

OPTIMIZING MANAGERIAL TIME: STRATEGIES FOR EFFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines efficiency and effectiveness of managerial activities. Materials from the author's personal archive, coupled with first-hand experience as a Komsomol leader at both city and regional levels, and later within the armed forces, consistently indicate that the effectiveness and quality of management are entirely dependent on manager's personality. This includes their experience, readiness to perform tasks in their assigned area, personal, business, and moral qualities, as well as their attitude toward work. Furthermore, the judicious allocation and efficient use of time by managers lead to rationalised management, which in turn results in a commensurate increase in the effectiveness of any type of activity.

Keywords: *manager, management, efficiency of activity, time saving, working time, advanced training.*

INTRODUCTION

The renowned statement by the German philosopher, sociologist, and economist Karl Marx, 'all economy ultimately comes down to saving time' (Marx and Engels, XXXX), can be aptly applied to the management process in the activities of modern managers. Time is a finite resource for everyone; while most people lament its scarcity, managers particularly often express concerns about insufficient time. The core issue, however, is not a fundamental lack of time, but rather its inefficient use. Although this assertion might initially seem exaggerated or even absurd, it proves consistently true if a manager critically analyses and evaluates how they utilise their time.

During his work in the Komsomol in the 1980s, the author of this article, on behalf of the city party committee, the local administrative body of the Communist Party, took part in studying the efficiency of the activities of the heads of enterprises and organisations of one of the cities of the capital region. In this article, the author aims to share some thoughts arising from those studies, because today's situation in management activity is similar to that.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The original concept of Karl Heinrich Marx's renowned work, "Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1859" (Marx and Engels, 1981) (the foundational version of *Capital*), envisioned a study of bourgeois society's economy within a grand plan of "six books": capital, landed property, wage labour, the state, international trade, and the world market. While articulating his thoughts on the subject and method of political economy, Marx expressed several important considerations regarding the relationship between society's material basis and its ideological superstructure. Marx concluded, 'All economy ultimately comes down to saving time... Saving time, as well as the planned distribution of working time among the various branches of production, remains the first economic law on the basis of collective production'.

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The founder of the administrative school of management, theorist and practitioner Henri Fayol (1992), in his book *General and Industrial Management*, famously defined management as a set of five functions: 'To manage is to forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to co-ordinate and to control'. This overarching activity aims to lead an organisation towards its goals through the maximum and efficient use of all resources, including time, at the enterprise's disposal. Consequently, management is a process aimed at achieving objective necessity and goals (Fayol, 1992).

In their monograph *Russian Media Industry: Digital Future*, Russian economics scholar Elena Vartanova et al. (2017) describes the continuously accelerating processes of informatisation and digitalisation. These processes occur in an environment where the time to complete tasks remains constant despite rapid changes. Therefore, anticipating the future - both in demand and market research, and in research and development - is crucial for the timely preparation and planning of resources. It also serves as an important factor in human resource management.

The book *On the Division of Social Labour* by Émile Durkheim (1996), founder of the French sociological school and structural-functional analysis, addresses the influence of management level on the concentration of primary efforts, the planned distribution of time, and its rational utilisation. The monograph's author indicates that important conclusions were obtained from a broad discussion of the problem of time saving and distribution with enterprise heads and their deputies, as well as through surveys (written and oral) of this group, and these findings are presented in the book (Durkheim, 1996).

In their book *Experience of Successful Management*, German scientists Richter and Halle (1989) analysed time usage to determine how much time managers spend on tasks they initiate themselves. This analysis considered various factors, especially manager's position within the management hierarchy. According to Richter and Halle, answers to this question can only be obtained through direct conversation with the manager, as the nature of the inquiry requires additional clarification. Consequently, the percentages presented in Table 1 are not highly indicative on their own. Nevertheless, in each specific case, these tables help assess the breadth of a manager's interests and independence, what these aspects should ideally be, and the influence of the manager's personal qualities on them (Richter and Halle, 1989).

