Chapter 21
Investigating Temporal Structure Usage in Individual Time Management Practices:
Two In-Depth Field Interviews

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers in management and organizational behavior have shown that temporal rhythms and norms exist and that they collectively impact multiple aspects of an organization. They have also shown that individual productivity is hampered if temporal cycles clash. This suggests that individual time management is related to the temporal structures that govern and constrain an individual's life. At its simplest form, individuals use external records to capture explicit temporal structures that allow them to view this constraint. This external record then allows individuals to view the relationships between the temporal structures affecting their lives and the relation-

ships between the different temporal structures. Thus, knowing these relationships can help an individual build a personal schedule in a calendar tool that optimizes his or her use of time while still abiding by the temporal structures that cannot be controlled. It is expected that people who are very busy or very interested in personal advancement want to optimize their time usage and, therefore, spend time learning about the myriad of temporal structures that affect their lives so that they can best control them. It follows that people who are effective time managers are likely to use and understand temporal structures in a more sophisticated fashion than people who are not. This research investigates this possibility through two sets of intensive field interviews with a group of academic professionals at a U.S. public research university. The focus of this work is on investigating types

of temporal structures being used in individual time management with calendar tools.

The chapter has this focus because its underlying motivation is that of developing new information technology to support better personal time management. In particular, this research is designed to provide evidence that offering the support of additional temporal structure features in electronic time management or calendar tools will help users be better time managers. It recognizes that being an effective time manager also involves personal commitment. This research seeks to find evidence that additional temporal structure management tools will help such a person better achieve this goal. Therefore, it mainly focuses on collecting temporal structure requirements at the task analysis stage in the systems analysis and design process through intensive user studies.

This research examines (1) how the temporal structures discussed in the literature review are used in personal time management, (2) what types of temporal structures are being used in individual time management practices, (3) what kind of support the current time management tools provide for capturing and managing the temporal structures, and (4) what design implications can be drawn from human studies for the inclusion of multiple types of temporal structures in electronic time management or calendar tools. In the field study, twenty busy professionals from a U.S. public research university were interviewed about their time management strategies and time management tool usage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Temporal structure has long been regarded as a complicated instrument of activating and structuring asynchronous differentiation to achieve organizational goals. Temporal structure is defined as patterned organization of time used by humans to help them manage, comprehend or coordinate their use of time (Wu et al., 2005). It is a primary concept in organization behavior and organization change (Bluedorn & Danhardt, 1988; Clark, 1985; Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). In particular, considerable management interest has been observed in today's organizations, which are facing globalization, technological innovation challenges and uncertainty pressures. As Jones et al. (2008) mentioned, "*Specifically, attention has focused on accelerations in the pace of organizational activity (e.g., speeding up of information transfer and processing); reductions in cycle times (e.g., decreasing 'wait times' in business processes); shifts in when and where work is performed (e.g., distributing working geographically); changes in significance of deadlines (e.g., generating expectations of immediate response); and intensification of work experience (e.g., increasing the availability and accessibility of people, products, and services) (e.g., Cusumano and Yoffe, 1998; Fine, 1998; Gleick, 1999; Green, 2002; Hongladarom, 2002; Whipp, Adam, and Sabelis, 2002; Yeh et al., 2000)*" (p. 2). These changes have altered a number of aspects and dimensions of temporality in organizations. For example, more tensions are created with established work processes (Sawyer and Southwick, 2002; Scott and Wagner, 2003). As the main actors in organizations, individual professionals, who are responsible for responding to and implementing these temporality changes, constantly face more time pressures to meet their hectic and ever-changing deadlines. In other words, people are restricted by their external temporal structures. Orlikowski and Yates (2002, p. 686) proposed that "*people in organizations experience time through the shared temporal structures they enact recurrently in their everyday practices.*" In theory, the temporal structures provide a foundation that human beings use to construct the regularity of their society and reduce the uncertainty of human perception of time. In practice, "*a challenge individuals and organizations face is reconciling these different temporal structures to make it possible to work and take part in non-work activities*" (Saunders and Kim,

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