

TIME MANAGEMENT IN ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Architects have always made genuine efforts to control the waste of resources, of all kinds, in their practice of the architectural profession. Unfortunately, however, many people in management positions, (including architects), pay a little attention to a proper management of their time. The reason for this state of affairs is that most people fail to consider time as a resource in business management. Apart from human, financial and material resources, time is also a resource, and a limited one at that. And this being the case, since most of the work of the architect has a time frame component; this paper will discuss ways of effective time management for both the architect in practice, and all others. The paper also discusses some tips on how to save one's time, which include proper time planning using appropriate tools, avoiding obstacles to time management, and using good time saving techniques. It is expected that the architect will become a good manager, and efficient in project execution, if he puts these rules into practice.

Keywords: Architects, Time Management, Practice of Architecture.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of time may mean different things to different people. According to Webster (1995), time may be regarded as; the physical quantity measured by clocks, a period of history, and a period of duration available for certain action to be taken, etc. The latter concept of time best suits our purpose in this paper. Naturally, every activity of man is carried out within space and time. Space, when considered in terms of landmass alone is limited in supply. Time is also a limited resource in the sense that a person has only 24 hours to spend in any day. This time duration translates to 168 hours in a week, about 720 hours in a month, and just 8,766 hours in a whole year! If a person has the privilege of living up to 200 or 300 years on earth, then there may be no need for such a person to consider time management as a serious matter. This is because the person in question can afford to waste half of his life, and still have more than enough time left to achieve his life time goals within the remaining time he has to live. Unfortunately, this is not the case, especially in this part of the world where the average life expectancy oscillates between 50 and 60 years. There is, therefore, little or no time at all to waste here.

The Preacher (1967) in the Holy Bible recognized the importance of time, and so recorded in Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 the need for the proper use of time in the following words:

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For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:

- A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to laugh;
- A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance;
- A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
- A time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
- A time to rend and a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak;
- A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.”

One may, by extension, even dare to add here:

- A time for studying Architecture, and a time for practising Architecture;
- A time for planning the use of time, and a time for time management.

It should be evident from the foregoing statements; that every activity of man has a time tag attached to it. Therefore, the issue of time management should also be seen to be a matter that requires being handled with all seriousness, since time is a resource that is limited in supply.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE OF TIME

As already stated, time is a resource in management circles. It is an equal opportunity resource (Kaderlan, 1991). This simply means that every human being has access to the same amount of time – only 24 hours per person, per day! For some people, this amount of time is ample, but for some others it is grossly inadequate. The adequacy, or otherwise, of the time available to us depends entirely on how the time is used. Kaderlan (1991) observes that some people appear to have more time than others do. This is simply because they know how to manage their time better, and more successfully than others. Laporte (1988) also observes that most people are prone to time wasting, (probably as a result of improper planning), and that this attitude results in their loss of zest, vitality and pleasure, all of which we need to live successfully and also work or practise our own profession effectively and efficiently. Effective time management is, therefore, important because time lost is never regained.

WHY TIME MANAGEMENT FOR ARCHITECTS?

In trying to understand who and what an architect should be, Foster (1982) reports that Vitruvius in his “Ten Books on Architecture” stated that “an architect should have imagination, an understanding of both the theoretical, and practical aspects of construction, should be versed in letters, drawings, the use of geometric instruments, optics, arithmetic, history, philosophy, music, medicine, law, and astronomy.” It is instructive to note that the architect has to contend with diverse opinions on most of these fields of study in practically every piece of work he handles in the course of his practice. Ordinarily, the architect is expected to be reasonably informed in the above mentioned fields of study outlined by Vitruvius so as to be properly equipped for the work challenges he may meet later. This is more so as he is expected to design for all kinds of people namely: the educated and the uneducated, the healthy and the sick, the rich and the poor, the sane and the insane, the living and the dead, and so on. This, therefore, makes it more clearly imperative that the architect should also be well

tutored in time management, because acquiring knowledge in all the above fields has to do with the passage of time. To buttress this point, Uji (2002) further underlines the importance of time by stating that time is not only necessary to acquire such knowledge as preparation for creative thinking, it is also vital for the later creative stages of effort, incubation and insight, and for the ultimate stage of evaluation. He continues by stating that sufficient knowledge for use in the creative activity can only be acquired if there is sufficient time. This shows that time is of utmost importance in the creative process – which constitutes the bulk of the architect's work – and should be seen to be highly interactive with knowledge. The paucity of time available to the architect, or any other person, may be better understood in the way time passes every day. Whitrow (1980) observes that as people grow older, time appears to be passing away more rapidly than was the case previously. He buttressed this point by quoting Guy Pentreaths comments on time thus:

*“For when I was a babe and wept and slept, time crept;
When I was a boy and laughed and talked, time walked;
Then, when the years saw me a man, time ran;
But as I older grew, time flew.”*

In fact, time surely flies away when it is not properly planned, managed and used, hence the need for time management.