METHODOLOGY

When assessing the efficiency of management activities, it is crucial to employ methods and approaches that account for its specific nature and successful implementation. As is well-known, efficiency is determined by the ratio of the achieved outcome to the resources expended to attain that outcome.

Management performance is reflected in three key elements: economy, efficiency and overall effectiveness of management activities. In relation to management, effectiveness is appropriately defined as the ratio of the achieved result to the set goal. This approach differentiates between target effectiveness and executive effectiveness. Target effectiveness gauges the degree to which a goal aligns with actual needs, while executive effectiveness measures the extent to which actual results correspond to the established goals. As is commonly understood, both quantitative and qualitative indicators are assessed during the analysis of any process.

Methods for assessing the efficiency of property use rely on both quantitative and qualitative approaches to studying the processes that define its implementation.

The study clarified manager's role in management, revealing challenges such as a lack of time and the narrowness of existing methodological approaches to planning. The optimal planning method or approach, it was found, is heavily dependent on the specific planning direction. A sociological survey was conducted, and an analysis of statistical data demonstrated the effectiveness of the methods employed. The study also included a functional analysis of managers' activities, which characterised the social effect of organising a manager's work.

DISCUSSION RESULTS

1. The challenge of time management

A primary reason why managers often experience a lack of time stems from errors in planning management tasks. In light of this, three straightforward questions become especially significant: First, what tasks should a particular manager undertake? Second, how do they intend to accomplish these tasks? And third, how much time will be required to resolve each specific issue?

While managers typically find it easy to identify their primary tasks, often defined by national or public interest, it is far more challenging to decide which tasks should not be prioritised. Such tasks should either be excluded from the work plan entirely or allocated only a brief period, often primarily for oversight. Once the most critical tasks are identified – which typically include planning and organisation, maintaining production discipline, ensuring safety, and implementing control – it is essential to clearly determine which responsibilities can be delegated to lower-level managers. This highlights that, beyond selecting the correct primary tasks, managers must also decide which problems they will dedicate minimal time to; or even exclude from consideration altogether.

These considerations should form the basis of the initial stage of work planning. For example, an enterprise head should carefully assess which challenges, e.g., demand studies, research and development, new product development, technological innovations, management organisation, or HR policy, deserve more attention to confidently manage core production issues. Essentially, this is about commanding your time, rather than being dictated by it. Haste and disorganisation arise when circumstances, not the manager, control time allocation.

In today's rapidly accelerating processes of informatisation and digitalisation, the window for performing work without significant change is constantly shrinking. Therefore, anticipating the future - both in demand and market research, and in research and development - is crucial for the timely preparation and planning of resources. It is also an important factor in effective personnel management.

Finally, managers must allocate personal time for professional development. This includes opportunities for enhancing their skills, attending training sessions, engaging in self-study, and analysing decisions from governing bodies. It also encompasses staying current with the latest advancements in management science and delving into specialised problems within their field of activity.

2. Manager's time budget

The effectiveness of management is significantly shaped by the strategic focus of core efforts, the deliberate distribution of time, and its judicious use. Important conclusions were drawn

from extensive discussions and surveys (both written and oral) with enterprise heads and their deputies concerning the challenge of time allocation and management. This is not about capturing an exhaustive picture, but rather highlighting key issues related to the length of the workday and how managers, from various perspectives, distribute their time among short-term, medium-term, and long-term tasks. The table below presents some of the questions asked concerning the distribution of time costs.

