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# Making Time

*Time and Management in Modern Organizations*



*Edited by*  
Richard Whipp,  
Barbara Adam,  
and Ida Sabelis

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RICHARD WHIPP, BARBARA ADAM,  
AND IDA SABELIS

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## FOREWORD

*Gabriele Morello*

When we were children, my sisters and I used to follow two orders of time prescriptions: Mama's time and Papa's time. Our mother (who as I write is 104 years old and mentally in perfect shape), born to a German family, expected us to be punctual, precise, and exact. Duty came before pleasure, treats had to be earned, meals and bedtime were fixed and had to be respected. Our father, a very creative Sicilian, was more flexible, approximate, and adaptable. With him we did not need to be rigorously on time. Excuses were easily accepted; sometimes he himself forgot what he had told us to do.

We stayed in the city of Palermo during the winter, and lived in the countryside on a farm in the summer months. Although the farm is only 30 kilometres from the city, time habits there are different. In both places, the concept of time does not seem to be of great concern to local people. Attitudes towards it differ, however. In the city, appointments have a more precise meaning than on the farm. The city-dwellers claim that 'punctuality means to foresee the delay of the others', but this does not stop people following schedules and procedures. At school, classes due to be given at 9 o'clock start—when 'punctual'—at 9.15. This fifteen-minute delay rule is known as 'quarto d'ora accademico'. On the farm, a delay of up to one hour for any appointment is acceptable. '*Un'ora è puntamento*' expresses this idea in local dialect.

I do not know if farmers' time follows everywhere the cyclical pattern based on seasonal rotation described in many books. On our farm it was certainly perceived as more moving and flowing than in the city of Palermo, where past, present, and future are more clearly experienced in the mind as separate entities. In the city, when we say 'next year', this may be any time between the following year and the next three years; on the farm, 'next year' depends on normal weather conditions: rainfall, temperature, the sirocco wind, and so on. Since weather conditions are never normal, 'next year' does not mean very much.

In the traditional Sicilian culture, greater importance is given to human wisdom and experience than to the notion that time is money. 'Everything has its own time', 'Every time comes and goes', are more popular proverbs than

'Lost time is never found again', 'Time and tide wait for no man', and similar sayings indicating that time is an economic resource not to be wasted. Recent research shows that, while Sicilians exhibit little tolerance when faced with short hold-ups and irrelevant delays (hence our antipathy to queuing and our frequent use of car horns), we are more likely to accept long delays, as if we were participants in a long story with a far-off end. The Teatro Massimo, one of the finest theatres in Europe, was closed for twenty years for restoration.

To be sure, although a background of enduring customs still exists, in the 1990s much was being done in terms of economic development and cultural change, and a 'new Sicily' was rapidly emerging. Ideally, the community should preserve and conciliate the best features of tradition with innovation and progress.

Profane time and sacred time also had different rules when we were children, as to some extent is still the case in 2001. Carrying out errands, attending sporting events, or going to a movie do not require any special dress, while festivities, going to church, and public holidays do. Santa Rosalia, patron saint of Palermo, is still commemorated on 15 July, and celebrations tend to be drawn out over two days before and two days after.

I finished high school and went through university earlier than my school-mates. It was in those years, I think, that my biological time tended to internalize rhythmic changes, following a faster tempo than my peers. I skipped three years at school and achieved two degrees in the time it normally takes to get one. Given the fact that I was eager and impatient, this was perhaps due more to restlessness than to intelligence.

I soon developed the habit of doing several things at the same time, rather than one after the other. Such behaviour fitted well to my work environment, where it was normal for people to interrupt what they were doing and do something else, give different appointments for the same time, and talk over the phone while dealing with visitors. This is the most striking difference in conduct to which I had to adapt when commuting between Italy and other countries years later. It was not so much a problem of punctuality, which certainly had a different meaning for me in Palermo, London, and Amsterdam, but rather the monochronic versus the polychronic mode (in the sense of Hall (1983)) that was to be adapted in Northern Europe.

My interest in research on time started in the late 1950s with a project called the International Research Project on Evaluation (IRPE), funded by the Ford Foundation. This project attempted to assess the effects of management development programmes at Istituto Superiore per Imprenditori e Dirigenti di Azienda (ISIDA) and in seven other European graduate schools of business administration. We conducted an experimental design aimed at measuring what cognitive effects, if any, management programmes had produced on students' time perception, duration, sequence, periodicity, timing, and tempo. As a professional statistician, I saw the fascination of 'measuring the unmeasurable', as my Dutch colleague Peter Nijkamp calls this kind of exercise.

