



## Optimizing Time workflow and Productivity in the Public Sector in Delta State, Nigeria

By

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### Abstract

This study examined optimizing time workflow and productivity in public sector in Delta State. Administrators and employees in Delta State in particular and Nigeria at large need time optimization skill to enhance productivity in the public sector in Delta State, Nigeria. Time optimization allows you to be in command of your time. It is about deciding what is important and increasing efficiency to make the best and most effective use of the time available. Time optimization involves investing time to determine what one wants out of his day to day activities. Effective time optimization is the investment of time in such a way that suitable results are achieved from activities within a specific time range and it increases productivity.

### Keywords

**Optimizing Time, Workflow, Productivity, Public Sector, Nigeria**



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## Introduction

Time is an essential resource every employee or head of organization needs to achieve set goals and objectives. It is so delicate that it cannot be saved but can only be spent and once misused it can never be regained. Every manager is looking for ways to optimize time for workflow and productivity. Whether it is the organization looking for workflow and high productivity, manager of an organization looking for means achieving organization goals or an individual looking for better ways to spend their time for improved efficiency. Time optimization cannot be over emphasized, it affects all fares of life. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Time is defined as a period either long or short, during which you do something or something happens while Management is defined as the act or skill of dealing with people or situations in a successful way.

According to Ojo and Olaniyan (2018) they attribute time as follows: (i). Time is a unique resource. (ii.) It is the scarcest resource in the universe. (iii.) Time cannot be replaced by man. (iv.) Time cannot be accumulated like money. (v.) Time cannot be turned on and off like machine. (vi.) Time cannot be stocked like raw materials. (vii.) Time passes at a pre-determined rate irrespective of what happens. (viii.) Everybody is equally endowed with the same amount of it irrespective of his position. (ix.) Time like any other scarce resource must be managed and used judiciously.

## Concept of Time Optimization

The action of making the best or most effective use of time or a situation or resources (Mayer, 2020). According to Morris (2021) time optimization is an act, process or methodology of making use of time fully perfect. Time optimization is the

act changing an existing process in order to increase the occurrence time for favorable outcome which in turn boost workflow and increase productivity (Umukoro, 2017).

Time optimization allows you to be in command of your time. It is about deciding what's important to you and increasing your efficiency to make the best and most effective use of the time available to you. Time, just like money, is a limited resource. Time, just like money, can be wasted or saved up. Time, just like money, can be spent on anything but not on everything (Nakpodia, 2011). Time optimization involves investing time to determine what one wants out of his day to day activities. Effective time optimization is the investment of time in such a way that suitable results are achieved from activities within a specific time range and it emphasizes on productivity (Balogun, 2022). Time optimization is defined as one's capabilities to make effective use of time and productivity, especially when at work. If you think dwindling few seconds is fine, ask a marathon runner the importance of it. Time is essential in our lives and plays a significant role.

### **Time Optimization Strategy**

The first step towards developing and implementing an effective time optimization strategy is to create an environment that will support individual effectiveness (Kohn, 2020). This is done by the following technique:

- i. **Getting organized.** The individual should maintain a tidy and well organized work environment. An effective filing system must be in place for easy retrieval of documents.
- ii. **Effective delegation.** Where delegation is impossible, prioritize in order of importance.

- iii. **Protect your time through insulation and isolation.** Avoid time wasters key time wasters include: attending to unimportant issues, socializing, poor communication, incomplete information, living tasks unfinished, unnecessarily long meetings etc. Time optimization requires the ability to give priority attention to only important issues.
- iv. Recovery from bad habits such as procrastination.

### **Goal Setting**

Goal setting is crucial in time optimization. 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 optimize your time, set long range and short range goals with key step to be taken to ensure their realization. As a personal assistant (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'.

### **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.

## **ABC Analysis of Time Optimization Technique**

This involves categorizing 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 are neither urgent nor important.

Priority attention is given to goals listed as A and B. Research of high-performing organizations 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.

## **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.

## **The Eisenhower Method**

This is a method of prioritizing 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.

**Quadrant 4 (Not important and not urgent):** Listed here should be time wasters such as facebook, 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 organizational and 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.

**Keeping Task Lists:** An effective technique in time optimization 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. Prioritization 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 organization of workflow and productivity of its users. There are two major steps in preparing a task list;

**Step I:** 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 than two hours to complete.

**Step II:** Prioritize 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 task list is then used by acting on them in order of importance. As each task is completed, it is ticked off or 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-term 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).

**Computer Based Time Management Tools:** The turn of the nineteenth and most part of the twentieth century saw the use of papers, diaries (both manual and digital), alarm clocks etc as tools of time optimization. However, breakthroughs in electronics and information technology saw the proliferation of the use of computer based time optimization tools and software. Today, there is a number of computer software that is available for time optimization (Oke, 2013). Below is a list of some of them:

□ **Word Processors:** such as Microsoft Office has proven to be a useful tool for time optimization. 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 prioritize tasks

□ **Emails:** Most standard free emails such as Yahoo and Gmail have features that are used for time optimization. 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 optimization.

□ **Online Time Management Tools:** There are many easy to use online time optimization tools to choose from one of which is <http://www.rememberthemilk.com/>. This online tool synchronizes 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.

