

Study on Providing Professors with Efficient Service Based on Time Management Strategy

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Abstract

Time management is the study to use time scientifically by deploying skills, techniques and means, and maximizing time value to help individuals or organizations efficiently complete tasks and achieve goals. University professor as a body is an important force in teaching and research. In order to ensure high-quality teaching, productive research, we should establish appropriate service systems to help professors save time and improve efficiency. Time management is the main point of penetration in this research. The responsibilities and missions of professors in universities are the main points of concern. The responsibilities for universities to improve the quality of time management for professors were analyzed. Suggestions and counter measures used to economize time and to improve efficiency for professors with better service were proposed. Through introducing the concept and methods of time management for professor-service into the system, one can greatly improve the service quality, optimize professors' time allocation, increase work efficiency.

Keywords: time management, professors, efficient service

1. Introduction

University professor as a body is an important force in teaching and research. In order to ensure high-quality teaching, productive research, various colleges and universities have established appropriate service systems to help professors save time and improve efficiency. Time management is the study to use time scientifically by deploying skills, techniques and means, and maximizing time value to help individuals or organizations efficiently complete tasks and achieve goals (Valeeva & Kraysman, 2014; Grazyna & Mirosława, 2015; Sandhya, Shuchita, Kaumudi, & Ravi, 2012; Robles & Franzoni, 2015). Through introducing the concept and methods of time management for professor-service into the system, one can greatly improve the service quality, optimize professors' time allocation, increase work efficiency.

Due to the non-binding education system, university professors have more flexibility on working hours and place of work: except a fixed location for classes on a fixed duration, other times can be disposed of at will. In order to manage time well and ensure high-quality teaching, productive research, time management strategy is introducing to establish appropriate service systems to help professors save time and improve efficiency. So time management is the main point of penetration in this research. Through introducing the concept and methods of time management for professor-service into the system, one can greatly improve the service quality, optimize professors' time allocation, increase work efficiency.

2. Development of Higher Education Entails Higher Demands for Teachers to Improve Time Efficiency

According to the Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the CPC, we should set education ahead of improving people's welfare and of strengthening the social construction. The goal of "running education to people's satisfaction" has been proposed and set as a task, which has pointed out the direction for future reform of China's education development. For universities to comprehensively implement the spirit of the Eighteenth National Congress of the CPC, the basic function of universities must be the focal point: actively promoting the sustainable and scientific development of China's higher education. With the continuous development of higher education reform and of social economy, the function of a university is also constantly evolving. The Report has rendered personnel training, scientific research, service economic and social development, cultural heritage of innovation as basic functions of a university. Performing these functions cannot do without the hard work of

teachers, whether it be to cultivate high-quality talents, nurture high-level scientific research or service of socio-economy and cultural heritage to create a good atmosphere for innovation, as a prerequisite we need university teachers to invest high quality time and efficient work pay (Mohamed, Elma, Emir, Jasmina, & Marijana, 2010; Wang & Zhang, 2008; Shen, Gu, & Liu, 2011).

After the Cultural Revolution, China regains the tradition of the importance of education and envisages education. With the era of knowledge economy coming in, people are concerned about the extent of education, especially higher education on increasingly high expectations of growth. But due to the non-binding education system, university teachers have more flexibility on working hours and place of work: except a fixed location for classes on a fixed duration, other times can be disposed of at will. Such use of time and media exposure on individual misconduct make community raise the question: do the teachers outside of the class spend time on research and educating people to perform their functions, or on camping money and moonlighting part-time? Such questions and criticism from the society on one hand convey people's dissatisfaction with higher education, but on the other hand also express hope: university teachers shall have a scientific and reasonable allocation of their time to improve efficiency, to perform the essential functions of universities to strengthen people's welfare, to promote social development and improvement, and to contribute more work force (Glottzbach & Kellogg, 2007; Ju, Li, Zhang, Du, & Lu, 2010; Qu, Xu, & Wei, 2009; Chen, 2012).

3. Analysis of the Status Quo of Time Inputs and Distribution of University Professors

According to a sampling investigation made by Shen Hong, etc., from University of Science and Technology on 68 universities in 11 provinces, it showed that the average weekly working time is 43.7 hours. Further, it showed that at the university level, the working time for "985" college teachers was 6.2 hours longer than that for non-"985" university teachers. In terms of the rank, full professors have the longest: up to 48 hours, 44 hours, 42.5 hours, and 40.3 hours for associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers, respectively. This investigation has powerfully counterattacked the point that university teachers work leisurely without sufficient amount of time throughput. In fact, university teachers being mental workers, in order for them to provide students with new knowledge and skills, they themselves must first acquire the relevant knowledge and skills, which requires teachers to engage in long creative thinking. And this work is usually uninterrupted, continuous, and long-term. Therefore, taking into consideration of hidden working hours, university teachers, especially full professors have not only sufficient amount of work hours, but usually overload.

