The Role of Temporal Dissonance in Hybrid Work Environments

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Hybrid work models give employees the chance to work more flexibly, but they can create a problem called "temporal dissonance." This happens when there is a mismatch between the work schedules and expectations of remote workers and those on-site. This conceptual paper looks at how this mismatch affects both the company culture and people's well-being. These timing mismatches can damage the shared experiences and casual communication that help colleagues feel connected. When this connection weakens, it can create a feeling of "us vs. them." Teams may then struggle to work together, share less information, and the company might lose its sense of unity. In addition, temporal dissonance can hurt how employees feel about their jobs. Remote workers may feel like they have to be available all the time, which blurs the line between work and personal life. On-site workers may feel restricted by strict schedules and consider remote colleagues to be less dedicated. This situation can lead to more stress, burnout, and lower job satisfaction for everyone involved. Understanding and fixing temporal dissonance is essential for businesses using hybrid work models. Companies need to focus on solutions such as allowing people to communicate without needing an immediate response, ensuring some work hours overlap, and having fair policies about flexibility. These strategies help create a stronger connection among employees and protect their well-being in this changing work environment.

Keywords: Temporal dissonance, organizational culture, employee well-being, human resource management, hybrid work model

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In the post-COVID-19 era, hybrid work structures have been emerged as alternative to in-office work model (McPhail *et al.*, 2023). Hybrid working is a combination of both in-office and remote work structures which offers flexibility and, social and professional benefits to employees, whereas financial benefits to companies. With the rise of new work models, organizational researchers not only investigate their benefits but also look at the problems they bring. Literature reports various challenges came up with hybrid work structures, for instance, communication issues, collaboration challenges, inclusion concerns, work-life balance, unequal access to opportunities, managing office space utilization, technology dependence, security risks, and leadership adaptation. However, management literature completely missed the challenge of 'temporal dissonance'. Although, research exists on work-life balance and flexible work, the specific impact of temporal dissonance on organizational dynamics is largely unexplored. Nowadays, this construct is more often discussed in blogs, online forums, and

philosophical discussions. In this article, I shall shed light on the significance of this construct and its impact on 'organizational culture' and 'employee well-being' in hybrid work environments (HWEs).

What is Temporal Dissonance?

Being an emerging concept, literature does not offer a clear agreed-upon definition of 'temporal dissonance'. I define 'temporal dissonance' as "the concept refers to the misalignment or conflict in perceived time rhythms, work schedules, and availability expectations among employees and between employees and the organization."

In hybrid work setting, where employees juggle remote and in-office schedules, asynchronous communication, and varying personal time constraints, temporal dissonance is likely to emerge.

Temporal Dissonance in Literature

The concept has been rarely discussed in business management literature but limited presentation has been found in other domains e.g., behavioral ecology, phenology, information systems, neuroscience. Burgelman and Grove (1996) explored the concept of 'strategic dissonance' which is distinct from 'temporal dissonance,' but shares a common thread of misalignment and tension. The article explores the challenges faced by organizations, particularly those in hi-tech industries, when their intended strategies diverge from their realized strategies. According to the authors, strategic dissonance arises from 'strategic inflection points' (SIPs), which are significant shifts in the competitive landscape, technology, or other factors. These SIPs create a mismatch between the basis of competition and the firm's core competencies, and top management's strategic intent and the organization's realized strategy. I compare that both strategic dissonance and temporal dissonance involve a sense of misalignment. In strategic dissonance, the misalignment is between strategic intent and action, whereas in temporal dissonance, the misalignment is between different temporal rhythms or perceptions of time. While strategic dissonance is not explicitly about time, time is an implicit factor that develop strategic dissonance. SIPs unfold over time, and organizations must adapt to them within a specific time frame. The ability to recognize and respond to these changes in a timely manner is crucial for the success of organizations. The concept of organizational rhythm, that is discussed by Jackson *et al*. (2011) has a strong relationship with the concepts that Burgelman and Grove (1996) presented. If a company is out of rhythm with its market, or its own internal processes, then strategic dissonance will occur.

