

Original article

## Time – the significant capital of the manager

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### ABSTRACT

The current conditions of the functioning of enterprises and the complexity of many production processes raise the issues related to the efficiency of managers' work to a higher level. Following this requirement, much more attention is paid to improving work efficiency and its proper organization. It has been emphasized that the increasing amount of knowledge necessary to be acquired in a unit of time and the greater degree of difficulty of working in various positions make it necessary to take into account, apart from natural human predispositions, also biological rhythms and current environmental influences. Therefore, it is understandable that employees, especially managers, should know the psychophysical activities shaping the efficiency of human work and consider their influence on the improvement of management efficiency.

It has been emphasized that the role of a manager comes down to achieving the goals set by the team. In addition to the conditions, several proposals have been presented to improve the activities of people holding managerial positions.

### KEYWORDS

management, manager, time, work improvement

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## Introduction

Today, more and more time is spent on work. Poles and Greeks are among the busiest in the world. According to the OECD, they spend almost 2,000 hours a year at work, significantly ahead of the Germans, who work six hundred hours shorter per year. Unfortunately, diligence does not go hand in hand with productivity because Poles' productivity is as much as 70% lower [1; Cf. 2]. However, as recent research shows, the productivity of Polish workers is steadily increasing. It is not a question of why other nations have more time, and others less, since the day is only 24 hours long. The issue dealt with in this article is answering the fundamental question: What to do to have enough time to settle matters concerning the organization? This article aims not to bind the package of proposals to a specific employee or person holding a particular position, industry, etc. The presented suggestions have a general

dimension, which justifies their presentation because each person will use the above-mentioned postulates depending on the needs or possibilities.

Time is elusive, and you cannot manage it. The only thing we can do is to learn to use the time we have at our disposal better and more efficiently. It means that by controlling what we do, we manage ourselves in time, and that is exactly what we mean when we talk about time management. Time management is essential in every area of our lives, both in work and private life. It is up to the manager who has a limited amount of time to use it.

## 1. The importance of time – general issues

Time is a limited resource. It cannot be stored or bought, it cannot be multiplied, it cannot be replaced, and it expires constantly. It can only be put to good use. Unused time will never come back. Robert Kiyosaki, the author of *The Rich Father's Prophecy*, wrote this wise sentence: "Time is one of your most valuable assets" [3, p. 303]. Nowadays many people complain about the lack of time and difficulties in reconciling their duties. It is worth emphasizing that those who lose most of it complain about the lack of time the most [3].

Everyone's dream is to have more time. More time for tasks at work, for hobbies, for family, for oneself. However, not everyone can do it. You have to set priorities so that the correct management of time serves something. At work, you need to define what is most important, what is less vital, for trivial matters, or even those you can let go of. It would help if you also defined which tasks you have to carry out and/or take part in them directly.

The above provisions emphasize the need, even necessity, of effective time management. There are many definitions relating to time management. It is generally accepted as the planned and systematic performance of tasks in order to achieve the assumed goal. The main goal of time management is its effective use, not only the ability to plan and deal with time. Time management consists of many tools and methods, and their use leads to a more balanced and satisfying life and more efficient use of time.

Do we have enough time for everything? Most of us will answer "no" to a similar question. However, in reality, each of us has more of it than we think we do, only we cannot manage it. With Brian Tracy's book [4] we will learn how to achieve more in a short time, earn better and enjoy life more. Thanks to practical strategies and techniques, we will learn how to: – gain two hours of work a day, learning about the psychology of effective time management, – make better decisions faster, – set clear goals and concentrate efforts on the right actions, – deal with complex tasks more effectively, – effectively use the methods that increase productivity. Brian Tracy, based on the results of more than 25 years of research on time management strategies used by successful people, has created a simple and effective system thanks to which each of us can improve the quality of our lives – and in a matter of weeks.

The goal should be person-specific and meet certain conditions:

- undertaking and achieving the goal should be under the control of the person who wants to achieve it,
- if the goal has been imposed (e.g., by the superior), it is worth re-evaluating it for your own goal so that it does not remain an uninspiring order.

One more circumstance must be borne in mind. If you aim too high, you can easily get discouraged. On the other hand, if it is too low, the goal will not inspire or motivate you. Goals should be ambitious enough to cause moderate positive stress – but not so ambitious that their creator does not believe they could be met.

## 2. The rhythm of human work

Each person has a different, peculiar only to him/her, the rhythm of work [5, p. 65]. It consists of three parts: the period of getting to work, practice, and fatigue (Fig. 1). Efficient, effective work is achieved in a practice period that is much longer than the rest.

For the organization of your work, it is crucial to get to know your work rhythm. In general, it is assumed that introducing to mental work takes 10-15 minutes, efficient mental work 2-2.5 hours, followed by a short rest. It is not just relaxation. Sometimes it may be other, so-called light managerial activities. However, after two or three such cycles, a long rest is necessary.