However, time is a scarce resource and limited. Even if a professor sacrifices his/her normal life, and works in the spare time, still he/she cannot meet the demand for more workload. The enlarged enrollment at colleges/universities, resulting the number of students escalating has incurred the continued increase in the task of teaching. Research achievement and job promotion are now closed linked together by quantitative assessment. The competition among universities and among the faculties at the same college has become even more fierce. The workload from teaching and from is much heavier before, even doubled in certain cases. The phenomenon is very popular: huge workload, continuous accumulation of tasks, working time being evidently insufficient. In a short period of time, the situation is difficult to change or to ameliorate, thus, a viable approach is how to rationally allocate limited amount of time so that university teachers may benefit most. This is the path which we need to explore.

If we delve into the working time of a university professor, we found that it can be divided into four parts: teaching, scientific research, service and administrative affairs, and other activities. The teaching time is the one which a professor spends on teaching in classroom, and on preparation which includes: writing teaching plans, referring to curriculum resources, correcting students' papers (course examination, experiment report, small thesis and projects), writing teaching guidelines or writing (revising) syllabus (including experiment outline), etc. The time on scientific research includes: conducting scientific research, writing papers, short-term visiting, attending conferences, and studying literature, etc. Time on service and administrative affairs refers to: attending all political study in schools and in departments, discipline construction, academic exchanges, and some other activities; and attending all meetings specialized in subject research, course design, and construction of curriculum research and teaching, etc. Other time includes receiving mails and emails, expense reimbursement and so on. According to an investigation by Lu Genshu, etc., from Xi'an Jiaotong University on 500 teachers in three universities, viz. Xi'an Jiaotong University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Beijing Normal University, on the whole, university teachers spend about 55% of their time on teaching, about 25% on research, and about 20% on administration, services, and other activities combined together. According to the percentage of time university teachers engaged in all kinds of academic activities, cluster analysis of university teachers shows that about 60% is mainly engaged in teaching and these teachers spend about 70% on teaching; 25%

belongs to the category of research-oriented and research activities takes up to 50% of their time; and 15% of university teachers mainly do administrative service and the time on administration, services and other three types of activities accounts for as high as 50% of their time.

Through the above investigation and analysis of professors' time inputs and allocation, we can find that university professors continue to extend working hours, and work load has been increasing, but there is still much work which cannot be completed in time, and the time is not enough. On the other hand, too much work does not require their professional knowledge nor ability to handle. For example, much of the work such as dealing mailed letters and booking tickets for outside school visits, etc., takes up too much valuable time. It is not worthwhile for professors to spend their time on such trifle matters. Therefore, it is extremely important that the university service agencies establish the concept of time management to provide professional, efficient service to optimize university professors' time allocation, to improve time efficiency (Komoda, 2006; Mitchell, 2004).

4. Strategies and Methods on Optimizing University Service from the Viewpoint of Time Management

4.1 Break down Work Scientifically

Work Breakdown Structure, or in short WBS, is an important concept in project management. Deliverable-oriented, its idea is to group project elements which summarize and define the entire scope of the project, and each lower layer represents a more detailed definition of project work. WBS is made up of three key elements: work—the assignment that has tangible results; breakdown—the gradual segmentation and classification of the hierarchical structure; structure—organization of each part according to a certain pattern. On time management, we can use this tool to analyze work so as to establish an efficient framework. The work which a professor bears on teaching, research and administrative services is usually not a single work-item type but has multiple work packages with organic composition. Service department may through the use of WBS tools break down professors' work, coordinate responsibility, function, and specialty of each agency in order to fully and reasonably divide aided mechanism at all levels, to analyze in-depth and to optimize processes, and to strengthen internal cooperation to improve work efficiency, thus, saving time. Figure 1 shows an example on writing a book. The work is broke down in hierarchy so that one can lay the foundation for project planning and scheduling control to facilitate the work of division and the responsibility to implement and to improve efficiency (Haugen, 2005).

