

# The Standardization of Efficiency and Its Implications for Organizations

by Harry T. Hall, Jr.

University of Oklahoma, USA

## ABSTRACT

*Time has become increasingly utilized as a tool for organizations to increase productivity and control workers. Since the advent of the mechanical clock in the fourteenth century, time has structured organizational experience. This increased precision has led to the standardization of efficiency. The struggle for greater efficiency creates an organizational environment where the worker is dissociated and dehumanized—subsumed by the machine. Time and technology work in concert to improve efficiency. In addition to the mechanical clock, computers and the Internet have also contributed to the conquering of time in the organizational sense. It is the instantaneousness of communication that has led to the initial feeling of time being conquered. Social interaction is one of the fundamental drives of humanity, and this interaction is threatened by the standardization of efficiency. Implications for organizations are discussed, followed by an exemplar involving the changing nature of investing. Finally, ideas for reclaiming the pre-modern conceptualization of organizing are suggested.*

## THE STANDARDIZATION OF EFFICIENCY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The last three years have seen a proliferation of research investigating the impact of time and time consciousness on organizations. Infrequent inquiries into the relationship between time and organizational experience in the twentieth century have now given way to special journal issues, such as *The Academy of Management Review*, 26, which focuses exclusively on the conception of time in organizations. That is not to imply that time as an organizational construct was completely ignored, as authors such as Taylor (1911), Mumford (1934, 1970), and Hassard (1990, 1996) have written on the subject, but prior to the twenty first century one would be hard pressed to describe scholarly investigation into time and organizations as a burgeoning area of inquiry. However, many other academic disciplines have been both aware and concerned with time and the relationship it has to human experience. Philosophers have been concerned with time consciousness for nearly two millennia (Heath, 1956). In part because of philosophical

examinations of time, as well as natural and social scientific investigations into the phenomenon, our conception of time has advanced far beyond the initial, naturally experienced understanding of time. "Time, as a subject of inquiry, is pervasive and generalizable," and "it is a central issue in all disciplines of inquiry" (Goodman, Lawrence, Ancona, & Tushman, 2001, p. 507). Removing the layers of time conceptualizations artificially imposed by humanity, one is left with only three empirically discernable aspects of time—the day, the month, and the year (Barnett, 1998). Every other aspect of time is an artificially imposed construct. Recognition of this brings full circle the relationship between time and organizations. Where nature and the seasons once dictated work behavior, time and its physical manifestation—the clock—now regulate human endeavors.

The central premise of this paper is to explore the relationship between time, specifically instruments of time-keeping, and organizational experience. In doing so, other concepts such as efficiency, narrative, technology, relationships, modernity/postmodernity, and globalization will

also be explored. After beginning with a brief discussion of the historical evolution of time, an analysis of the inextricability of time, technology, and efficiency will be discussed. By linking time with efficiency and technology, a situation is created where innovation, creativity, and relationships actually become incongruent with the standardization of efficiency. These incongruencies manifest themselves in increased dissociation. Landes (2000), while acknowledging Mumford's assertion that the clock creates dissociation between time and human experience, notes that the clock dissociates "human events from nature" (p. 14). By definition, dissociation from nature involves a moving towards the unnatural. A cursory examination of the modern organizational landscape might lead one to conclude that technology and globalization have had an effect quite the opposite of dissociation—McLuhan's (1964, 1967) "global village" realized.

However, a closer examination reveals an organizational landscape where handshakes at business meetings and the voice inflections of phone calls have been replaced by "emoticons" and hastily composed directives of email. Face to face contact has been replaced by virtual memos. The normalcy of social interaction has been replaced by the unnatural rule of efficiency. Providing evidence for the deterioration of organizational social networks is a discussion of the shift in stock market investing from relationship building to the pure, impersonal logic of the system.

Desired outcomes of this exploration include (1) increased understanding of how time impacts and structures our organizational experience, (2) the implications which this structuring has on organizational relationships and fulfillment, and (3) a reconceptualization of time that privileges the relational emphasis of pre-modern organization. Perhaps even before examining the various conceptualizations of time, it is necessary to briefly discuss why time has become such a pervasive influence in recent organizational literature. It could be argued that this is due to the continuing level of encroachment

by time on our everyday lives. In order to truly understand this argument, it is necessary to recognize how time conscious our society has become. Although this paper is not intended as an in-depth discussion of metaphorical systems, a glance at Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) listing of metaphorical conceptualizations of time demonstrates how western society has come to view time as a commodity. Examples from their list include, "You're *wasting* my time," or "This gadget will *save* you hours," or even, "You're *running* out of time" (pp. 7-8). In fact, the idea that time is an invaluable resource dominates our Western understanding of time.

