



**Multidisciplinary and Multilevel Perspectives and Insights
on Time Management**

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Multidisciplinary and Multilevel Perspectives and Insights on Time Management

“Time is what we want most, but what we spend worst.” – William Penn

The idea

The Roman philosopher Seneca (2000 CE, p. 118) lamented that people trifle with time, because time is “an immaterial thing that doesn't appear to the eyes, and for that reason it's valued very cheaply.” Two thousand years later, people still have “neither the necessary economic sophistication nor the perceptual apparatus to account for time in the same way as they account for money” (Soman, 2001, p. 171). Accounting for time, or what is more commonly referred to as *time management*, is a construct that plays a critical role in numerous domains in management and related fields such as work-life conflict (Adams & Jex, 1999), time scarcity (Hochschild, 1997), job performance (Barling, Cheung, & Kelloway, 1996), stress (Häfner, Stock, Pinneker, & Ströhle, 2014), creativity (Zampetakis, Bouranta, & Moustakis, 2010), life satisfaction (Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990), and social life adjustment (Southerton, 2003), among many others.

We conducted a literature review and discovered that the literature on time management is fragmented and dispersed across various disciplines including psychology (Burt & Kemp, 1994), education (Liu, Rijmen, MacCann, & Roberts, 2009), economics (Becker, 1965), and sociology (Flaherty, 2003). The scattered state of the literature hinders progress because each discipline investigates time management with little, if any, acknowledgement of findings from other disciplines. The disjointed nature of research on time management would thus greatly benefit from a multidisciplinary integration of its body of knowledge. Accordingly, the goal of our manuscript is to review and integrate multiple literatures to provide non-specialist readers with an easily accessible, evidence-based treatment of time management research. As an important first step, we address the absence of an established definition (Peeters & Rutte, 2005) by proposing that *time management is a form of decision-making used by individuals to structure, protect, and adapt their time to changing conditions*.

The targeted audience for our manuscript includes scholars interested in the role of time management in theories ranging from micro to macro levels of analysis. Also, our approach is innovative in several ways.

First, rather than focusing on literatures that deal solely with time management, we integrate several bodies of work to draw insights from the sociology of time (Flaherty, 2011; Zerubavel, 1981). Integrating sociological insights affords new perspectives that are typically overlooked in the time management literature. For instance, our manuscript emphasizes the need to recognize that no individual is a temporal island—people need to coordinate their schedules with others (e.g., coworkers, family members). As such, it is important to recognize that time management is as much an individual endeavor as it is a collective one (Perlow, 1999), which is why our manuscript adopts a multilevel perspective. Furthermore, integrating insights from sociology of time allows us to incorporate the importance of time norms (Zerubavel, 1979a). Time management does not operate in a normative vacuum because people's time use is constrained by temporal norms. For example, calling one's boss at three in the morning, forgetting a 30-year

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3 anniversary, and rushing a meeting with a client can all be considered serious time norm
4 breaches. Our focus on time norms, which goes beyond temporal *faux pas*, enables us to study
5 power dynamics (e.g., a boss showing up 10 minutes late at a meeting signals power, a
6 subordinate doing the same thing signals lack of assiduity), the impact of timing on social
7 competence (e.g., knowing when it's the right time to ask for a favor; Baron & Markman, 2003),
8 in-group and out-group dynamics (e.g., workers belittling other workers for leaving at 5:00 pm;
9 Whyte, 1956), and other social phenomena relevant to time management with implications for
10 management theory and practice.
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14 Second, our approach is also novel because it includes time attitudes. Whereas much of the
15 literature focuses on time management skills, such as scheduling and monitoring (e.g., Macan,
16 1994), our perspective is that such skills are likely ineffective if unaccompanied by the right
17 mindset. For instance, we advance the concept of time awareness, which we define as a person's
18 ability to think about time in an explicit, strategic, and quantitative fashion. Much like
19 individuals with poor budgeting skills struggle with personal finances, we propose that people
20 with poor time awareness will experience higher levels of time conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell,
21 1985).
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25 Third, we draw attention to the fact that time management is a subset of a broader, more abstract
26 concept: temporal decision-making. Time is a resource like no other. Because people do not
27 account for time the way they do with money (Soman, 2001), many insights from the decision-
28 making literature do not necessarily apply to temporal decision-making. For example, in a series
29 of experiments Soman (2001) found that the sunk-cost effect (i.e., a decision-making bias
30 inducing people to throw good money after bad) does not apply to time. For this reason, we
31 believe that the field of management would benefit from more empirical and theoretical research
32 on temporal decision-making. Such research would shed light not only on how people make
33 decisions about time, but also explain the dynamics behind behaviors traditionally considered
34 deviant, such as time theft (i.e., working on personal projects while at work) and time abuse (i.e.,
35 excessively soliciting coworkers' time). Finally, we conclude our manuscript with practical,
36 theoretical, and methodological recommendations that aim at refocusing our attention on the
37 "resource" dimension of time and its role as an antecedent other well-studied resources in such
38 as financial resources, social resources, and knowledge resources (e.g., Barney, Wright, &
39 Ketchen, 2001).
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43 44 **To whom is the article speaking**