ANALYZING THE COST OF TIME

An understanding of the cost of time may most likely bring one to a better appreciation of the need for time management. This is because the costing of one's time reveals to the person how much money the person stands to lose for any length of time wasted or mismanaged, for, as the saying goes: time is money. According to Heller and Hindle (1998), the cost of time is generally given by the following formulae:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{(a) Cost per hour} &= \frac{1.5 \times \text{Annual Salary}}{\text{Working hours per year}} \\ \text{(b) Cost per minute} &= \frac{\text{Cost per hour}}{60} \end{aligned}$$

Thus, for the least paid worker in Nigeria's Federal Civil Service, who works for an average of 20 days in a month for a salary of ₦18,000.00, the cost of his time will be given by:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Cost per hour} &= \frac{1.5 \times 12 \times \text{₦}18,000.00}{20\text{days} \times 12\text{months} \times 8\text{hours}} = \frac{324,000.00}{1920} \\ &= \text{₦}168.75 \end{aligned}$$

Similarly, for an architect, or any other senior civil servant who earns about ₦100,000.00 per month, the cost of time translates to:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Cost per hour} &= \frac{1.5 \times 12 \times \text{₦}100,000.00}{20\text{days} \times 12\text{months} \times 8\text{hours}} = \frac{1,800,000.00}{1920} \\ &= \text{₦}937.50 \end{aligned}$$

Assuming that the above respective sums can be lost in one hour, then the quantum monetary loss for the architect mentioned above over a period of 35 years, the maximum time for employment in the public service in Nigeria, will be well over

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N60,000,000.00. The colossal effect of this loss on an economy will be better appreciated if many architects, as well as, other workers are involved in the mismanagement of time.

CONSEQUENCES OF BAD TIME MANAGEMENT

For the architect, the mismanagement of time may lead to some disastrous consequences, which include the following:

- (a) Loss of credibility
- (b) Loss of clientele
- (c) Loss of (on-going) jobs
- (d) Schedule overruns
- (e) Payment of liquidated and ascertained damages

The architect may likely lose some measure of credibility if he fails to deliver a job on schedule. The architect also stands the risk of loss of clientele because disappointed clients are most unlikely to renew their patronage. Architects may lose (on-going) jobs as a result of time wastage that is traced to them. Schedule overruns may result on projects where the architect has not properly considered the issue of proper time management. It should be noted here that a schedule overrun is neither a good element of proper architectural practice, nor is it a good example of best practice in business management. The Nigerian Institute of Architects (1990) clearly states that one of the conditions necessitating the payment of liquidated/or ascertained damages on a building is non-completion of the project at the date agreed in the contract documents. Barring the occurrence of a *force majeure* or any other adverse natural phenomenon outside the control of man, it should be accepted that inability to meet target completion dates on projects might, among other factors, most likely arise from poor time management.

THE WAY FORWARD

According to Heller and Hindle (1998), the key to successful management is the possession of good time management skills. Therefore, to succeed in his professional practice, the architect should endeavour to master the art of effective time management. Interestingly, time is the most user-friendly resource in business management. This is so because, as Kaderlan (1991) has observed, time is the most predictable resource of all in that time is always available in a known and fixed quantity and comes at no cost whatsoever to the user. Simply put, the supply of time has no financial implications attached to it. However, to move forward in the management of time, the architect must learn to have his time properly leveraged. Smith (1998) defines leveraging as the addition of an input to achieve greater results. This simply means planning the use of time in such a way as to achieve so much from the little time available. This stand may be the reason why Kaderlan (1991) tends to see time management as: planning applied to daily activities. That is exactly what it is, because with such planning the tendency to waste time will be highly reduced, thus making available more time for productive activity. As Nwankwo and Lulsegger (1995) have stated, the degree of efficiency and success of an enterprise depends on the adequacy of the planning, and the use of resources. Thus, the success or failure of the enterprise lies in the method of allocation and use of the resources, which should be understood to include the use of time. Architectural practice is an enterprise, and so is rightly included in this postulation. As has already been stated,

the best we can do on the use of time is to have our time properly leveraged. This can be done by setting aside some 30minutes every day, during which one plans his/her activities for that day or the next. Such a little amount of time spent in planning the use of time will help to properly organize all other activities the person may engage in throughout the day.

STEPS TO TIME MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Certain steps have to be taken in order to plan the use of time properly. The steps include the following:

- Engage in Quiet Time Practice
- Set Realistic Goals
- Work out Prioritized Tasks Lists.

Noting and memorizing the above mentioned steps does not mean planning the use of time. The most important thing to do is to take a firm decision to start planning the use of one's time, and to stick to the implementation of that plan when formulated.