Indeed, incidences of numerical logic applied to time have been many and diverse, dating back to before the days when Plato held that 'the forms of time, mobile image of eternity, revolve according to the law of numbers'. Distinctions between different dimensions and meanings of time always attract our attention—clock time versus social time, mental time versus biological time, personal time versus Newtonian time, physical time versus metaphysical time—and it is never clear when and where observed relations support the speculation of the theorists. In my own studies I have concentrated mostly on the way people perceive time in different cultures and professions, and on the relationships between time and behaviour in the area of management and consumer behaviour. In doing so, my main instruments for measuring time perceptions have mostly been of a quantitative nature, including the measurement of attitudes towards the past, present, and future using Semantic Differential techniques.

Now that the time span in front of me is shorter than the time span behind me, and experience and wisdom tend to have more space, I am no longer sure that this approach best enables scientists to achieve valid results in the advancement of the study of time. Throughout the history of science, as we all know, debates on quality versus quantity have been long and fierce. It seems that even the difference in approaches has to do with different attitudes towards time. As Ilja Prigogine (1994: 17) puts it: 'Scientists do not read Shakespeare and humanists are insensible to the beauty of mathematics . . . this dichotomy exists for a much more profound reason, which lies in the way in which the notion of time is incorporated into these two (scientific and humanist) cultures.'

Whatever the scope of the debates on time and temporality, and no matter which research methodologies are used, it seems to me that scientists are increasingly sharing the view that the understanding of social time—not to mention the operational possibilities to use it in 'better' ways—cannot be frozen into any rigid or schematic form that leaves out whatever has to do with attitudes, feelings, emotions, hopes, fears, and the other forms of human expressions that make up the existential nature of time. This is the reason why this book, which does not fall into the trap of unilateral thinking but gives an account of different viewpoints and experiments, should be read with interest and pleasure by all those who want to take the time to understand more about time.

Gabriele Morello  
*Palermo, 7 June 2001*



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# **Choreographing Time and Management: Traditions, Developments, and Opportunities**

*Barbara Adam, Richard Whipp, and Ida Sabelis*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Time is an essential feature of social and organizational life. It is our prime organizing tool. People use time in order to create, shape, and order their worlds. And yet, despite its importance, we take our time values and uses of time largely for granted. This not only applies to one's daily life but is also true for academic theory and business practice alike. *Making Time* is concerned to bring time to the forefront of management theory and practice. It seeks, accordingly, to make explicit what are currently the many implicit temporal assumptions that underpin management thought and action. It emphasizes the richness of the temporal dimensions involved and the wealth of competing attempts to order, regulate, and control time in the act of managing. The point is to describe and explain this temporal complexity as it occurs in management by working with a variety of specialist perspectives, such as strategic management, organizational theory, decision making, industrial relations, and marketing. Furthermore, a deliberate attempt is made to set the experience of more traditional industrial settings alongside those at the forefront of the 'new economy', such as the computer industry.

Time is currently a fashionable motif. A popular time consciousness has emerged from public attention to the millennium—seen, for example, in the accounts of the evolution of timepieces or the exhibitions on the establishment of the Greenwich meridian. During the 1990s, the notion of 'time management' become a central feature of management training, and the business shelves of bookshops are populated with self-help texts on how to manage an individual's

time. In contrast to these guides, *Making Time* provides neither instant recipes nor simple personal blueprints. Rather, its contributions offer insights into a much broader temporal domain, extending concerns to encompass the more complex and paradoxical nature of temporal relations in both the theoretical and practical spheres of management. Many commentators regard the time line on the  $x$  axis of their graphs, uniformly calibrated by the calendar and clock, as a sufficient means of capturing time in their work on management. The major theme of this collection is to challenge that assumption. The authors in the volume recognize the pervasiveness of industrial time in both management and academic discourse. Where they differ is in giving full recognition to the way that people create their own sense of time alongside the official temporal apparatus of the clock and diary.

