principles of time management within which these technologies thrive will be better positioned to meet the demands of their roles.

As globalization occurs within various work settings, so too comes the necessity of the leaders being culturally intelligent in time management practice. This is because, while such leaders might be well-versed in business management practices, they will still have to understand how cultural norms and expectations influence perceptions of time, productivity, and work-life balance. Such cultural flexibility will be key to nurturing effective and efficient teams that are expected in today's modern world.

Time management is not, therefore, an absolute process but rather a skill that grows with practice and experience. Leaders who engage in self-scrutiny, commit themselves to learning and improving their time management skills, with the employment of tools and techniques, will prove more useful in fostering growth in an organization. By recognizing time as a limited and very precious asset, leaders can transform it into a powerful tool for achieving both personal and professional endeavors.

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