### **Importance of Time Optimization Workflow and Productivity**

According to Peel in (2017) identified four key benefits of effective time optimization: First, time optimization is an important tool for stress reduction. This is because, with an effective time optimization method in place, important tasks are completed on time leading to less frustration and more inner peace Second, good time optimization methods help in the achievement of work-life balance. This is because an effective time optimization 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 optimization enhances the achievement of individual and by extension, organizational goals. The following are benefits of time optimization:

- It helps to take control of many areas of your life.
- It increases productivity.
- Time optimization makes you become more organized.
- It helps you to utilize time effectively.
- Time optimization also helps you gain time for yourself to relax and do the things you enjoy doing.

Other benefits of time optimization are:

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

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

□ **Morale and confidence booster.** As a result of time optimization, individuals accomplish tasks within the stipulated time frame, making them popular in their organization as well as amongst their peers.

□ **Realization 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 optimization enables an individual to prioritize tasks and activities at workplace.** It is foolish to stay overburdened. Do not accept anything and everything that comes your way.

□ **Time optimization** helps an individual to adopt a planned approach in life.

### **Time Optimization Tools**

The term "Time Optimization" is a misnomer. You cannot manage time; you manage the events in your life in relation to time. You may often wish for more time but you only get 24 hours, 1,440 minutes or 86,400 seconds each day. How you use that time depends on skills learned through self analysis, planning, evaluation, and

self-control (Beckwith, 2006). Much like money, time is both valuable and limited: it must be protected, used wisely, and budgeted.

People who practice good time management techniques often find that they:

- i. Are more productive,
- ii. Have more energy for things they need to accomplish,
- iii. Feel less stressed,
- iv. Are able to do the things they want,
- v. Get more things done,
- vi. Relate more positively to others, and
- vii. Feel better about themselves (Dodd and Sundheim, 2005).

Finding a time optimization strategy that works best for you depends on your personality, ability to self motivate and level of self discipline. By incorporating some, or all of the ten strategies below, you can more effectively manage your time.

1. **Know How You Spend Your Time:** Keeping a time log is a helpful way to determine how you are using your time.
2. **Set Priorities:** Managing your time effectively requires a distinction between what is important and what is urgent (MacKenzie, 2015).
3. **Use a Planning Tool:** Time management experts recommend using a personal planning tool to improve your productivity.
4. **Get Organized:** Most people find that disorganization results in poor time management.
5. **Schedule Your Time Appropriately:** Even the busiest people find time for what they want to do and feel is important.

6. **Delegate: Get Help from Others:** Delegation means assigning responsibility for a task to someone else, freeing up some of your time for tasks that require your expertise.
7. **Stop Procrastinating:** You may be putting off tasks for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the task seems overwhelming or unpleasant. Try breaking down the task into smaller segments that require less time commitment and result in specific, realistic deadlines.
8. **Manage External Time Wasters:** Your time may be impacted by external factors imposed by other people and things.
9. **Avoid Multi-tasking:** switching from one task to another, resulting in a loss of productivity.

### **Time Optimization Workflow and Productivity in Public Service**

Time is one of the resources that an administrator or individual needs to manage efficiently in order to achieve organizational goals. The administrator who coordinates the activities of staff must be able to manage his time very well in order to accomplish the aims and objectives of the organization (Olaniyi, 2018). However, what makes time different from other resources used in an organization is that it cannot be accumulated or stockpiled like machines and raw materials replaced like a man. Time is irretrievable. All it entails is its effective management for organizational success. Time optimization is very important for everyone. It is the ability to produce and follow a schedule, meet deadlines, prioritize and minimize distractions and unimportant tasks. It includes optimizing time wisely so that tasks and projects can be done effectively and efficiently.

Akomolafe (2015) posited that time optimization skills are essentially for workflow and productivity. Prochaska-Cue, Preston & Mahar (2017) also opined that time optimization skills require four basic steps: decide what you want to accomplish; determine activities to reach each goal; make a daily 'to do' list; and set one's priorities every day. According to Olaniyi (2018), a good time manager is a person who can efficiently manage himself and all his activities within a time range. Manktelow in Akomolafe (2005) submitted that administrator's managerial abilities should reflect on their time optimization skills.

Setting priorities seems to be foremost in time management strategies. According to Lakein (2013) and Olaniyi (2018), setting priorities involves a clear understanding of one's job and one's life. One of the easiest ways to prioritize is to make a "to do" list daily, weekly, monthly or termly. It is essential to set priorities and estimate the time required for all identified tasks, so that you are aware of what is important (Akomolafe, 2005).

Following priorities setting is time scheduling, activities take different forms and different amounts of time. So to effectively use one's time, it is important to estimate how long a task will take and allow that amount of time for the task. To get a more accurate estimate, an administrator needs to keep track of how he spends his time for a week. This will help him on how to get a better idea of how much he needs to spend on each activity, assignment and programme. Hassanzabeh & Ebadi (2017) posited that administrators can make good use of their time by reducing their time wasters. Ajayi (2007) defined a time waster as something that occurs in the day that is not necessary to the day or an activity that consumes more than necessary time.

According to MacKenzie (2012) and Akomolafe (2015) listed the following as time wasters: telephone interruptions, social media (facebook, whatsapp, instagram) drop-in visitors, conversation with colleagues, unscheduled meetings among others. Other time optimization strategies as pointed by researchers include: delegation of duties to competent subordinates; avoidance of procrastination; avoidance of multi-tasking; minimize clutter and paper on one's desk. These are some of the basics of effective time optimization for workflow and productivity.

## **Conclusion**

It can be concluded therefore that time optimization is an indispensable tool for effective workflow and productivity. Although techniques such as goal setting, establishing priorities and schedule of duty are being used in time optimization.

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