*Making Time* aims to spark a debate in the field of management that does justice to the richness of the temporal features of contemporary organizations. Importantly, the volume represents the chance to share a more developed language of time for describing and understanding organizations and their management, using broader concepts such as 'rhythmicity' and 'timescape'. Equally, the book has relevance to practitioners. The conventional thinking locked within the industrial time framework offers little to organizations that are trying to come to terms with the problems raised by new technologies and seeking to release the potential of those technologies through unconventional work patterns. On a wider scale, the contributors to this volume share the central belief that developing an understanding of the social relations of time and management is a precondition to securing practices that are sensitive to the changing conditions of a global economy and its inherent paradoxes.

In this first chapter we introduce readers to key time and management issues and locate *Making Time* in its wider academic and public context. We take two routes to this end: the first takes us along the historical path of time in management studies. The second guides us through the tracks that have been opened up by time studies and theoretical perspectives on the social relations of time. Next we consider some of the methodological issues that arise from identifying time in management as the explicit focus of attention. The last task is to introduce the chapters with their authors' disciplinary location and particular time focus.

## **APPROACHES TO TIME IN THE STUDY OF MANAGEMENT**

Any attempt to summarize the subject of management requires caution. The study of management has become a huge sector of economic endeavour in its own right. Estimates in 2001 identify an \$8 billion global industry that embraces a wide range of actors. These include not only management scholars and

educators but also consultants, commentators, and policy-makers. As the popularity of management as a subject and qualification grew in the late twentieth century, so an interesting phenomenon appeared: what once had been a subject investigated largely by academics became less exclusive. Those being studied in various industries and sectors began to capture and record their own experience and knowledge of management. The corporate university and the writings of managers and consultants now sit beside the more conventional academic forms.

At the same time, the diversity of the management area has continued to grow from its inception in the USA in the middle of the twentieth century, through its take-up by Europeans in the 1960s and its wider international spread from the 1980s. The subject has always born the imprints of its parent disciplines: economics and psychology in the early phase in the USA, with a marked contribution from sociology and anthropology during its expansion in Europe. The result is that management has produced an elaborate collection of writers who draw from contrasting intellectual traditions. The scope of its specialisms is striking. An exercise by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC 2001: section F8) on research training in business and management in 2001 highlighted the existence of competing orientations to research (positivist, realist, interpretative, and post-structural) and the presence of a catalogue of established specialisms such as accounting and finance, strategy, marketing, organizational behaviour, operations management, and international business. On the one hand, such a profile cautions against easy generalization given the scale and scope of both the subject and its adherents. On the other, it also gives a sense of the opportunities for the exploration of time within the field of management.

### **Engagement with a Dominant Time Rationale**

In spite of this heterogeneity, a first look at the work of management writers produces a clear impression. During the development of management as a formal field of study, a strong temporal dimension has been present, anchored to an essentially linear understanding of time. Until the last two decades of the twentieth century, rationalism predominated. This outcome is entirely consistent with the character of management as a subject and its evolution. The expansion of the modern economy in its Western context gave rise to a particular form of organization, with an emphasis on management as the means of controlling resources in order to secure certain organizational goals. Time was a potential barrier to achieving those goals (Thompson 1967), as Dirk Bunzel (this volume) shows in his identification of the 'centrifugal forces' that organizations produce. The undisputed aim of management has been to control time not to problematize it.

The same imperative has informed most management research, as seen, for example, in the work of Taylor and then Fayol in the first two decades of the twentieth century, through to the human-relations school in the inter-war years, and the rise of planning in the post-war era. During the twentieth century scholars progressively investigated every aspect of the functioning and circumstances of management. It is understandable that they should have worked predominantly within the temporal framework that both informed the actions of those who were the subject of their research and suffused the industrial society of which they were a part (see Pamela Odih and David Knights, this volume). The same point could also be applied to most Western historians. Thus, as Alf Rehn (this volume) reminds us, the dominance of linear time, as embodied in the clock and calendar, may appear somewhat narrow and limited as a way of conceiving of time, but it has provided an essential element of a major socio-economic form.

It would, however, be inaccurate for time scholars to categorize the broad field of management as entirely monochronic in its approach to time. Important exceptions exist in all the main parent disciplines and the specialisms within management (see Das 1991). Some indicative examples reinforce the point. In psychology, McGrath and Kelly (1985) in their work on what they call 'time and human interaction' embrace both 'dominant' and 'variant conceptions of time' (1985: 17–42) and a 'network of time frames' (1985: 50) as they build their framework for a social psychology of time and work. Thrift (1996: 220–30), from geography, uses notions of time consciousness and social theory to open up the jointly temporal and spatial components of, for example, international finance. Economics too has scholars who argue for alternatives to the overarching neo-classical paradigm. Shackle (1972), for example, presents a broad critique that challenges the rational temporal core of market equilibria, while others, such as Langlois (1986), operate in the 'new institutional' framework that gives primacy to the operation of time in the context of institutions in economic processes.