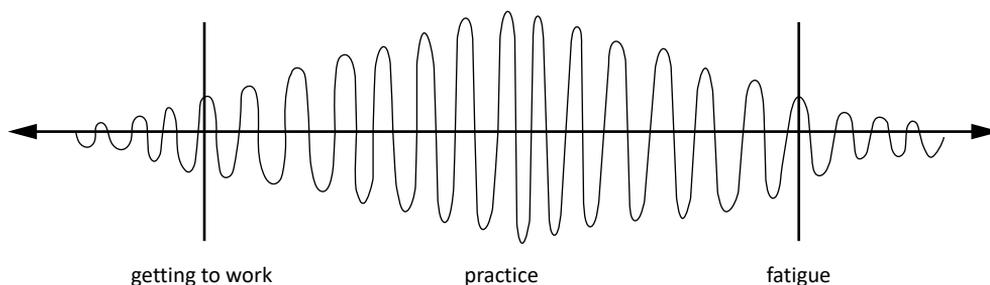
The work rhythm is closely related to the biological (circadian) rhythm, one of the basic features of life, and means periodic, predictable oscillations in physiological, biochemical, and behavioral processes. This internal clock has been created due to evolution as an expression of the adaptation of living organisms to regular changes taking place in the external environment. That means that both of these factors are interconnected, and the main generator of internal clock systems is the external light and temperature stimuli, called synchronizers.

If the signals do not appear at a specific time (as in people working in the night system), the biological clock is disrupted with all consequences.

The natural human circadian rhythm is influenced by environmental factors, mainly the weather. In the case of positive effects (high pressure), this results in the mitigating influence of minimum efficiency and a general improvement in the activity. It is possible to carry out more tasks and select challenging problems to solve in such a period. In the case of unfavorable impacts (low pressure, passage of atmospheric fronts), complex tasks should be abandoned as much as possible and avoided in minimum psychophysical efficiency periods. Especially during this period, opportunities for conflict situations among colleagues should be avoided.

It would be advisable for the superior to choose a close associate (deputy) with an individual course of biorhythms that is delayed in time relative to his/her own. It enables more efficient actions in the moments of decline in the form of one of the members of the management team, of course, provided that they fully understand each other. In the case of larger groups, it seems more appropriate to select the principle of biorhythm compatibility.

It was found that most of the physiological functions of the human body change in the circadian rhythm – 24 hours. These include, among others: temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, secretion of water, digestive juices, liver function, as well as the composition of body fluids



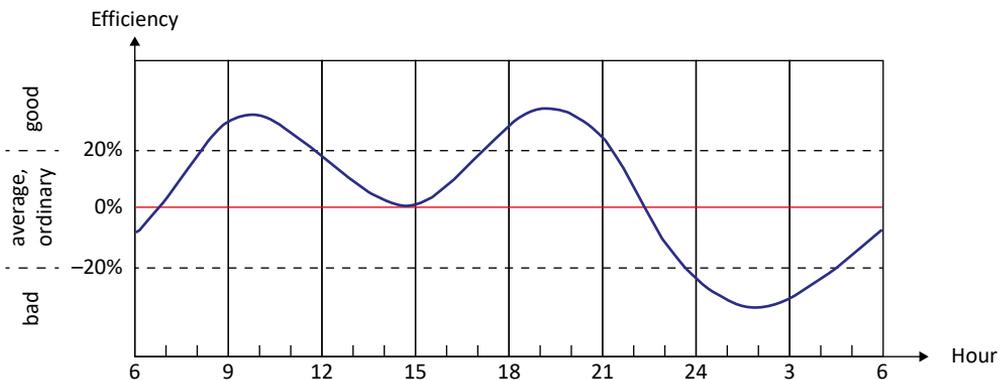
**Fig. 1.** Work rhythm  
Source: [6, p. 59].

and the level of hormones in the blood. These changes have a significant impact on both the physical performance of the body and its mental performance.

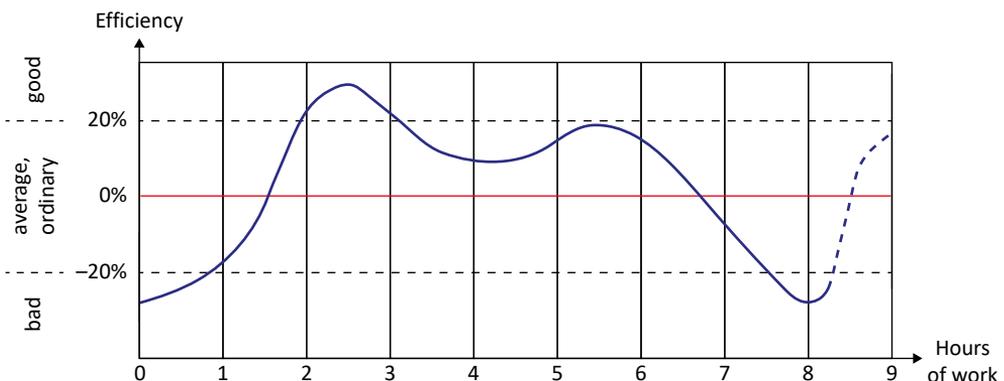
Many scientists have studied the physical performance of the human body. Research carried out, i.e., by G. Hildebrand and O. Graf, shows significant changes in the work efficiency during a day. In the chart of the circadian rhythm of the human body efficiency prepared by G. Hildebrandt (Fig. 2), two clear maxima of the most outstanding efficiency can be noticed: between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m., and second between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. On the other hand, the phases of reduced efficiency fall on the period from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., and according to this author, the minimum efficiency falls on the night hours, usually between 2 to 4.

Due to the nature of the manager's work, research results on daily work efficiency are more interesting. According to the daily work efficiency curve proposed by Otto Graf (Fig. 3), an employee achieves the highest work efficiency after 2.5 hours of work. After about 4 hours, it decreases to reach a local minimum and increases until 5.5 hours. It reaches the daily minimum after 8 hours of work.