Jackson *et al*. (2011) highlighted the crucial, yet often overlooked, role of time in collaborative scientific endeavors. The authors argue that existing studies on collaborative science have primarily focused on spatial and logistical aspects, neglecting the importance of temporal dynamics. They emphasize that time is not a neutral milieu but an active ingredient that shapes collaborative work. The

article introduces the concept of 'collaborative rhythms,' which are the various temporal patterns that shape collaborative work. They proposed four types of rhythms i.e., organizational, infrastructural, biographical, and phenomenal. The article stresses that these different rhythms can often clash, leading to temporal dissonance. This occurs when the temporal patterns of different collaborators or aspects of the project are not well orchestrated. Conversely, successful collaboration requires temporal alignment, which is the process of coordinating and synchronizing these different rhythms.

Conway and Limayem (2011) examined 'temporal dissonance' in the workplace. They suggest that mismatches in time perceptions and work schedules between IT workers and managers can lead to stress, cynicism, and ultimately, project failures. This article focuses on a more practical and applied use of the term within the context of organizational behavior.

Kent *et al*. (2021) reviewed the theories of consciousness and informed that existing theories of consciousness largely ignore time. Many theories focus on static moments, neglecting the continuous, flowing nature of conscious experience through time. They mentioned that conscious experience flows through time, involving future predictions, present experiences, and past memories. Therefore, a comprehensive theory of consciousness must account for how we experience the passage of time. It is argued that the study of time consciousness could help test new predictions of different consciousness theories. The authors also stress that there are neural, functional, and phenomenal aspects of time, all of which need to be taken into account when studying time consciousness.

Anderson *et al*. (2022) argue that Electric Vehicles (EVs) should be viewed as platform businesses, where value is created through the interaction of various actors (EV manufacturers, charging infrastructure providers, software developers, etc.). This perspective highlights the importance of network effects and the need for coordination among these actors. The EV industry is characterized by rapid technological advancements. This creates a potential for temporal dissonance, as different actors may operate at different paces. For example: EV manufacturers may develop new models faster than charging infrastructure can be built. Software updates may outpace the ability of consumers to adapt. This mismatch in temporal rhythms can lead to feelings of being out of sync or overwhelmed. The article stresses the need for coordination. Coordination is inherently a temporal activity. The ability of the different actors to synchronize their actions, and timing of those actions, will greatly affect the success of the EV platform. If there are temporal mismatches between the different actors, then the platform will not function correctly.

Temporal Dissonance and Organizational Culture

Temporal dissonance greatly affects the performance of employees, teams, and hybrid organizations

as a whole. This dissonance arises from the flexible and often asynchronous nature of hybrid work, where individuals have varying work schedules, locations, and communication patterns. It significantly impacts organizational culture by creating feelings of disconnection, inequity, and reduced collaboration among employees and management (Knight *et al.*, 2022).

Hybrid work allows greater flexibility, but it also leads to a wider range of work schedules and locations. This variability may create temporal dissonance when employees struggle to synchronize their work activities. This leads to decreased feelings of belonging and social cohesion, as employees may feel isolated from their colleagues. Golden *et al.* (2008) highlighted that the concepts of isolation and lack of face-to-face time are very relevant, and are amplified when considerable variations of schedules found in hybrid work environment. Similarly, Ravishankar *et al.* (2022) discussed the challenges of coordinating work in digital environments, which are exacerbated in hybrid settings. It highlights the importance of temporal coordination for effective collaboration.

Mazmanian *et al.* (2013) examined how digital technologies reshape employees' experiences of time and space, which can contribute to temporal dissonance in hybrid work. Leonardi *et al.* (2021) identified how digital communication affects work, and how it can cause issues. Hybrid work often relies on asynchronous communication tools, such as email and messaging platforms. This can lead to temporal dissonance when employees have different expectations for response times. This causes frustration and anxiety, as employees may feel pressured to be constantly available or experience delays in receiving critical information.