Engage in Quiet Time Practice

Engaging in the practice of quiet time for at least 30minutes daily is essential in planning the use of time. During this period, all the person's activities for that day or the next day should be clearly written down with appropriate time duration allotted to each activity. The time planner should select a place for the quiet time, which may be at home, in the office, or even in a car, provided the place so selected is free from all manner of distractions.

Set Realistic Goals

Setting realistic goals is a major step in the ladder of success. Simply put, a goal is an objective or an aim, or just something that one hopes to achieve in the future, (Quirk, 2001). Goals may be set on a short-range, medium-range, or long-range basis depending on the urgency, or otherwise, of anticipated results. The first thing to do in goal setting is to write down the goals. In a nutshell, write down all the tasks that you wish to accomplish, and then go ahead to plan how to accomplish them and also how much time would be needed for each task to be completed. It should be noted that there can be no plan of any kind except where one already has an idea of what exactly one intends to achieve. Similarly, in time management, one needs to have a clear picture of what one intends to accomplish before planning one's time to meet such targets. Another point to note in goal setting is that the goals to be set must be realistic ones. That means that the goals should be practically possible to achieve, and that also within the time allotted for each of them.

Work out Prioritized Task Lists

Having set goals, the next step will be to have the goals crystallized into tasks which are now arranged in form of a list, and in order of priority. The prioritized task list sets out all the tasks that are expected to be completed on a particular day, week, month, quarter or year. These tasks should be arranged in such a way that the most urgent or most important ones among them will be done first, while the rest will be done later.

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According to Heller and Hindle (1998), a good way of preparing a "Daily Task List" is to divide the tasks into three major categories: A, B and C as shown below:

- A. - Tasks that are important and urgent
- B. - Tasks that are either important or urgent, but not both;
- C. - Tasks that are neither important nor urgent, but routine.

In addition to the above, the prioritized tasks may further be assigned numerical values such as: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, etc. This is to help determine when exactly a task has to be done, and which one actually comes first. However, mere task prioritization does not necessarily mean good time management; the implementation of the tasks so prioritized does that!

TIME PLANNING TOOLS

Several tools may be employed in planning for an effective use of time. The tools include the following:

- (a). Good Diary (pocket or desk)
- (b). Personal Organizer (in diary form)
- (c). Electronic Organizer
- (d). Personal Digital Assistant (PDA)
- (e). Laptop or Notebook Computer

Each of these tools has provision for daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly planning. The yearly planner contains one's long-range goals, while the quarterly planner takes care of the medium-range goals. The monthly planner in turn keeps a record of the goals one has set for the month. On its part, the weekly planner also records all the possible tasks one should carry out in a week, while the daily planner acts as the person's organizer on daily basis. It is necessary to stress the need for one to carry along one's daily planner at all times. This is to ensure that the right tasks are performed at the right time, and also have such task ticked when they are completed. Now, for these tools to be used effectively there has to be a combination of a deliberate effort and strength of character for one to commit himself to planning every day. In effect, the planning of one's time should become a personal habit if the person is to succeed in time management.

OBSTACLES TO TIME MANAGEMENT

Let it be noted here, that no matter how well one may have planned the use of one's time, there may still be some obstacles to efficient time management. Two main obstacles to time management are interruptions and procrastinations.

Interruptions

Most often, interruptions arise from such unforeseen circumstances as impromptu meetings with clients, project and staff meetings, and unplanned travel over which one has little or no control. Again, interruptions may also come from colleagues in the office, friends and family members who may come visiting at a time that one needs to be left alone to attend to some tasks uninterrupted. In addition, interruptions may, as well, come from spending so much time reading mails, newspapers and magazines, or making unimportant telephone calls. At times, taking telephone calls from outside the office may also interrupt the progress of one's tasks. The solution to the problem of interruptions is to set aside specific time periods in a

day, during which to make or take calls, receive visitors, and read mails, newspapers and magazines. Furthermore, it will be proper for the time planner to allow some extra time on tasks to take care of time obstructions.

Procrastination

Procrastination is another obstacle to good time management. It simply means putting off what one ought to be doing now, or ought to have done to a later time when it may never be done, or done perfunctorily. Procrastination works against proper time management, and so should be avoided. This is because, as Lorimer (1995) has observed, putting off an easy thing makes it hard, and putting off a hard one makes it impossible. One good way of avoiding the waste of time through procrastination is by the application of what Kaderlan (1991) calls the *salami technique*. This technique involves the execution of a project bit by bit; that is doing one small piece of the project at a time. This way, an activity that requires a long, uninterrupted time to complete is broken down into short tasks of 10 – 15 minutes. For example, if the project is the design of an office complex for a client, then the *salami technique* steps might include the following actions: a review of the client's brief, doing a research on office buildings, consulting other professional experts on the project, preparing sketch designs, and also budget estimates, etc. Each step may be further subdivided to get the smallest individual steps possible; so that the emerging task may be done within the time allotted for it.