At this point, it is worth emphasizing that the obtained results refer to a statistical middle-aged man and are presented after some generalization.



**Fig. 2.** The 24-hour rhythm of the human body's efficiency according to G. Hildebrandt  
Source: [7].



**Fig. 3.** Daytime work efficiency curve according to O. Graf  
Source: [7].

After averaging, for most people, the two periods between 8 a.m.-12, and 3 p.m.-5 p.m. (6 p.m.) are the periods for optimal performance. Some authors are convinced that the afternoon conditions for optimal operation are between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m. However, this is at odds with the generally recommended working hours [8, p. 63]. Knowing these facts allows you to optimize performance and gradation of effort at work significantly. It also gives you the opportunity to organize your work and that of others. However, it should be remembered that the quoted results are averaged for a larger population, and there may be individual deviations from the curve of physical fitness or mental performance (e.g., type of "early bird"). It does not reduce the value of these studies in any way, as it is easy to make the necessary corrections based on self-observation.

It was also found that the human body can adapt these rhythms to the changing environmental conditions, which we observe when changing the place of stay or working time. This adaptation, however, requires various individually determined times. We often deal with the above reactions of the organism, for example, during a stay in another city, especially in the initial period.

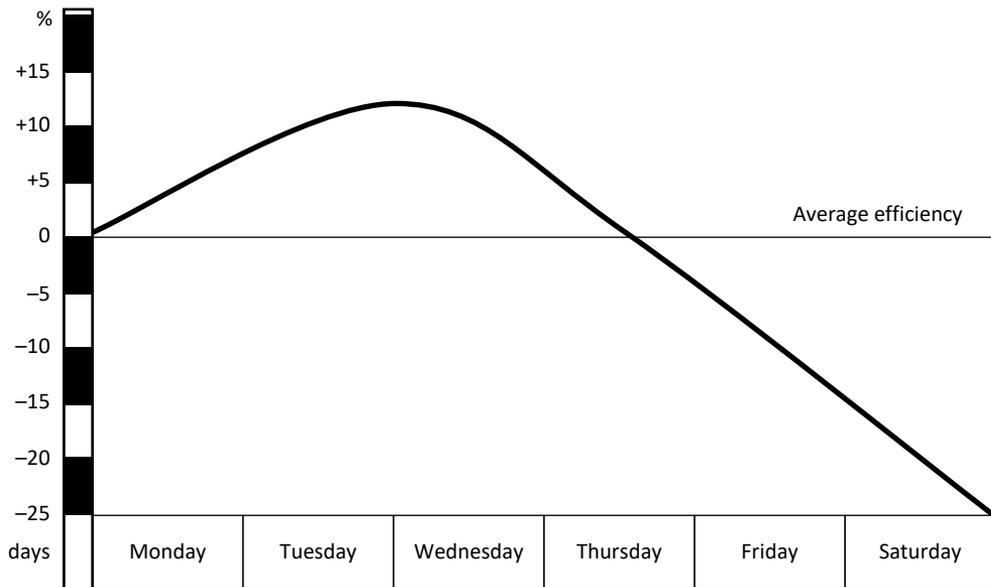
The body's adaptive abilities allow it to partially adapt to new conditions, but most often only after a minimum of one week of work. In the case of shift work, after this period, there is usually a transition to another shift, which disorganizes the work of the organism partially adapted to the new conditions. Of great interest are studies that have shown, for example, that night shift work is more effective if the cycles are shorter (2-3 days) or longer (several weeks). Numerous studies confirm the fact that in the hours of lower efficiency of the system significantly when the mental fitness of the body decreases: the number of accidents at work increases, the accuracy of decisions made decreases, the number of conflicts and irritations between people increases, concentration decreases, and human beings become slower.

Daily work efficiency is not directly proportional to the time allocated to it. It largely depends on the workload in the period preceding the day. It turns out that if the load on the eve or in the previous days was moderate and there were sufficient conditions for recovery, then high performance is achieved. Even better results are obtained after one or two days of rationally organized rest. On the other hand, if the workload and working time were extended during the preceding days, the work efficiency decreased, especially the conceptual work efficiency decreased.

It has been shown beyond reasonable doubt that, as the time of mental work increases, there is an increasing decline in productivity. This decrease is quite significant in the case of repetitive mental work. For example, it can be stated that the extension of working time by 4 hours (50%) reduces the efficiency by 15%, and extends the working time by 8 hours (100%) reduces the efficiency by 25%. It looks even more unfavorable when performing unrepeatable mental work. In this case, extending the working time by 50% causes a decrease in productivity by 25%, while extending the working time by 100% causes a decrease in productivity by 55%.

Given the above facts, extending the working day beyond the limits of optimal human capabilities most often does not bring the desired benefits because the time to perform tasks, especially those requiring much mental effort, is significantly longer. Therefore, this should be borne in mind, for example, during an inspection or the so-called conference.

Of great interest are the issues related to the efficiency of mental work during the week (Fig. 3). It depends basically on the same factors that affect daily productivity, proper planning and organization of work, and rational distribution of effort. There are quite significant fluctuations in labor productivity during the week. We can see a substantial drop in efficiency



**Fig. 4.** Average work week efficiency  
*Source: [6, p. 63].*

in the last two days of the week. It is caused by a sudden decrease in the psychophysical condition and the build-up of fatigue in the previous days of work. Increasing working hours per week also does not bring directly proportional effects to working time.

