

# **The role of time in leader-follower interactions**

## **Introduction**

Research has demonstrated time to be an important variable within an organization at an individual, group and cultural level of analysis (Francis-Smythe & Robertson, 1999; Schriber & Gutek, 1987; Gevers et al, 2006; Rutoski et al, 2007). In fact a number of researchers have called for further work to be done in this domain (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001; George & Jones, 2000). In response to this call, this paper will explore the role of time in leadership and management. The importance organizations attach to time is only too clear when organizational economic goals and measures of performance (such as monthly targets, productivity measures) are considered. However, it is somewhat surprising that organizations have a limited capability to understand how time permeates and impacts in everyday work practices.

This paper will explore the role of time in leadership by introducing the notion of Temporal Intelligence (TI). TI is a developing concept that represents an individual difference factor in regards to a leader's temporal practices. Specifically, this paper will present the findings from a qualitative research investigation into the role of time in leader-follower interactions.

There is concern within the contemporary research arena that a preponderance of attention is directed towards the outcomes of leadership effectiveness rather than relevant individual characteristics (Gawith & Flaxman, 2007; Judge & Bono, 2000; Rubin et al. 2005). The importance of operationizing leadership effectiveness as a research variable is reflected in the end-goal of this project. At the same time it is also recognised there is a need to identify a leader's temporally related individual characteristics that may potentially provide a fruitful basis for explaining leadership as a phenomenon and predicting effectiveness; this has clear implications for selection and development processes.

## **The Development of Temporal Intelligence**

### **The Conceptual Model of Temporal Intelligence**

The conceptual development of Temporal Intelligence was based upon a review of the time and leadership literature. A model was proposed to represent TI. This model distinguishes between *self*- and *other*-referencing temporal practices. The former refers

to self-referencing thoughts, behaviours and attitudes towards time that Francis-Smythe and Robertson (1999) found as an individual difference variable comprised of a five dimensional structure (Time Personality). In relation to other-referencing temporal practices, this is further differentiated between *global* and *individual reflexive* typologies. The global form of temporal practices refers to how a leader behaves and thinks about dimensions of time in the workplace in the context of interactions with individual followers and teams/groups of followers. Two main frameworks have been drawn upon to propose that there are 14 dimensions of time influencing the global form of temporal practices (Halbesleben, Novicevic, Harvey, & Buckley; 2003 Schriber & Gutek, 1987). Recognizing individual differences in temporal preferences (Francis-Smythe and Robertson, 1999), the individual reflexive form of temporal practices refers to a leader's awareness of his or her followers' behavioural manifestations of these preferences and subsequent behavioural responses to this awareness. Empirical evidence based on person-job characteristics fit studies (Hecht & Allen, 2003; Slocombe & Bluedorn; 1999) and research investigating the effects of time personality on job-related affective well-being (Francis-Smythe & Robertson, 1999) support this individual level analysis. The notion of drawing on Time Personality in the realms of leadership and management may have potential beneficial implications for time management training. In sum, this paper will discuss the qualitative research that has been conducted by the researchers that focuses on understanding both aspects of other-referencing temporal practices.

### **Pilot Repertory Grid Interview Stage**

#### **Sample**

There were 6 participants in the pilot sample (4 males and 2 females). All participants were in full-time employment in the educational sector (3 senior leadership level and 3 middle leadership level).

#### **Procedure**

A form of repertory grid interviews (Kelly, 1955) were conducted for all the pilot stage interviews, however a number of methodological changes were made during this process. More specifically, the sorting technique (triadic vs. dyadic), element identification method and construct elicitation processes were changed. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into details of the methodological development of the interviews; however

these developmental changes reconciled arising theoretical and practical issues. This resulting tailored methodology may provide valuable techniques for researchers and practitioners alike.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of 10 participants, 5 males and 5 females. The sample was obtained through a quota sampling methodology based on the following criterion variables; leader level, organizational sector and gender.

### **Procedure**

Following the repertory grid technique (Kelly, 1955) psychological constructs were elicited representing the role of time in the participant's own individual leadership and management practices. More specifically, the interview procedure involved a number of stages. Firstly, information relating to the job responsibilities and the number of leadership roles the participant perceived themselves to hold was elicited. This information was used to help the participant identify a list of the individuals and teams that broadly represented their leadership roles. This list was anonymous to the researcher whom had numbered cards that represented the names of individual followers and teams, which formed the elements of the repertory grid.

Participants then read a paragraph that represented one of the eight Full Range Leadership Theory's (FRLT; Bass, 1985) dimensions that in turn reflected one of the three leadership styles; transformative, transactional leadership or laissez-faire leadership. The first leadership dimension/paragraph selected was based on the information the participant provided about their leadership roles. Moreover, the researcher selected the dimension that was perceived to align with the behavioural content of information gathered at the beginning of the interview. The participant was then asked to describe the extent to which the presented behaviours representative of one of the dimensions of the FRLT aligned with their own behaviours.

Utilising a dyadic sorting technique, once the participant identified the extent to which their own behaviour aligned with a behaviour in a dimension of the FRLT framework,

they were asked to think of a situation to represent the behaviour they outlined for themselves and draw on an element to describe a specific example. The participant was then asked questions that either clarified their discussion and/or related it to temporal aspects of behaviour (construct elicited). This included asking the participant what behaviours they see as important in this situation (cue questions related to outcomes where appropriate were employed). The guiding rationale for this construct elicitation process was to draw on the principles of the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954).