Panteli and Tucker (2009) explored the challenges faced by employees for work coordination in mobile environments, which are relevant to hybrid work. They highlighted the importance of boundary management and negotiated coordination. Bloom *et al.* (2015) focused on work from home and highlighted the importance of communication and collaboration, which are affected by temporal dissonance. Hybrid work can create confusion about when synchronous collaboration is necessary. Employees may have different expectations for the frequency and timing of virtual meetings and other real-time interactions. This can lead to feelings of exclusion and inequity, as some employees may feel that they are missing out on important discussions or opportunities for collaboration.

Temporal dissonance erodes organizational culture by creating feelings of disconnection, inequity, and reduced trust which leads to decreased employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Organizations can mitigate temporal dissonance by establishing clear communication protocols, promoting flexible work policies, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and trust. In essence, temporal dissonance is a significant challenge in hybrid work environments. Organizations must proactively address this issue by promoting clear communication, flexible work policies, and a culture of inclusivity.

Proposition 1: Temporal Dissonance negatively affects organizational culture in Hybrid Work Environments (HWEs).

Temporal Dissonance and Employee Well-being

Temporal dissonance, in hybrid work setting, significantly impacts employees' well-being because of mismatch between individuals' perceived experience of time and the temporal demands placed upon them by their work. Hybrid work often blurs the lines between work life and personal life. This leads to conflicting expectations regarding when work should be done. For example, an employee might feel pressured to respond to emails at all hours, even though they have designated 'off time.' This creates a dissonance between their desired personal time and the perceived demands of their job. The flexibility of hybrid work can also lead to a lack of structure, making it difficult to establish clear boundaries between work and personal time. This may result in feelings of being constantly on duty leading to burnout.

In addition to burnout, temporal dissonance can increase workforce stress and anxiety. When employees feel, they are constantly struggling to keep up with the demands of their work, they may experience feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion, which also disrupts work-life balance, making it difficult for employees to disconnect from work and engage in personal activities. This can lead to feelings of resentment and dissatisfaction. According to the research conducted by Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2024), business owners adopting a hybrid work model should understand this model is more than just a division of time between locations; a mismatch between various hybrid work elements and employee needs can cause negative well-being outcomes. Similarly, Hanzis and Hallo (2024) emphasized that while hybrid work offers advantages, it also raises concerns about adapting organizational norms to this new way of working and how that adaptation affects employees.

It is apparent that the immediacy of digital communication has altered our temporal landscape, compressed our sense of time, and often overwhelmed our capacity to process information at a natural pace, which in turn negatively impacts the well-being of the workforce.

Proposition 2: Temporal Dissonance negatively affects employee well-being in Hybrid Work Environments (HWEs).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I presented the concept and efficacy of 'temporal dissonance' from the perspective of organizations and management, which is quite an unexplored topic. The significance of the concept

cannot be ignored because the increasing prevalence of hybrid work has highlighted the importance of temporal flexibility. However, without clear boundaries and expectations, this flexibility can lead to temporal dissonance and produce negative consequences for organizational culture and employee well-being. Organizations need to establish clear guidelines for communication and response times in hybrid work environments. Managers should encourage employees to set boundaries between work and personal time. Providing employees with resources and training on time management and stress management techniques can help mitigate the effects of temporal dissonance. By understanding and addressing the challenges of temporal dissonance, organizations can create more sustainable and supportive hybrid work environments that shape commendable organizational culture and promote employee well-being. Business management scholars could conduct qualitative studies to explore employee experiences and perceptions of time in hybrid work; quantitative studies to measure the relationship between temporal dissonance, organizational culture, and employee well-being; and case studies of organizations that have successfully mitigated temporal dissonance.

Here, I pose some research questions that could be explored further. How does temporal dissonance manifest in hybrid work environments? What are the key factors that contribute to temporal dissonance? How does temporal dissonance affect team collaboration and communication? What strategies can organizations implement to mitigate temporal dissonance and promote a sense of temporal alignment? What is the relationship between temporal dissonance and employee presenteeism or absenteeism?

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