

12-1-2007

Management by Interruptions (mbi): Mini not Micro Management

Andrew Sikula Sr.

Marshall University, sikula@marshall.edu

John Sikula

Follow this and additional works at: http://mds.marshall.edu/mgmt_faculty

 Part of the [Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons](#), and the [Management Information Systems Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sikula Sr., Andrew, Sikula, John. 2007. "management by interruptions (mbi): mini not micro management." *Supervision* 68, no. 12: 3-4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Management, Marketing and MIS at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Management Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu.

management by interruptions (mbi)

mini not micro management

Andrew Sikula, Sr. & John Sikula

Do you want to affirmatively continue your and Tom Peters's Search for Excellence? Then practice MBI. A corollary to Ken Blanchard's idea of the One Minute Manager is the concept of Management by Interruptions (MBI). Although we do not want to overly manage the details of work, usually called micro management, we are often called upon as leaders and managers to supply frequent small segments of data and information. Mini management is good; micro management is not.

We are increasingly in America living in a service economy where we provide aid, assistance and support instead of hard goods or manufactured products to consumers. For most service industries, companies compete largely on the basis of convenience/rapid delivery usually measured in terms of hours or days of time. When dealing with deliverables to customers, time or speed to market (rather than price, quantity or quality) is the main sales determinant. Speed and time are

sisters and they often determine market share.

A real management inefficiency historically and still today is wasting time and waiting around for decision-making data and information. Time is our most highly valued possession, although oddly enough it is free to us, and we all have the same amount of it per day. How we manage our time will determine how successful or unsuccessful we become in business and in life. This success will ultimately depend on how well we manage small increments of time, often in only a few minute intervals, or "interruptions" as these authors prefer to call them.

Management in the 21st century is much different from that practiced in previous decades. The most critical issue is no longer quantity, quality, price, value, location, geography, climate and/or culture. The essential management factor is now time and its efficient and effective utilization. For most current managers, there are no leisurely days with a relaxed pace. The efficient executive today is

constantly bombarded with overnight mailings, stop-in visitors, surface mail, telephone calls, inter-office deliveries, e-mails, and faxed messages. Even when out of the office, cell telephones, text messages, pagers, palm pilots, laptops, and iPods keep a busy supervisor in constant contact with constituents.

Today's world increasingly operates utilizing quick responses to the continual bombardment of bits and pieces of information and data. Both at work and at home, rapid reactions to sources of news are expected and often demanded. Instant messages seek immediate answers, and e-mail etiquette expects answers during the day or within 24 hours, whether you are bodily at work, home, traveling, or even on vacation. Although the subject of time management interruptions has been mentioned previously in the business literature, when discussed, interruptions were treated as annoyances to be avoided rather than as events to be encouraged. Management by Interruptions or MBI demands that

we recognize the positive aspects of, rather than, the negative connotations associated with, frequent interruptions. If people (subordinates, peers and/or supervisors) have the ability and liberty to interrupt you at any time, they will not be waiting around wasting time until you supply them with needed data and information to continue work and to complete their projects.

We must guard against believing that work interruptions are not normal, and also that such behaviors are undesirable. You must come to the point where you recognize that this is how the business world works today and that you are a part of it. In the past, people made appointments and sometimes waited weeks for meetings to take place. The best managers today provide information when it is needed, and large projects are accomplished bit by bit and minute by minute with updated data, knowledge and information. This is MBI.

Managing interruptions (MBI) is properly viewed as personal enlightenment not as individual infringement. Large blocks of quiet time to relax and to reflect have become a relic of past administrative eras. Increased world-wide competition and a faster pace of modern life demand faster personal and corporate decision making. Successful administrators know this reality and accept it as a fact of life. If you are not presently managing interruptions, you should be. The number one cause of bad management is inefficient use of

information. Lack of productivity is almost always traced to wasting time and waiting for data to arrive. People need accurate information and data to do their work. Without same, nothing gets accomplished.

Today, managers should expect interruptions, whereas in the past, interruptions were viewed as unexpected. Managers must minimize unexpected operations and be more willing to accept expected interruptions. Expected interruptions can be ignored, which will delay input, or they can be treated as information gathering events which may now or later be used as decision criteria for actions. The point is to expect interruptions and to use the information gathered to help make faster and more timely decisions.

Managing time and work today must be accomplished recognizing that interruptions of various kinds are going to take place. The need for instant information makes personal performance more stressful and demanding than in the past. The expectation of quick decision making and problem solving has increased over the years and continues to grow. Managers today need to envision information as nourishment and to provide this sustenance. Managers in the 21st century must minimize negative unexpected work flows in the form of family member chitchats, social gossip, and personal healthcare emergencies. At the same time, affirmative expected interruptions in the form of constant information gathering, frequent listening

sessions, and continuous deliberations about pending courses of work action must be both accepted and encouraged. Oddly and unseemingly, information interruptions and MBI can actually make management run more smoothly in today's fast-paced, digital and electronic work environment. ❧

Andrew Sikula, Sr. is the Director of the Graduate School of Management at Marshall University's South Charleston Campus. John Sikula is the President for Regional Centers and Outreach at Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio. Andrew and John Sikula are identical twin brothers and co-authors of the above article.

Copyright of Supervision is the property of National Research Bureau and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.