The cited facts can be commented on in various ways. Following this, it is possible to present many critical issues necessary to improve work. The interpretation of the individual charts presented in Figs. 1, 2, and 3 also allows specifying some practical advice for managers who organize their work and for subordinates. For example, important decisions should be made during periods of maximum mental activity (especially the first period of the noon peak). The research shows that the number of wrong decisions increases with the decrease of the mental abilities of the manager, and therefore it is not advisable to plan around 12-14 hours for making decisions necessary for the enterprise.

Everyone's efficiency fluctuates a lot throughout the day. These changes are natural and related to the daily rhythm of people's life energy. The efficiency curve for each individual is slightly different, but the statistically average daily productivity was determined. It increases in the morning (usually from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.) and reaches its peak in the 12-14 hours.

Applications for planning activities during the working day:

- it is worth getting to know your daily rhythm,
- complicated and essential matters should be planned during peak performance in the morning,
- during a drop in the performance, do not work against your biological rhythm, but try to relax and use this time for contact with people and routine activities,
- when the performance curve rises in the afternoon, more important things can be resumed.

### 3. Time thieves

We begin this excerpt from the article by William Penn saying, “Time is what we need the most, but we use the worst”. Often, the observation of what is happening around us confirms our belief that the words of this English Quaker are still relevant, although more than 300 years have passed since his death.

Wasting time is a significant problem for many people, including managers. There are two main groups of time-wasting determinants.

The first group consists of internal conditions, i.e., factors dependent on a person, including the three most important ones: lack of self-reflection and lack of realizing the passing of time; lack of knowledge about time management; human personality traits.

The features conducive to wasting time include lack of knowledge, lack of experience, lack of motivation, lack of assertiveness, indiscipline, non-punctuality, lack of order, non-systematicity, lack of organizational talents, carelessness, being phlegmatic, having poor communication skills, talkativeness, lack of ambition. Most of them are features closely related to the human personality, and therefore very resistant to changes. It can be counteracted by elimination or transformation by adopting a different mental model or by appropriately programmed training.

It is noticeable that the waste of time in most cases results from the fact that a person does not act consciously and that his/her behavior is accidental or insufficiently directs him/her. Generally speaking, most people cannot manage their time rationally. In return, they complain about the lack of it.

The second group is external factors. These include the way to work, various types of meetings, queues in shops and offices, phone calls and visits of sales assistants or unexpected applicants, obstacles to work coming from the environment (noise, buzz), the need to read daily, and professional press, ability to watch TV broadcasts, failure of devices, installations, power supply, untimely customers or friends, traffic congestion, etc. In studies dealing with time management or the manager’s work, you can find the specification of the so-called time wasters. Most often, activities that are listed in different order are endowed with this name. The set is presented above, but the order does not prove the rank or frequency of a given factor. The range of these circumstances or premises is quite broad. It is understandable because each person is different and carries out his/her activity (functions) in different circumstances specific to him/her. Thus, there are many factors among the time eaters mentioned. Some of them result from the improper organization of the manager’s work. A significant percentage is a derivative of his/her personality and/or consequence of functioning in a specific organizational structure where the “top” imposes his/her work style. The division into these two sets is problematic because, in many cases, the factors overlap. The above-mentioned premises should include [9]: improper document filing system; personal disorganization – “collapsed desk”; incomplete, late information; wanting information about everything; imprecise or no communication; too extensive communication; insufficient coordination of the team’s work; failure to complete cases; trying to do everything at once; lack of self-discipline; no priorities; protracted meetings; postponing work; private chat; lack of motivation, indifferent attitude to work; not being able to say “no”; too little delegation of tasks; waiting time (e.g., appointments, deadlines; breaks for unplanned phone calls; unannounced guests; distraction, noise; hanging out on Facebook and other social networks.

In the conclusion of this thread of considerations, you can include advice for the manager not to be kind to himself/herself and not to justify himself/herself for not doing something,

for not fulfilling some part of the plan. It corresponds to the thesis that lost time cannot be recovered. You have to be able to say “no”, be assertive about your own time, and respect others’ time [10].

#### **4. How to manage time?**

We will also begin this fragment of the article with the words of Albert Einstein: “There are thousands of ways to kill time, but no one knows how to resurrect it”.

When striving to improve effective time management, first of all, you need to define a goal of action. Following this, the palette of tasks to be performed should be specified. Only then is it possible to make a plan for what needs to be done. It is the first step in completing all the tasks ahead of you. The transparency of the plan will allow you to prepare well and directly affect your achievements’ quality.

The key is goal setting, both short-term and long-term. All activities should be planned according to the idea known as KISS. It means “keep it simple, stupid” or “keep it simple and smart” – meaning “keep it simple”. All activities must be divided into stages, the execution of which will be straightforward. Each, even the most complex undertaking, can be divided into simple activities.

Goals must be set in time. You need to set an exact date when you will achieve your goals and objectives. Without a clear deadline, the manager will plant the seeds of procrastination in his/her mind. At the same time, he/she must be careful not to fall into this trap.

The above is the basis for the conclusion that proper time management must start with the goals you want to achieve. Thanks to this, we know what we want and where we are going. It is easier to define tasks and individual goals.

The next piece of advice seems to be very pragmatic. It says that during the hours of mental decline, a manager should devote part of his/her time to implementing the control function or performing routine tasks that do not require maximum concentration of attention.