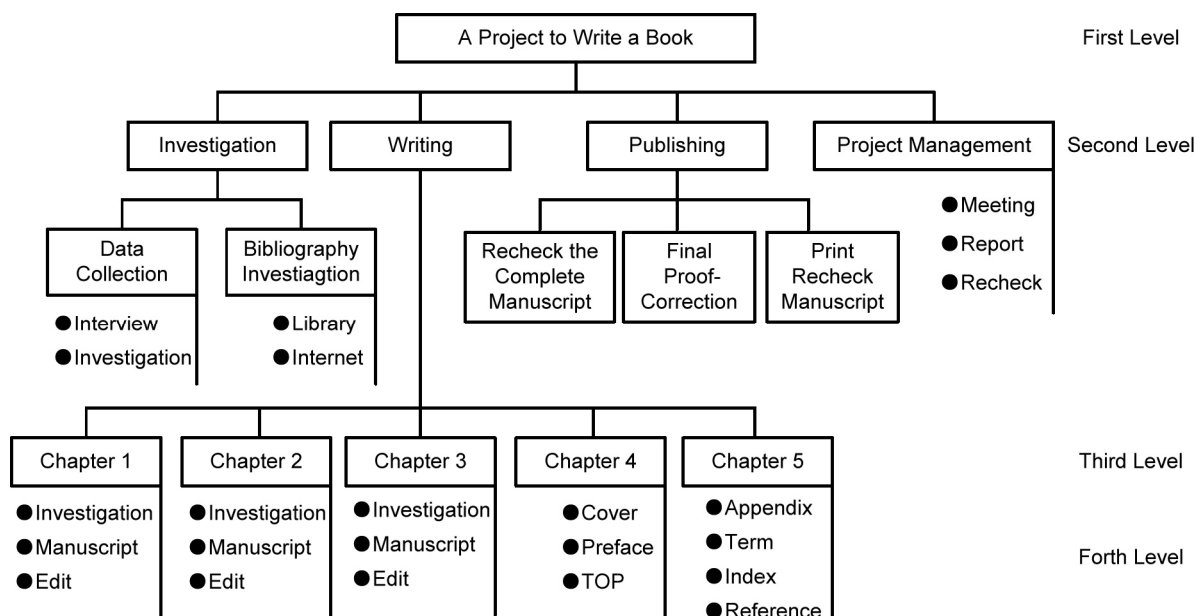


Figure 1. WBS of the project to write a book

4.2 Release Time, Delegate Authority

The late 19th century and early 20th century Italian economist and sociologist Vilfredo Pareto pointed out that in any specific group and event the important factors are usually a minority but unimportant factors account for the majority, and that so long as the few important factors are under control, then, the whole situation will be under control. The Pareto principle gives an important revelation to university services: relieving professors of spending time on trivial issues because even professors spend 80% of their time on them they can only get 20% of the benefit. Professors should spend their time on a few important issues, solving 20% of the vital few issues, and they will get 80% of the benefit. In their 48 hours average weekly load, university professors should be granted the freedom to work on important matters. In four quadrants shown in Table one, for unimportant yet qualified work and unimportant yet unqualified work, professors should let go off these works as soon as possible and let other officers or agencies do the work. For important yet qualified work, professors should engage more people to do the jobs through personnel training. For the core which is the key areas of pioneering the future, professors shall commit their time on the challenging work (Kelly, 2011).

Table 1. Important-equal matrix

Important Qualified	Important Unqualified
Unimportant Qualified	Unimportant Unimportant

4.3 Render Professional Service

In practice and in order to save time and to improve efficiency, many professors often arrange their students for some secretarial services. However, this is not a good practice. Firstly, people tend to think that as college students they should not be arranged for something which has nothing to do with learning and growing, which deviates from the essential goal of education, and which may also trigger the conflict between teachers and students. In particular, the relationship between graduate students and their mentors, due to the fact that too many students provide secretarial services for their mentors, has evolved into the communication model of “wage earners” and “boss”. Such a relation has been criticized in the society, and people think that it has tarnished the purity of education, using the relationship with money to cover up academic relations. Secondly, many students have not received any professional training on secretarial services, thus, lacking professional secretarial knowledge and skills, and they may not be able to accomplish secretarial works such as reimbursement, grading homework, and literature retrieval. These kinds of work will take up much of their own more time on learning and on research, thus, affecting their own studies. Therefore, it is extremely urgent to provide professional administrative, literature retrieval, and some other services for professors. Through specialized training for colleges service personnel, a learning management organization can be built up, and the quality of university service management team can be improved. And such an organization can provide professional and efficient services for professors by sharing and by reducing their workload, thus, helping improve work efficiency for professors.

5. Conclusion

As we all know, Performing university professor’s functions can cultivate high-quality talents, nurture high-level scientific research or service of socio-economy and cultural heritage to create a good atmosphere for innovation. It needs university professors to invest high quality time and efficient work pay. But due to the non-binding education system, university professors have more flexibility on working hours and place of work: except a fixed location for classes on a fixed duration, other times can be disposed of at will. In order to manage time well and ensure high-quality teaching, productive research, time management strategy is introducing to establish appropriate service systems to help professors save time and improve efficiency. Time management is the study to use time scientifically by deploying skills, techniques and means, and maximizing time value to help individuals or organizations efficiently complete tasks and achieve goals. Time management is the main point of penetration in this research. The responsibilities and missions of professors in universities are the main points of concern. The responsibilities for universities to improve the quality of time management for professors were analyzed. Suggestions and counter measures used to economize time and to improve efficiency for professors with better service were proposed. Through introducing the concept and methods of time management for

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