Following a *difference* construct elicitation method, participants were then asked to think of another situation involving a different follower in the list and identify any differences that occurred in comparison to the behavioural content of the previously identified psychological construct (the researcher guided and clarified this process). This process of construct elicitation was repeated but used random selection for the second FRLT dimension.

Following the employment of two of the FRLT dimensions to facilitate construct elicitation, a temporal framework was introduced to replace the leadership dimensions as represented by the FRLT. This framework represented the dimensions of time that derived from a review of the time and leadership literature. Ensuring consistency, a dyadic sorting technique was employed with the same process of construct elicitation as employed for the FRLT. The inclusion of both a leadership and temporal framework was based on two reasons. Firstly, to address the virtual dearth of research linking time to leadership, the decision was made to allow the development of psychological constructs within a leadership specific context. Due to the extensive empirical support of the FRLT, it was decided that a framework based on Bass' theory would be used for this purpose. Secondly, involving a temporal specific framework allowed the integration of perceived valuable knowledge originating from the review of empirical and theoretical based time literature into the construct elicitation process.

### **Analysis of the Constructs**

The psychological constructs deduced from the interviews were subjected to a-priori qualitative content analysis. Each construct was inspected to assess whether any

behaviour, thought or attitude underlying one of the existing temporal dimensions was present and was made with reference to a follower or team/group of followers (i.e., global temporal practices). A construct could at this stage qualify to represent one or more themes. Secondly, all the constructs were analysed and any behavioural manifestations of a follower's time personality and subsequent behaviours of the leader were themed to represent individual-reflexive temporal practices. All the themes were then re-inspected and the similarities and differences between the grouped themes were used to develop and re-structure the original themes into master themes.

### **Results and Discussion**

Currently, the researcher is completing the analysis of the results. The analysis presently has psychological constructs representing 12 of the time dimensions related to global temporal practices. These are deadlines, decisive timing, pace, multi-tasking, co-ordination, temporal perspective interaction, breaks, time buffers, time allocation, quality and speed, time boundaries between work and non-work and autonomy. Based on a thematic analysis of the constructs, a summary of 12 dimensions of time relating to leader-follower interactions are detailed in Table 1. Psychological constructs representative of the themes will be drawn upon as illustrative examples of the different temporal dimensions.

Analysis of the constructs also found that 17 of the 109 psychological constructs represented the individual reflexive temporal practices with behavioural manifestations of four of the five time personality dimensions being identified. One such psychological construct that represents follower behaviours that relate to 2 of the Time Personality dimensions is presented below:

More pushy to achieve deadlines for this follower. Her map of time is different to mine. If there are lots to do on a list she will get stressed (i). She see's each task as an individual task and considers each task in depth. Sense of achieving is very important to her. She spends more time on the relationship than the task itself. She needs a sense of urgency. I need to encourage completion. She doesn't know what she would be doing next in a project (ii). I know a sequence for me to get something done but she doesn't plan (ii). I insist on a plan and will make my own plan and give to her if she doesn't do it.

- i) Refers to the Time Personality dimension of Polychronicity; preference for carrying out multiple tasks at the same time.
- ii) Refers to the Time Personality dimension of Planning; attitudes towards planning and sequencing of tasks.

**Table 1: Thematic descriptions of the 12 dimensions of time**

Theme	Description
Deadlines	The leader's monitoring of followers work within the deadline lifespan, which includes responsive actions. The behaviours the leader employs if a deadline is missed. Deadlines are differentiated between leader originating (i.e., self-imposed) and external.
Decisive Timing	The leader's attitudes towards making delayed decisions in the workplace.
Pace	The leader's influence on the rate of activities in the workplace (e.g. tasks). Also the rate of leadership and management activities are considered in this dimension of time (e.g. deadlines and delayed decisions)
Multi-tasking	The behaviours the leader employs when setting many tasks at the same time to followers.
Co-ordination	The leader's sequencing and co-ordination of their followers and follower's activities in the workplace. This includes the concept of entrainment.
Temporal perspective interaction	The leader's reflection in the past, living in the present and projecting to the future in relation to interactions with his or her followers.
Breaks	The leader's role in guiding when socially orientated breaks take place among followers. Also the leader's monitoring of non-work orientated behaviours.
Time Buffers	The breaks a leader plans between work schedules and tasks involving followers.
Time Allocation	The cues the leader uses when estimating how long a task will take a follower.
Quality and Speed	The leader's thoughts and behaviours in relation to prioritizing speed over quality in their followers work output.
Time Boundaries between work and non-work	The leader's monitoring behaviours within the duration of work periods. Also behaviours that influence the extent to which the follower works out of <i>formal</i> times is considered. This dimension of time also concerns any communication the leader has with his or her followers out of <i>formal</i> working times on work orientated issues.
Autonomy	The leaders behaviours that affect the extent to which followers are autonomous in their work activities.

### Conclusion

The repertory grid interviews demonstrate that time has a broad impact on leader-subordinate interactions. The next stages of the project will involve developing and piloting a questionnaire measuring a leader's Temporal Intelligence. Following the completion of the pilot stage of the Temporal Intelligence Questionnaire (TIQ), the construct validity of the questionnaire will be examined in reference to a personality, cognitive ability and leadership style measure. The final stages of the project will explore any relationships that exist between the TIQ and both team well-being and leadership effectiveness.

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