It is reasonable for a manager in his/her working day plan to include the performance of several critical managerial activities, a certain number of less essential managerial activities, and leaving a reserve to implement a possible spontaneous – sudden, unplanned activity. At the same time, as already mentioned, fundamental activities should be performed in the periods of maximum psycho-physical.

When planning your endeavors, get to know yourself first. B. Tracy says one minute of planning saves 10 minutes in action. Know yourself and find time during the day when you are most productive. There is no prescription for this, and you just have to watch yourself. Some people work better in the morning, and others do better after lunch. During this time, complete complex tasks, then they will not be so difficult.

It is also important to give (assign) a proper priority to each of them. It will help you avoid feeling overwhelmed by having too many goals and help focus your attention on the most important of them.

Some people suggest that you plan your day before it starts. Work it out in the morning or, even better, the day before bedtime. But since you go to sleep with this plan, you will not get any sleep.

Writing down tasks and planning the day will allow you to see what the coming day will look like and what and when should be done. The goal of the plan manager-author should be to

stick to this schedule during the day and implement the planned activities. In addition to strictly substantive tasks, also take account of other tasks, such as going to the gym, meals, going to the child's presentation in kindergarten. Of course, life can be unpredictable, and not always everything that we have planned will be possible to achieve, but we should strive for it.

You need to know by when you have time to complete the task. If it is not imposed in advance, you set a time limit, determine how much time you need, and enter the date by which you plan to finish the task since tasks without a specific deadline drag on indefinitely. Try not to exceed the set deadlines. If this happens, immediately set the next date. Also, learn why you failed to meet the deadline. What was the reason for this? How can you avoid this in the future?

Learn to say no – let the manager use management by objectives (MBO). As already mentioned, you only have 24 hours during the day, so don't get distracted by irrelevant things. Also, don't take on more tasks than you can manage. People will be turning to you with various requests, and they will be asking for your time. Think carefully about whether you have to take care of it. If you are focused on work, some important task, and someone distracts you from it, apologize to him that you are busy at this point and, unless it is a matter of life or death, postpone this conversation to another period. Such distraction, detachment from the task makes it harder for you to come back to it later, and you will lose precious minutes for it.

Set yourself reminders. Reminders are a handy feature of many electronic calendars. If you have an important meeting or task to perform, set yourself a reminder. You can define how long before a given event is notified. Sometimes 15 minutes before is enough; sometimes it is worth setting a more extended period, e.g., one day. It all depends on what the task is about and how much time is needed to prepare well.

Prioritize tasks. You cannot do everything, so you need to learn to prioritize tasks and assess what your attention should be in the first place, what is important, and what can be ignored or postponed. Here it is worth mentioning the well-known 80/20 rule, which is useful when setting priorities. Usually, around 20% of the efforts made are responsible for 80% of the results. Find these key tasks that will allow you to take a big step forward in achieving your goals.

Delegate. Learn to delegate tasks – I am not irreplaceable; I believe in the competencies of colleagues and subordinates. Give them a chance to prove themselves – they will have the satisfaction and thank you for sure. At this point, it is appropriate to present the words of G.S. Patton: "Never tell people how to go about things. Tell them what to do and you will see that they will surprise you with their ingenuity".

Apparently, not everyone can afford the comfort of employing associates. Nevertheless, take into account that your time is precious. Contrary to appearances, sometimes it is much cheaper to commission tasks than to pore over them yourself. Especially when it comes to tasks in which we have no experience, and someone could do them better and faster.

When you have a task ahead of you, ask yourself if you are the person who should do it? If there are any things that someone else could do better than you or are not important enough for you to do personally, consider delegating them. It will save you time and spend it on other activities. Note, however, that responsibility cannot be delegated.

Another piece of advice comes down to grouping similar tasks. If you create groups of tasks, specific activities must be assigned to them. For example, you can have the following categories: family, work, personal development, etc. It is up to the manager to determine the category. It's a good idea to group similar tasks into blocks and complete them at the same time. If, for

example, you need to make several phone calls to different people, specify the time slot when you will make them and make these calls one by one. It can be similar to checking e-mails. It is not advisable to check your e-mail every now and then. It is much more advantageous to define when it should (can) be done, e.g., twice a day at a specific time. It allows you to improve the process. It is also worth considering the location where you will carry out the tasks. Sometimes we waste time unnecessarily on the so-called logistics, unnecessary movement.

Use time buffers. Leave a buffer between tasks to be performed, a time gap of 5-15 minutes. That allows you to finish one task and catch a breath before proceeding to the next. Besides, the world is not perfect, some unforeseen circumstances may happen, and it is worth having some spare time. These buffers should not be too big so that you do not have “downtime” and use the whole day efficiently.

It would be best if you began to realize that the day rarely goes according to plan. Unforeseen accidents can happen suddenly, and unforeseen situations can change the course and direction of your day. You have to be prepared for such situations, so prepare a buffer system for your plan. This buffer will allow you to deal with unforeseen events and circumstances during the day. However, you have to be careful not to get lost in these scenarios. Set time limits depending on how much time you will need for unexpected events, and then return without thinking about the most substantial tasks. Think in a broad perspective and focus on what matters most.

## 5. Helpful methods

In order to maintain a specific convention, this fragment will begin with a reminder of the life maxim, which says that: *We should devote the most time and energy to those tasks that will bring us the most benefits.*

Before introducing quite often recommended and used methods facilitating the manager’s work, the reflection of a slightly different dimension and time devoted to thinking becomes the main issue today. According to L. Seiwert, it is much better to spend more time thinking and then taking action than taking action without thinking and then wasting time correcting the wrong outcomes that have occurred. That is why it is so important in modern, intelligent organizations to devote time to thinking, during which the cyclicity of mental work, phases of fatigue and intensification, and effective breaks in mental work are considered [11].