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46 This paper has two audiences. The first audience is management scholars interested in time.
47 Organization studies' interest in time has soared over the past three decades (Ancona, Goodman,
48 Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001; Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988; Shipp & Cole, 2015). For example,
49 management scholars interested in the micro level of analysis have extensively studied how
50 people perceive time (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011), whether people are more past-, present-,
51 or future-oriented (Nadkarni & Chen, 2014; Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009), and whether
52 people like to do one or many things at a time (Bluedorn, Felker Kaufman, & Lane, 1992; Hecht
53 & Allen, 2005). At the macro level of analysis, some have studied how time can be used as a
54 resource, for instance by taking an institutional work approach (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016)
55 or a resource-based perspective (Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010). At the micro level, however,
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3 there is comparatively less research on the strategic management of time (Claessens, Van Eerde,
4 Rutte, & Roe, 2007; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Shipp & Cole, 2015). Our paper's goal is to
5 introduce such scholars to the many ways time can be used as a resource to achieve a variety of
6 organizationally relevant outcomes. As we mentioned earlier, we adopt a multilevel approach to
7 time management, meaning that our review and synthesis of the literature will be of interest not
8 only to micro (e.g., organizational behavior and human resource management) scholars, but also
9 to those interested in organizational theory, strategy, and international business.
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13 The second targeted audience is scholars from disciplines outside of management who are
14 interested in the management of time. Sociologists, in particular, decry the lack of attention on
15 how time can be used (Flaherty, 2011; Nowotny, 1992). But time is a multidisciplinary topic,
16 drawing attention from sociologists (Adam, 2004; Durkheim, 1947; Parsons, 1951; Weber,
17 1930), physicists (Hawking, 1988; Smolin, 2013), historians (Le Goff, 1980; L. Mumford, 2010),
18 anthropologists (Bloch, 1977; Bohannan, 1953; Hall, 1959), philosophers (Callender, 2000;
19 Russell, 1915), psychologists (Ariely & Wertenbroch, 2002; Buehler, Griffin, & Ross, 1994;
20 Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), and economists (Becker, 1965; Golden, 2009). We believe that
21 researchers from outside of management would also benefit from an accessible, unified summary
22 of time management research spanning multiple disciplines. Importantly, we believe that a
23 coherent, integrated review of time management research would be the first step in encouraging
24 much-needed research on this topic of individual, organizational, and societal importance.
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28 **The importance of the idea**

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31 The foundations of early and modern management cast time as a precious, strategic resource
32 (Drucker, 1967; Smith, 1799; Taylor, 1911). Curiously, however, management scholarship has
33 by and large eschewed the idea of time as a resource and focused on using time as a contextual
34 factor or a proxy for change (Shipp & Cole, 2015). But time, we argue, is the most important
35 resource of all. Time is the fundamental dimension that enables social life (Adam, 1990; Berger
36 & Luckmann, 1966; Young & Lim, 2014; Zerubavel, 1981). Time facilitates coordination of
37 activities, both at work (Janicik & Bartel, 2003) and at home (Southerton, 2003). "In fact...,"
38 noted Talcott Parsons (1951, p. 204), "a society so complex as ours probably could not function
39 without relatively rigid time scheduling." Time management is even more important today for
40 people, such as global entrepreneurs (Markman, Devinney, Pedersen, & Tihanyi, 2016), who
41 must coordinate different time zones and navigate different cultural time norms.
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45 In addition, time has unique properties that sets it apart from all other resources. Unlike money,
46 time is possessed in equal amounts by everyone; every individual runs on a 24-hour-a-day
47 budget (McGrath & Rotchford, 1983). Unlike energy, time is not renewable, recoverable, or
48 substitutable (Jaques, 1982; Moore, 1963). Time is also unique by virtue of it being *the*
49 fundamental resource—time is a resource that serves as an important causal antecedent for the
50 acquisition of other resources. For example, at the individual level of analysis, people are not
51 able to acquire new knowledge, skills, and abilities if they don't have sufficient time (Aguinis &
52 Kraiger, 2009), which impairs their performance as a result (Markman, 2012). At the firm level
53 of analysis, organizations are not able to acquire valuable and imitable resources that gives them
54 a competitive market advantage if they don't have sufficient time (Perlow, 1999).
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3 Thus, we conceptualize time as a socially crucial, equally distributed, non-renewable, and
4 fundamental resource. We therefore argue that individuals and organizations must think about
5 time explicitly and use it strategically. This perspective on time, while abundant in popular
6 discourse (e.g., Franklin, 1964; Lakein, 1973; Pausch & Zaslow, 2008), deserves more empirical
7 and theoretical attention, hence the importance of our review as an integrative first step.
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10 **How are you going to communicate your idea**