Table 1. Distribution of time costs for managers

Question	Average		Extreme values			
	Hours	%	Max. hours	%	Min. hours	%
1. How many hours do you work on average per day?	10.9		13		9	
2. How many hours do you work on weekends, including time dedicated to improving skills?	5.2		10		2	
training	1.6					
reading specialised literature	1.9					
preparing for the next work week	1.7					
3. How do you relax, and how much time do you spend on relaxation weekly, particularly on weekends?	18.1	100				
Reading fiction	1.9	9	6		0	
watching television	6.3	35	12		1	
sports	1.4	8	12		0	
walks	1.7	9	7		0	
work in the garden	4.0	22	16		0	
hobby	3.0	17	8		0	
4. How much of your working time do you allocate to solving						
short-term tasks ((issues related to the current year's plan implementation)		73		95		0
- medium-term tasks (issues related to preparing plans for the upcoming year or the next five-year period)		20		945		
Long-term strategic tasks (e.g., forecasting research and development activities, consumption dynamics and market analysis)		7		110		
5. How is your weekly work time budget distributed (in %) between:				6		
meetings and conferences		35		60		
business trips		15		30		
personal clarification of specific operational issues		22		55		0
work with personnel (including tours of the enterprise)		16		25		
routine work (checking emails, signing documents, etc.)		12		20		
6. How is your working time distributed (in %) to solve:		23		50		
technical issues (research, development, technology issues, etc.)						
economic issues (including planning)		33		75		0
supply chain issues		10		40		

sales issues		6		20		
HR issues		8		20		
other issues		20		40		
7. What percentage of your working time do you spend on:						
self-initiated tasks		55		90		0
tasks initiated by other bodies or individuals?		45		10		0
Question	Average		Extreme values			
	Hours	%	Max. hours	%	Min. hours	%
8. How much weekly working time do you estimate could be saved through the rationalisation of:	8		12		5	
meetings	2		5		0	
preparing draft documents that later proved unnecessary	2.3		6		0	
duplicate work	7.6		5		0	
other	2.1		7		0	

3. Time allocation

The significant excess working hours of managers (question 1) are attributed to irrational work organisation, time wasted on minor issues, and a concurrent lack of clarity on key tasks.

Naturally, a manager cannot always strictly adhere to the legally defined length of their workday, even though they bear personal responsibility for it. Analysis indicates that managerial overtime has, in part, become habitual, viewed as the norm. Many managers perceive overtime work as fundamentally unavoidable and believe that strict adherence to their workday length would diminish their authority.

An insightful approach to test the necessity of one's time and one's self-criticism is to ask oneself periodically (at least monthly) after work: "What would have happened if I had been absent from work today?" Frequently, it becomes apparent that much of the day's activity was unrelated to the manager's primary responsibilities, or that certain issues were not critical enough to warrant the manager's dedicated time. The aim of this question is to determine what the manager would have been personally compelled to do in each specific instance. A critical examination of labour and time expenditures can reveal surprising time reserves, organisational deficiencies, inadequate consistency, and more, if the manager is willing to ask this rather challenging question. Deciding to ask and answer it will take no more than five minutes, and truly, these minutes should not be spared after a long workday. Managers who engage in this self-inquiry and critically analyse their time management and work style often implement substantial improvements to their work organisation.

However, by comparing their own time expenditure with the data presented in the table, the reader can determine the extent to which the structure of their time allocation differs from the average.

Objectively, an extensive increase in the length of a manager's working day is not limitless, just as the extensive expansion of production is not. Only through the intensification and

modernisation of managerial work, coupled with clearly defined tasks, can a manager effectively handle all essential management functions.

It is widely recognised that, in recent years, more and more managers have been unable to complete their tasks within legally established working hours. Many admit to spending too much time on details and minor issues, yet they immediately attempt to justify this focus on trivialities. Naturally, sometimes a seemingly minor detail or triviality can prove highly significant, akin to the tip of an iceberg. In some instances, it signals a genuine underlying problem, making it unacceptable to disregard such a detail. The key here is to avoid overlooking genuinely important matters.

A detailed examination of managers' rest periods (questions 2 and 3) is indeed required, yet it lies beyond the current article's scope. Insights from interviews and surveys of managers confirm that reliable, successful work is predicated on active rest, the forms of which are highly diverse. This might involve informal discussions with staff during an enterprise tour, social gatherings with colleagues, or a personal hobby, with the latter being particularly significant for active rejuvenation. Conversely, the time allocated to passive rest strikes us as unduly prolonged, with its extreme durations being especially salient.

It is extremely important to note that managers dedicate almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of their working time to solving issues related to current plan implementation (question 4). However, in accordance with the management principle mentioned earlier, managers should allocate more attention to future-oriented challenges. The higher a manager's position, the greater their focus should be on these prospective issues. This involves concentrating on strategic development goals, which includes forecasting, analytical activities, and work on medium- and long-term planning. Therefore, production associations and large enterprises, by appropriately prioritising their production development prospects, should contribute to the state's economic policy implementation.