The record of sociology as a contributory discipline to the management field in relation to time is different in a number of respects. Some sociologists have pioneered the joint use of time and social theory in order to understand the operation of specific types of organizations. Zerubavel (1981), for example, in trying to make sense of medical institutions, uncovered an array of 'hidden rhythms' that permeate the work of health-care staff in the USA. The French tradition of industrial sociology has similarly produced alternative accounts of the time-ordering patterns of work and domestic life (Grossin 1974). Until the late 1990s, however, management was not regularly the principal object of this kind of study. Yet a concentration on the way time is experienced by people, which does not fit neatly with managerial preoccupations, has produced important results.

Perhaps one of the most notable outcomes from this vein of research has been the formation of a network of time specialists who operate on the

boundary of sociology and organizations. Clark, for example, played a lead role in linking the temporal frameworks found in both anthropology and industrial sociology and part of the French Annales school, in his studies of organizations (1985). The assumption of a dominant, singular clock time was directly challenged when he demonstrated the plurality of chronological codes, for example, that coexist both within and between organizations (1990). Others (see e.g. Starkey 1988; Whipp 1990; Hassard 1996) used such findings as the starting point for their own empirical investigations of how people in different sectors attempt to construct and order time (see also Bluedorn and Denhardt 1988; T. C. Smith 1988; Das 1991). By making use of the critical orientation of organization studies, Burrell (1998) has confronted the received wisdom in organizational thinking in relation to time and its shaping by the broader Western preoccupation with linear images of life and death. Other specialisms within management have made their own use of the notion of the subjective construction of time in order to question the orthodox temporal assumptions behind, for instance, industrial-relations systems (Blyton *et al.* 1989).

### **Masking Time and Making Time in Strategic Management**

One area of management studies that came to represent, and some would argue dominate, the entire field during the last two decades of the twentieth century was strategic management. Its growth has been prodigious and the results of work in this specialism have touched virtually all others. As Lyles (1990: 363) noted, the strategic dimension had become pervasive across not only management but also other social sciences. The appearance of a clutch of millennial 'Handbooks on Strategic Management' reinforce the centrality of this specialism (see e.g. Faulkner and Campbell 2002). Strategic management is, therefore, an appropriate candidate to inspect more closely in order to show what role time plays in one of the core aspects of the study of management. As will become clear, while time may be officially represented in a way that apparently conforms to the industrial time model, a more diverse sense of time is richly but implicitly present.

Various overviews of the character and evolution of the strategic management domain charted its multi-phase development from the 1940s to the close of the century (Whipp 1996; R. Grant 1998). Table 1.1 offers a summary and outline introduction to the subject. The route travelled by the writers in this area is instructive in relation to the role of time in two senses: the changing subject matter of strategic management and the varying conceptual orientations that have been employed. As Table 1.1 indicates, the agreed content of strategic management in the 1950s and 1960s was essentially planning and forecasting. During the 1970s and 1980s emphasis shifted to a wider analysis of, first, the



**Table 1.1.** The evolution of corporate strategy

Key dimensions	Period					
	1950s	1960s	1970s	Late 1970s to early 1980s	Late 1980s to early 1990s	Mid- to late 1990s
Dominant theme	Budgetary planning and control	Corporate planning	Corporate strategy	Analysis of industry and competition	The quest for competitive advantage	Strategic innovation
Main issues	Financial control through operating budgets	Planning growth	Portfolio planning	Choice of industries, markets, and segments, and positioning within them	Sources of competitive advantage within the firm	Strategic and organizational advantage
Organizational implications	Financial management	Rise of corporate planning departments and five-year formal plans	Diversification Multidivisional structures Quest for global market share	Greater industry and market selectivity Industry restructuring Active asset management	Corporate restructuring and business process re-engineering Refocusing and outsourcing	The virtual organization The knowledge-based firm Alliances and networks The quest for critical mass

Source: based on R. Grant (1998: 18).