



Why is management so busy?

Have you ever wondered what the ideal executive diary might look like? For instance, what might be the balance of problem solving to strategic thinking, direct involvement to coaching, debate to contemplation, preparation to action, or working time to family and leisure time?

Of course the answer will vary from individual to individual, or for different situations, but one thing is almost certain - it will be very different to what your diary currently looks like, and in a number of ways.

For one thing, if you are fairly typical of the executive population, your diary will be fuller than you would like it to be. There is not much free time to simply sit and think, prepare for the next item, read as much as you would like to, or to simply wander around and get a real sense of what is going on in your organisation. It always seems to be a struggle to find time for new opportunities, and you are probably spending more time away from your family and friends than you would like.

In fact, research shows that management workloads are continuing to increase and more executives are finding that they need to be 'available' for a greater proportion of their time - even when they are away from the office, at home or on holiday.

So are we working too hard?

There is considerable evidence to indicate that we are, and the consequences of that can only be detrimental. Imagine, if you will, someone who is doing a good job leading and managing a group in a fictitious organisation, who has the sort of ideal balance in their diary that you considered at the top of the page. They have just the right amount of time to prepare for each event and ensure it is efficiently handled, their strategic forethought anticipates a lot of potential problems and ensures that the rest

are more manageable, and the time they spend with their team ensures that many of the issues are dealt with successfully without them having to get 'involved'.

But now imagine that the world around them begins to change: more of their work involves travel; competitor advances and shareholder expectations mean they have to do more with less, baseline technology advances and statutory responsibilities become more onerous, a change programme or reorganisation gives them additional project responsibilities. What gives?

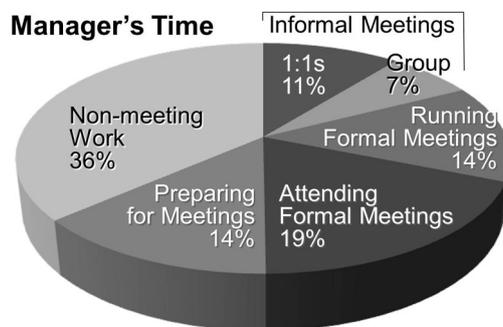
Well it cannot be the *doing* elements, because they still need doing, and there are more of them now. So it has to be the *thinking* elements. But hold on, didn't we say that thinking time was optimum in our ideal baseline model for ensuring efficiency in the *doing*? So what happens if we reduce it? Surely the doing bit also becomes inefficient?

The truth is, either our overall management process becomes more efficient to cope with these changes, or they eat up more of our time. That is what we are all experiencing at the moment - our overall management and leadership processes have *not* become more efficient, and so we are working longer hours than ever before - late night working, interrupted weekends, time away from home,

always on-line. And we are running out of road! The excessive hours occurring at the start of the industrial revolution have returned with a vengeance for some executives and professionals. There is no more time left in our diaries, and things are beginning to go wrong.

But what about the alternative suggested at the beginning of the previous paragraph? What about the option of making management and leadership processes more efficient?

On average, 67% of an executive's time is connected with meetings, either in leading, or attending, or preparing for



How the average manager's diary is divided up.
Results of 2010 iFacile survey into meetings

them, and the meetings process is virtually the least efficient process of any organisation.

Around 50% of all meeting time is wasted, and the remaining 50% is often not used to best advantage either. So yes, making management and leadership processes more efficient has to be a viable option.

The meetings taking place in most organisations utilise a process which remains largely unimproved in over 2000 years, despite advancements in virtually every other process. We therefore must not underestimate the scale of the task we are taking on or the entrenchment of current practice. Entrenchment so deep that managers often have

a blind-spot in this area, and see the way meetings take place as a 'de facto' practice. In fact many of them fail to recognise meetings as a process at all, and because of this, organisations often lack any objective measures of meeting performance. They will of course

measure the effectiveness of the processes meetings feed into, but still have no measure of the effectiveness of meetings within that. And that is despite meetings consuming two-thirds of all management time.

Pause for a moment, and think about this: the pressure is increasing, we are running out of time, and the process which up two-thirds of that time is un-measured and un-improved.

Please tell me you think that something has got to change!

The fact that you are still reading implies that you have some empathy with this view, and the good news for us both is that change in this area is now easier than it has been for decades. We find ourselves on the edge of an amazing opportunity which makes both improving the meeting process and measuring its effectiveness easier than ever before, and more obviously necessary than ever before. That opportunity is web-based meetings.

Web-based meetings clearly have a role to play in reducing time spent in travel, but their ability to harness the effectiveness of new, more participative, more creative, and more powerful decision making tools has an even

greater effect on meeting efficiency. For the first time we can see meetings more clearly as a process, and work to improve them as one. And it is this, rather than the reduction of travel time, that will have the biggest impact on releasing management to more balanced diaries and more strategic thoughts.

Not that the saving in travel time is insignificant. On average, managers spend almost 900 hours each year travelling away from home or the office in order to attend meetings. But they estimate that half of that time could be saved if web-based meetings could be made more effective - that amounts to a saving of 9 hours per week .

Think about this : the pressure is increasing, we are running out of time, and the process which takes up two-thirds of that time is un-measured and un-improved !

The approaches that people will learn in order to make their web-based meetings more efficient and effective will also begin to change their mindsets in respect of how physical meetings should take place. As they become more familiar with the concept

of meetings as a process, more skilled with the tools that make that process work well, and more accepting of the idea of meeting metrics, people will inevitably port some of this practice back into physical meetings, and that will have an even bigger payback in terms of management time and effectiveness.

So what did you think?

Feedback in one click: 

For background on the research quoted in this article, or to understand more about the opportunities of web-based meetings and further develop your thinking in this area we would recommend the book: **Meeting by Design** ISBN: 978 0954 302146. www.MeetingByDesign.org

Tools to measure and manage meeting effectiveness can be found at Inspirometer.com



Tag-Check Ltd | Ongar, UK
Telephone: +44 12 797 1110