Well-defined strategic goals, rooted in future needs, scientific and technical advancements, and available resources, are fundamental for stable development. Experience shows that managers should personally handle strategic issues, directly overseeing long-term initiatives. A growing number of managers recognise this necessity and take responsibility for both strategic work and the execution of current plans.

Moreover, when evaluating the results of a quantitative analysis of a time budget, remember that these alone do not provide reliable conclusions about its quality. Each manager must critically analyse the structure of their time expenditures and the quality of their work to draw dependable conclusions about their individual work style.

It is unlikely that universal recommendations can be offered here, as the specifics of the enterprise, the management level, and the unique challenges facing the manager play a decisive role.

Combining operational and long-term work requires linking measures to implement the current plan with long-term objectives. These objectives should aim to ensure economic factors are utilised when preparing future plans.

There is no clear boundary between the daily work of fulfilling the current plan and long-term activities; one cannot exist without the other. Moreover, to maintain production continuity, it may sometimes be necessary to rapidly concentrate significant resources on specific tasks. The

costs of such efforts — however substantial — are always less and more expedient (from the national economic perspective) than attempting to restore disrupted production continuity.

If production continuity is not maintained for an extended period, it will cause a disconnect between resolving operational issues and creatively assessing scientific and technological applications. Experience shows that either production continuity is ensured — allowing time and a creative atmosphere for effective future planning — or routine tasks become overwhelming, suppressing creative planning and consuming so much effort and resources that the quality, preparation, and especially the scientific and technical validity of the plan diminish. This, in turn, inevitably creates new difficulties when implementing poorly prepared plans.

The survey data on managers' working time allocation (question 5) yielded interesting results. Most managers believe the time spent in meetings is justified and necessary, especially for meetings they convene themselves. However, the overall effectiveness of meetings is often low, and participant awareness isn't always high enough. The role of meetings will be considered separately.

Almost every question reveals a wide range of time expenditure values compared to the average. A closer look shows these significant differences are due to both objective and subjective reasons. For instance, it's clear that large enterprise directors spend on business trips increases with the distance between business units.

The analysis of responses to question 6 particularly illuminates subjective factors, even though the average values were derived from varied responses. It's important to consider that managers with an engineering and technical background tend to prioritise technical issues. In contrast, those with a purely economic background in similar roles dedicate most of their time to economic and planning issues. This reveals an interesting and informative trend: the perception that engineers disregard economic issues and economists ignore technical ones is inaccurate. Instead, engineers are logically more inclined to address research, technical, and technological issues. Conversely, economists are more engaged with various economic issues and, consequently, spend more time on them. However, the responses do not suggest that economists completely disregard research and technical issues, or that engineers ignore economic issues, especially when these issues are strategic.

A manager's qualifications and individual propensities significantly shape how they allocate their time. In areas where they lack expertise, managers often defer to the relevant departments, though they still maintain personal oversight of crucial matters. Looking ahead, an enterprise manager could be either an engineer or an economist. However, if an economic director, for instance, has an engineering background, it's particularly important for them to acquire profound economic training.

Interestingly, all interviewed executives, regardless of their specific educational background, underscored the necessity of improving their qualifications in modern management science through specialised courses or seminars.

Furthermore, governmental and administrative bodies have a role in assisting managers, particularly directors of enterprises and organisations, in effectively distributing their efforts and time. This primarily entails dedicating ample attention to engaging with people, conducting interviews, and visiting enterprises.

Analysing time use is crucial for understanding how much time managers dedicate to tasks they initiate themselves (question 7). Several factors influence this, particularly a manager's position within the management hierarchy. The most accurate answers to this question come from direct conversations with managers, as the question's nuances often require further clarification. Consequently, the percentages in the table above aren't highly indicative on their own. Nevertheless, in individual cases, these tables are helpful for assessing the breadth of a manager's interests and their level of autonomy. They can also highlight what these aspects should be and the impact of a manager's personal qualities on their work.