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12 We start with a very brief history of time management spanning multiple centuries (e.g.,
13 Aurelius, 149/167 CE; Bennett, 1910; Franklin, 1964/1757; Seneca, 2014/50 CE; St. Benedict,
14 1975/530 CE) to show that, contrary to popular belief, time management is not a recent fad but
15 an age-old issue of great and universal importance to philosophers and laypeople alike.
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18 We then dispel the common misconception that time cannot be managed because time is an
19 external, immutable element that is “out there,” out of our reach. Here again, we draw on the
20 theoretical and empirical insights from sociology to define time. This allows us to highlight the
21 socially constructed nature of time (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) and show that, like all social
22 constructions, time is something that can be managed. We illustrate our point with various
23 empirical management studies showing how individuals use time to change their life conditions
24 (e.g., Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).
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28 Our manuscript will then offer an up-to-date review and synthesis of time management research
29 based on a selective review of more than 40 empirical articles published between the early 1980s
30 and today (please see the Appendix for a list of sources we already identified in preparation for
31 writing our proposal and manuscript). Our intent is not to cover the full breadth of the literature.
32 Rather, because our paper’s goal is to make time management research accessible to a wide
33 range of scholars, we focus on the core evidence-based conclusions of time management
34 research. As mentioned earlier, however, our understanding of time management wouldn’t be
35 complete without insights from other disciplines. Accordingly, we supplement the empirical
36 findings of our review with theoretical insights from sociology (Flaherty, 2011; Giddens, 1984;
37 Zerubavel, 1981), history (Le Goff, 1980; L. Mumford, 1955), and psychology (Buehler et al.,
38 1994). Such insights afford a conceptual framework that can explain why time management may
39 or may not be effective, depending on individual and contextual factors. As an illustration,
40 psychological research shows that some people discount time more steeply—they prefer small
41 rewards now over larger rewards later—which has significant implications for how people
42 manage their time. We further draw from early conceptual work on temporality (McGrath &
43 Rotchford, 1983; Moore, 1963) to reveal the multilevel dynamics behind time management.
44 Country-level cultural attitudes toward time (Hofstede, 2001; Levine, West, & Reis, 1980), for
45 instance, can affect time management at the organizational, group, and individual level through a
46 top-down trickling effect. Similarly, we argue that bottom-up processes, such as the concerted
47 action of multiple individuals (Roy, 1959), can affect time management at the team and
48 organizational level.
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54 Following are some examples of findings derived from our review, integration, and synthesis of
55 empirical and theoretical insights on time management:
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- Contrary to popular belief, time management training does not necessarily increase job performance (Häfner & Stock, 2010; Macan, 1994, 1996). This could be due to the fact that, ironically, time management training may take some time before bearing fruit (Van Eerde, 2015). This result could also be due to a performance measurement problem—managers sometimes assess performance based on whether their subordinates put in very long hours (Perlow, 1999), a practice antithetical to good time management.
- Time management seems to be consistently associated with lower anxiety (Bond & Feather, 1988), higher life satisfaction (Macan et al., 1990), and lower stress (Häfner, Stock, & Oberst, 2015; Häfner et al., 2014), all of which have important implications for well-being in and outside of the workplace (Griffin & Clarke, 2011).
- Time can be used as a tacit but powerful form of social control (Bluedorn & Waller, 2006; Zerubavel, 1979b) by powerful others. Individual time management, therefore, can only achieve so much in the face of institutional constraints (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Concerted temporal action (Perlow, Mazmanian, & Hansen, 2016), however, can be more effective at reforming exhausting schedules and time norms deemed oppressive.
- Gender seems to moderate the effect of time management on many outcomes; specifically, women tend to manage their time better. This gender gap in time management appears to occur at an early age, as early as middle school (Liu et al., 2009).
- Attitudes toward time may matter more than actual time management skills (Britton & Tesser, 1991). In other words, to “do” time management will likely prove ineffective if people don’t also “think” time management (Drucker, 1967). This warrants further attention to temporal decision-making.

In closing, we hope that our proposal conveys the idea that time management is an important issue concerning management and business. Moreover, our proposed manuscript synthesizes and translates theoretical and empirical research across disciplines (including management subfields) in an authoritative evidential manner that makes these findings accessible for scholars with a wide range of interests. We look forward to hearing from you and we will have an opportunity to improve our thinking in preparation for writing a manuscript for *Academy of Management Perspectives*.

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