Before commencing specific actions, think over everything without haste, i.e., think carefully before starting the work [4]. If we are starting a new task, we should first consider the procedure:

- Let each assignment have a deadline. If you are setting a deadline, ask for completion earlier than your due date.
- Avoid delay – it leads to a closed circle. If you have subordinates or assistants, learn to delegate tasks.
- Remember that it is impossible to be nice to everyone.
- You cannot do everything.

The urgency requirement determines how quickly the task must be completed. Both in private life and in every organization, there are many important and unimportant, urgent and non-urgent tasks.

We should have a time reserve for the implementation of unplanned (unforeseen) tasks. According to the Pareto principle, 20% of the work provides 80% of the result, a means that

a significant part of the planned results can be achieved by spending a minimum of time resources.

The ABC analysis, based on the Pareto principle, can often be very useful.

As in the 80:20 rule, it is assumed that the share of important and less critical tasks in the overall calculation is always the same. The letter A stands for the most crucial tasks. It is claimed that they account for about 15% of the total number of tasks. Nevertheless, when we complete 15% of the tasks, we will have 65% of the results. The letter B means tasks of medium importance. They are responsible for 20% of the effects we achieve. The last most important are the C tasks, they are the least important, but quantitatively they take up as much as 65% of all tasks. Unfortunately, they only give us 15% of the effects. The ABC analysis allows you to organize the tasks in terms of their importance, indicates which tasks to start with and which tasks will bring us the most effects. Thanks to this, with the least amount of time, we can perform the most essential tasks of high value to achieve goals. Thus:

- Type A tasks are the most important, they cannot be delegated,
- The tasks of type B are next in the hierarchy of importance. Their execution will also bring us a large increase in results – they are significant, but can sometimes be delegated,
- Finally, we should perform type C tasks that will bring us the relatively smallest increase in results in the end. We should also delegate these tasks.

The time effort analysis shows that the actual time effort involved in handling very important A, important B, and less important C matters does not necessarily correspond to the importance of all the tasks associated with the performance of a given function. We often waste most of our time dealing with many unimportant matters – C and then, as a rule, we do not have enough time to solve a few but significant tasks.

When presenting the proposals, the Eisenhower matrix, which is a method of setting priorities, cannot be overlooked. It is based on two task evaluation criteria: importance and urgency:

Validity – this is a criterion that is related to our mission and most important goals. If something significantly affects the achievement of important goals, it means it is important. Things that do not affect our world of values are not important.

Urgency – this is a time-related criterion. It pays attention to the due date of a task. This date may be more or less distant in time; therefore, it divides our activities into more or less urgent.

The Eisenhower matrix consists of four quadrants, as does the SWOT analysis. It is a popular tool for managing yourself in time, as it helps you determine what is important and requires your total commitment. Therefore, it is worth mentioning the roles we play in life, our mission, and our personal values. The roles of a self-conscious man result from his mission, which in turn results from the principles and values necessary to him. We play various roles in life: husband, wife, son, mother, father, employer, friend, etc. However, without missions and rules, they are shallow. Many people assign a rank of “importance” to too many tasks. Proper prioritization is about realizing what is at the most in my order of importance and putting importance on that, rather than simply reacting to urgent things.

The Getting Things Done (GTD) method – 5 steps to the goal is a time management rule highly rated by many managers. Its primary purpose is to capture all the tasks that need to be accomplished and place them in an external, logically arranged system and use it appropriately.

The success of the GTD method lies in strict adherence to the schedule of tasks to be performed so that after completing one activity, immediately move to another and successively

carry out the duties that are on your mind. This system, developed by Allen, increases productivity (because you can see exactly how many actions are in front of the manager) and relaxes simultaneously (because thanks to a clear list, you will not forget anything). To make GTD work, you must go through a five-step workflow management process.

The most critical assumption of the GTD method is the five-stage task management process it covers [12-14]:

1. Collecting – placing all tasks in one place,
2. Analyzing – determining what activity on your part a given case requires,
3. Organizing – assigning specific tasks to appropriate places and folders,
4. Review – periodically updating the system and analyzing your work,
5. Implementation – deciding what to do depending on the context we are in, and how much time and energy we have.

The ability to manage time determines the success of managerial actions. That is because the better a manager uses his time, the more he will achieve. It is therefore not surprising that there are several methods, guides, and similar types of studies, the common goal of which is how a manager can [15]:

- deal with incessant disruptions, deliberations, e-mails, and phone calls,
- devote enough time to the most important matters,
- create packages of similar matters in order not to lose concentration,
- overcome procrastination,
- identify tasks that can be delegated,
- identify tasks that cannot be delegated.

Work organization and time management have a lot in common. Good work organization creates conditions for the effective use of time. Poor work organization is tricky. Each activity takes a little more time than it should. Badly organized person:

- cannot find the necessary information or documents, has a disorder in the calendar,
- jumps from task to task, trying to meet deadlines,
- is badly prepared and is late for meetings, she has more and more paperwork,
- has no clear priorities, works in a mess,
- has problems communicating with others and keeps records poorly.

As a result, such a person doubles the effort, wastes time, fails to meet deadlines, and the effects of their work are insufficient, although they seem to have put the appropriate amount of time and effort into achieving them. Worse still, such poor performance is visible and affects the work of others.