The final, eighth question was deliberately provocative, and the answer can only be truly understood through direct conversation with managers. While most managers believe their time losses are minimal, we contend that these losses – ranging from 5 to 12 hours per week – are quite substantial. Of course, the subjectivity of this assessment must be considered. Nevertheless, it's a positive development that in recent years, managers have shown increased focus, and their work has become more specific. The emphasis on time-saving is also being implemented more consistently within the management sphere.

4. Factors of successful leadership

When asked to identify the primary reasons for their successes or failures in the final section of the survey, many managers, even the most resourceful ones, encountered difficulties. This was largely due to two factors. First, some managers had simply never deeply considered these questions before. It's often easier to pinpoint why a plan fell short on a specific metric than to articulate the reasons behind overfulfilling such plan. Second, what might seem like 'obvious' reasons aren't always so straightforward in reality.

When asked to identify the most significant contributors to successful work, managers provided the following reasons, listed in order of frequency (with 4-5 reasons required from each manager):

- Strong collaboration with leadership of municipal and regional authorities, as well as public organisations;
- Supportive peer relationships: good mutual understanding and support from other managers, including constructive and friendly criticism;
- Engagement with production teams: maintaining close contact with production teams;
- Responsive and creative implementation: swift response to and creative implementation of decisions from government and central authorities;
- Clear, sustained organisational goals: the presence of long-term, sustainable goals for the organisation;
- Effective reporting systems: a well-established, regular reporting system;
- Experience;
- Strong professional and business training and development;
- Strong leadership qualities: authority, consistency, and persistence;
- Consistent internal communication: constantly informing workers;
- Open and honest recognition of difficulties, coupled with the ability to articulate and defend one's own point of view;
- Focus on critical tasks;
- Prioritisation of tasks by importance;
- Engagement with changemakers and youth;
- Availability of a clear individual work plan;

- A clear understanding of the principles of leadership;
- Healthy lifestyle;
- Appropriate organisational structure;
- Continuous learning from peers;
- Collaboration with local governance bodies.
- Effective labour incentives through the correct use of rewards and punishments;
- Fostering employee autonomy and a sense of responsibility in employees for their assigned work.

When asked about the reasons for failures, many managers responded quite directly: 'Failures stem from a disregard for the factors that contribute to successful work'.

The following list of additional failure factors, which may seem disproportionately modest compared to the previous list of success factors, focuses on aspects of managerial activity that, according to the interviewed managers, held particular significance:

- Rush work and uneven workload;
- Unrealistic or misaligned plans;
- Unsubstantiated directives from higher authorities on organisational and management matters;
- Overemphasis on minor issues;
- Frequent plan revisions by higher authorities;
- Absence of a clear strategic direction;
- Insufficient focus on personnel development and engagement;
- Structural or process flaws within the organisation;
- Shifting organisational objectives;
- Decisions made without thorough consideration of consequences;
- Incomplete or inaccurate information regarding the current situation; and
- Inconsistent application of policies or lack of resolve.

Some managers opted not to answer the question about the reasons for failures. This suggests that either these reasons had not been thoroughly analysed by them, or they were reluctant to admit their own mistakes.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The factors contributing to success and failure were ranked by their frequency of mention. However, this order should be interpreted with some flexibility. While the top six responses were clearly dominant, the frequencies of the subsequent answers were so close that they can be considered approximately equivalent. It's also important to note that managers frequently emphasised in both written and oral responses that no listed factor should be considered insignificant. Finally, each interviewed manager was limited to listing only five reasons. This implies that factors appearing lower on the list were still considered among the five most important by some managers.

The above factors identified as contributing to successful management provide a strong basis for formulating and systematising rules for effective leadership. However, it's crucial to remember that the specific principles and guidelines for management will vary depending on its unique characteristics, tasks, and goals.

The key elements for successful management are:

- Clearly and convincingly articulating objectives while ensuring every team member is invested in their achievement;
- Selecting and deploying personnel based on the specific nature of the tasks at hand.

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