WAYS OF SAVING TIME

One good way to manage time is to save time. As Kaderlan (1991) has observed, time may be saved in several ways, as stated below, with the fourth point added by Heller and Hindle (1998):

- a. Maximization of activity – energy level nexus
- b. Holding effective meetings,
- c. Proper delegation of tasks, and
- d. Good office practice.

Maximization of Activity – Energy Level Nexus

One good way of saving time is to maximize the activity – energy level nexus. This simply means matching one's activity to one's energy level for best results. Here, a person is expected to handle the most difficult and highest mental and physical energy demanding tasks when the person's energy level is also very high. Some people work best in the morning, some do so in the afternoon, while for some others it is in the evening or at night. Once a person's optimal energy time has been determined, then all his high mental and physical energy-demanding jobs, such as architectural designs, amongst others, should be scheduled for such periods, while low energy demanding ones may be attended to later.

Holding Effective Meetings

Meetings are an essential ingredient in the running of any type of business, but they usually consume a substantial amount of the time available for the execution of projects, or achieving goals. A meeting can become more efficient and meaningful if it has a clearly defined agenda, with all the items on it properly prioritized, and treated accordingly. In addition, time could be saved during a meeting by starting the meeting on time, and also ending it at the time the participants have been told it

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will end. This will be possible if a specific amount of time has been allotted to each item on the agenda according as may be required. A person may be appointed a time keeper during a meeting to ensure that the planned time for it is not exceeded. Finally, discussions during a meeting should be brief and straight to the point.

Proper Delegation of Tasks

Another effective way to manage and save time is to delegate tasks properly to subordinate staff. The tasks to be delegated must be clearly spelt out, and the time for their accomplishment also stated, in order to achieve the desired results. However, delegation of tasks should not become an avenue for dereliction of duty, as it is not intended to remove all the work from the chief executive officer of the firm. It should rather be done to allow the officer in charge more time to attend to more serious matters that may need his personal attention for solution.

Good Office Practice

A lot of time could be saved in the architect's office if a good office practice is adopted in running it. The following rule may be applied for good results:

- (a). Process and despatch documents promptly
- (b). Handle and file all paperwork and drawings appropriately;
- (c). Make a proper use of the computer for paperwork and design purposes.

Improper handling of these areas in the office will lead to a waste of time, which may generate negative effects on the operational efficiency of the company.

ACTIVITIES THAT REQUIRE TIME

Every activity of man, as already stated takes place within space and time. These activities cover every aspect of a man's life namely: religious, financial, educational, recreational, and social areas. In order to lead a balanced personal and business life, a person has to have his time planned around such activities. It is instructive to state for one to engage in good time management, there must be a proper allocation of time for all these activity areas on daily basis. This is so because it is our view that:

- A man who does not find time to pray may not be expected to be at peace with his God;
- A man who does not find time to work should not be expected to earn a living;
- A man who does not find time to study will be bereft of knowledge, and so should not be expected to be the master of his profession or occupation;
- A man who does not find time for recreation should not be expected to be physically fit to carry out other tasks;
- And a man who does not find time to socialize may become a recluse, and a social outcast.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper, we have shown that by planning the use of one's time, and sticking strictly to such a plan, it will be almost impossible for the person to fail. Success comes from a consistent adherence to the realization of goals already set. Bland (1972) observes that men who have goals and plans dictate to those who do not have them. Maynard (1960) also captures the importance of planning by stating

that planning characterizes every action of management more than any other technique. Moreover, McNutty (1982) agrees with the foregoing by stating that good management must achieve, not only a logical plan, but also the commitment of all the participants involved to make efforts required to achieve the owner's time objective. The owner's time objective is of prime importance here because in the practice of architecture, emphasis is always laid on meeting the job owner's time requirements. It should be noted here that in a construction project, the control of time is equally as important as the control of cost on it. Therefore, it is very important to plan the use of one's time for maximum benefits, because as the saying goes: 'He who fails to plan, actually plans to fail'. Finally, we would like to conclude with the words of Lakein (1973) thus: 'Time is your life...to waste your time is to waste your life, but to master your time is to master your life and make most of it'. This means that to waste one's time is tantamount to wasting one's life, and so, not making the best out of it. So, as architects were originally called '*master builders*,' because of the vast scope of their job schedule in the building industry, it is our view that they should as well become, not only ardent but also, master practitioners of good time management to meet up with the demands of their calling. Therefore, with proper time management, architects should be expected to achieve the best results in their professional practice at all times. This practice will further bring out in them the modern world class managers which their strenuous training has prepared them to be, and so enable them to continue to offer the leadership position in the built environment.

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