Demonstrating the disadvantages of poor work organization is a simple task. However, how to organize work well and permanently? The plan is the key.

There are many tips on how to develop a plan. Examination of a series of studies leads to the conclusion that developing a plan is more than just writing a to-do list. Tasks must be recorded appropriately, and the plan must be adequately supplemented. For example:

- write down tasks. The list must be exhaustive, although in the form of short notes. It is hard to work with a very extensive plan,
- estimate as accurately as possible the time it will take to complete each task,

- add time for unforeseen events. Usually, everything takes more time than estimated. Also include the repetitive activities that you do every day on a regular basis,
- set priorities. It is a key, extremely important aspect of time management.

One more condition must be met. When we have many tasks to do, their list becomes long, and therefore illegible and useless. The only way is to divide the tasks into categories (groups):

- priority,
- important,
- for now,
- more information is needed,
- to read (get acquainted).

A person may adopt a slightly different time management strategy. So he/she can distinguish each task according to its importance into:

- essential and urgent – tasks with a deadline, meetings, crises, some phone calls and e-mails,
- not important and urgent – complete rest, searching for information, social interactions, learning, new stimuli, family,
- important and not urgent – ineffective meetings, some telephone calls, tiny or difficult tasks,
- not very important and not very urgent – the fourth group should be avoided.

Concerning the above proposal, the research results show that effective planning should include 15% in the first group, 20% in the second group of tasks, and 65% in the third group of tasks, which is in line with the ABC Pareto analysis.

It all depends on the specific person and the operating conditions of the organization or its specificity of operation.

In the context of the comments made (proposed solutions), the advice is as follows: check the plan during the day and analyze it thoroughly once a day, e.g., at the end of each workday, updating the plan according to what happened during that day, and quickly review it every morning when mail arrives. You must do it when it suits you. This process should become a habit. The results of several studies prove that such a procedure is the foundation of effective time management.

Beware of the so-called time thieves. If something is constantly bothering us at work, then we experience the so-called “Saw effect”. Then, a person disconnected from the task at hand, even for a short time, has to get back to work and get into work, and this requires additional time. The researchers found that when we add up all the lost moments in this way, we waste up to 28% of our time [16].

Generalizing the presented proposals, it can be stated that they are to help managers perform their tasks because they are oriented towards order, which – according to A. Dufresne – gives three benefits: it helps memory, saves time, and keeps things [17].

Implementing effective time management habits requires much diligent effort, but practicing and following them consistently every day will lead you to a feeling of satisfaction and freedom that you have not experienced in a long time. By taking the time to practice these strategies, techniques, and mindset, you will not only gain more time, but you will also get your life back.

A person improving the process of effective time management:

- can identify what is most important and then focus on,
- spends less and less energy on matters of little importance,
- makes better decisions about how to perform tasks (and more),
- better coordinates projects (parallel work on some tasks saves time),
- copes better with various obstacles,
- becomes disciplined in the use of time and achieves coherence with increasing ease,
- copes better with surprises and critical situations.

## 6. Research and its results

For quantitative research, a deliberate sample selection was adopted based on the selection of research objects from among the population of managers of various levels employed in small and medium-sized enterprises and people studying at post-graduate studies in enterprise management who plan to apply for managerial positions in the future. As part of the sample selection, N = 152 respondents with higher education were selected, including the majority – 63% (96 respondents) related to enterprise management, logistics, economy, or economic law. 37% – 56 respondents declared a very diverse education, from agricultural, through technical, to social sciences and humanities. For the research, the N sample was divided into five categories:

- middle managers in medium-sized enterprises –  $n_1 = 82$  (54%),
- entrepreneurs of small businesses (usually their owners) –  $n_2 = 37$  (24.4%),
- nominees for the position (persons occupying lower positions in the enterprise):
  - in a small enterprise –  $n_3 = 8$  (5.2%),
  - in a medium-sized enterprise –  $n_4 = 10$  (6.6%),
- studying at managerial postgraduate studies –  $n_5 = 15$  (9.8%).

It should be emphasized that out of all 137 respondents holding positions in enterprises (including those nominated for promotion to a higher position), as many as 87% (117 respondents) completed postgraduate studies and specialist training, including all respondents with education other than related to management enterprise. About 10% of the respondents included people not related to work for the company but studying to change their position or industry.

The quantitative research used the method of a diagnostic survey conducted with the use of the questionnaire technique with the use of an electronic questionnaire. It aimed to identify areas of improvement and the potential effects of failure to improve managers during the economic boom and market stability. The questions included in the questionnaire were open, conjunctive – single choice or disjunctive – multiple-choice based on a cafeteria of response variants. The qualitative research used partially structured interviews and an analysis of secondary data (desk research) from reports on the condition of Polish enterprises during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewees were 7 entrepreneurs, mainly owners of small enterprises, and 6 managers of medium-sized enterprises. The aim of the questionnaire research was to obtain answers to questions focused on the following problems:

- premises for organizing or not planning own work time by managers,
- forms of improving the work of managers,

- managers overcoming the so-called time wasters,
- time management for improving qualifications and opportunities to improve competencies.

On the other hand, the interviews were aimed at *ex-post* evaluation and comparative analysis of the results of quantitative research in confrontation with the situation of enterprises, mainly in terms of the possibility of improving one’s own and subordinate work.

The research was conducted at the turn of summer and autumn 2020, mainly in the area of Lower Silesia. Its goal was to identify the directions of improving the work of managers in the Polish economic realities and problems related to time management. Among many questions concerning other issues, such as those about the work organization, were questions related to time management.

The summary of the test results is presented in Table 1. Their analysis is a premise for drawing several conclusions. Concerning drawing up a work plan, there is a visible relationship

**Table 1.** Summary of the test results

Question	Mid-level managers – 82 persons		Small Business Entrepreneurs – 37 persons		Nominated for the taking – 18 persons		Comments
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Do you develop a work plan?	63 (77%)	19 (23%)	13 (35%)	24 (65%)	15 (83%)	3 (17%)	
What is the main time waster:							The respondents had a choice of 3 out of 12 factors (circumstances), starting with the most common ones
– unexpected meetings and calls to the supervisor,	36 (43.9%)		3 (8.1%)		13 (72%)		
– lack of information – “fighting” for “no”,	30 (36.5%)		30 (81%)		2 (11%)		
– protracted meetings, briefings	17 (20.6%)		4 (10.9%)		3 (17%)		
How often do you take breaks at work:							
– every 2-3 hours,	16 (19.5%)		7 (19%)		2 (11%)		
– every 3-4 hours,	54 (66%)		19 (51%)		9 (50%)		
– I don’t do at all	12 (14.5%)		11 (30%)		7 (39%)		
Do you take work to your home:							
– yes,	27 (33%)		26 (70%)		14 (78%)		
– no	55 (67%)		11 (30%)		4 (22%)		
How often do you take work home:							
– up to 2 times a week,	11 (42%)		8 (30%)		3 (21%)		
– 3-4 times a month,	8 (29%)		2 (7%)		1 (7%)		
– almost every other day	8 (29%)		16 (43%)		10 (71%)		

Source: Own study.

between managers who fulfill their functions depending on the size of the company in which they work. The vast majority of middle-level managers and nominees for the position develop their work schedules. Different solutions are practiced by small business entrepreneurs – often their owners. In this case, almost 2/3 of people perform their duties based on reacting to what they carry with them every day.

The position of the respondents on the so-called time thieves is very interesting. In this case, the “dominant” waste of time resulted from the need to obtain the necessary information, mainly related to making decisions. It is highly reflective that unexpected meetings and calls to the supervisor do not give a favorable opinion to the superiors who occupy a higher position in the company’s organizational structure. Their relatively low level of organization can also be seen concerning prolonged meetings or briefings. This state of affairs resembles the well-known saying that “The fish begins to stick at the head”.

There is no need to convince anyone that breaks influence the effectiveness of mental work. The hygiene of mental work directly requires you to take breaks every hour after an hour of effort. The research results show that these issues are not reflected in practice. Breaks every 3-4 hours dominate. Such a position may be a consequence of the fact that the superiors are not well organized.

When discussing fatigue issues at work, the interesting thing about professional activity outside working hours arises. A considerable percentage of small business entrepreneurs and nominees for higher positions take homework with them. The latter can, in a sense, be understood because they probably want to prove themselves to their superiors, to reassure them that they are making the right staffing decision. This “strategy” of the nominees’ conduct is also confirmed because they continue their professional activity at home so often. The situation is entirely different in the case of middle-level managers. Only 1/3 of them continue their work at home, but 42% of them do so twice a week.

## Conclusions

Each manager must develop his/her style (method) of time management, not only with regard to himself/herself but also his/her colleagues, especially subordinates.

It would be best if you improved your work organization constantly. Always make time for what matters most. It means that the time required for routine activities must be kept to a minimum.

You have to work systematically on planning the time and consistently carry out started activities to the end. Bad habits can be overcome by changing wrong beliefs. The manager controls his/her time and thus controls life. Every waste of time robs you of a piece of your life. Do not let it be lost forever.

The approach to time management must be systematic. You need to update your plan regularly, but that is no reason not to stick to it.

Managers should think: *Some people can and want to go fast, others prefer slower. It is important to keep moving forward. In small steps, or even in very small steps – but keep going. Consistent action is much more effective and mobilizing than larger, but irregular, leaps forward.*

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### Conflict of interests

All authors declared no conflict of interests.

### Author contributions

All authors contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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### Czas – istotnym kapitałem menedżera

#### STRESZCZENIE

Obecne warunki funkcjonowania przedsiębiorstw i złożoność wielu procesów produkcyjnych, na wyższy poziom podnoszą kwestie dotyczące efektywności pracy kierowników. W ślad za tym wymogiem znacznie więcej uwagi poświęca się poprawie wydajności pracy i właściwej jej organizacji. Zaakcentowano, że coraz większa ilość wiedzy niezbędnej do przyswojenia w jednostce czasu oraz większy stopień trudności pracy na różnych stanowiskach stwarzają konieczność uwzględniania, oprócz naturalnych predyspozycji ludzkich, również rytmów biologicznych i aktualnych oddziaływań środowiska. Jest więc zrozumiałe, że pracownicy, zwłaszcza menedżerowie powinni znać psychofizyczne czynności kształtujące wydajność pracy człowieka i uwzględnić ich wpływ na poprawę efektywności kierowania. Podkreślono, że rola menedżera sprowadza się do osiągnięcia założonych przez zespół celów. Oprócz uwarunkowań przedstawiono szereg propozycji ukierunkowanych na doskonalenia działalności osób sprawujących funkcje kierownicze.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** zarządzanie, menedżer, czas, usprawnienie pracy

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