By characterizing time as money or a valuable resource, and then linking time with productivity and efficiency, as Taylor did with his early time and motion studies, an unavoidable anxiety is created in the worker in that he or she will never be productive enough—there will always exist the possibility of producing a little bit more. Simply put, time is intangible, yet it is the foundational structure of our lives, dictating our day to day behavior. However, it is important to remember that time, as we currently conceive of it, did not always have this power over us.

## CONCEPTUALIZING TIME AND ORGANIZATIONS

The evolution of timekeeping from the simple brilliance of the earliest sundial to the sophistication of the mechanical clock is a remarkable story. The history of timekeeping provides us with a better understanding of how humankind has moved from work behavior influenced by the events of nature to increased synchronicity and machine like precision. A brief examination of time-keeping devices prior to the invention of the mechanical clock reveals instruments that were fascinating creations, but relatively imprecise compared to the simple wristwatches of today that can tell time to the nearest second, or tenth of a second.

Based on current evidence, the first sundial appeared in Egypt around 1500 B. C., but it was not until two hundred years later that

sundials began to resemble those with which we are familiar today. Sundials were present in the Greek and Roman world, with Vitruvius reporting "the existence of thirteen different kinds" at one time in Rome (Barnett, 1998, p. 21). Remarkable though it was, the sundial was severely limited in its utility as a device to structure the events of the day. In addition to being latitude specific, sundials had no way of recording time after sunset or any time of the day when the sun was obscured. It initially was only able to mark the hours of the day—not nearly precise enough to completely regulate business or structure behavior any more than the sun alone had. Although "sundials were *not* the watches of the ancient world" (Barnett, 1998, p. 22), they are important to a discussion on organizing behavior because cities and trade had become well established by this time, and "the more complex lifestyles they bred would certainly have been made easier by a firmer awareness of the time of day" (p. 17). Despite other timekeeping devices, such as candles or water alarm clocks, sundials existed as the dominant instruments of time measurement up until the creation of clock time, which shortly thereafter gave birth to the mechanical clock.

It is with the introduction of clock time that we begin to fully recognize and appreciate the level of control which timekeeping has taken over our everyday behavior. According to Mumford (1934), "the clock, not the steam-engine, is the key-machine of the modern industrial age," as well as the key instrument in, not only "keeping track of the hours, but of synchronizing the actions of men" (p. 14). Just as the earliest sundials were no doubt useful in improving the regulation of trade in early civilizations, the mechanical clock increases the precision and synchronization of our activities down to minutes and seconds. "Beginning with the fourteenth century's communal clock in the bell tower and continuing on to our own wrist watches, this new mechanical time allowed people to synchronize their efforts and gain a far greater collective efficiency" (Barnett, 1998, p. 58). Landes (2000), discussing this new age of watch and clock tower timekeeping, states, "for the first time, people could organize their life, indoors and out, in

harmony with the promptness of others," and now there existed a "growing core of owners and users of timekeepers, partisans and militants of a new punctuality" (p. 96). Landes (2000) was also quick to acknowledge the impact the use of timekeeping devices had on business, stating, "for better or worse, this was a new kind of man, one who became more and more common with the growth of business and development of a characteristically urban style of life" (p. 96).

While this initial discussion has focused on the evolution of timekeeping from sundials to the mechanical clock, the next section will examine the manner in which time and technology work in concert to move organizations to greater efficiency, while simultaneously eroding many important organizational characteristics, such as innovation and relationships.

#### TIME, TECHNOLOGY, AND EFFICIENCY

As timekeeping began to steadily influence behavioral practices, businesses began to use time as an instrument for regulation and control. "Time, like the individual, became a commodity of the production process, for in the crucial equation linking acceleration and accumulation, a human value could be placed upon time" (Hassard, 1996, p. 582).

Technology has and always will continue to be the greatest shaper of organizational life. According to Fulk and DeSanctis (2001), "with few exceptions . . . research has proposed that changes in communication technologies are tightly linked with changes in organizations" (p. 499). So while technology can move an organization forward through increased communication and productivity, it can also stifle and disrupt an organization through change, uncertainty, and an excessive emphasis on efficiency that leads to employee dissociation and dissatisfaction. One of the most telling characteristics of efficiency is that there is no end state. Although worker productivity and efficiency can be measured in comparison to previous levels of productivity and efficiency there is no discernable limit to efficiency. Perhaps that is

one of the reason that the concept has been so embraced and legitimized by employers—there is always room to push the employee to accomplish.

According to Thurow (1983), efficiency and the maximization of profit are the most important organizational goals. Thompson (1967) discusses how time, rather than the ability of the worker, becomes the more important concern, and he also identifies how time begins to develop as a measure of organizational discipline. Other scholars have looked at how organizational forms are constructed to control the worker population. "Organizational forms traditionally have been designed to achieve coordination and control in the presence of significant time and distance barriers" (Fulk & DeSanctis, 2001, p. 499). Fulk and DeSanctis acknowledge that organizations are structured in a way which maximizes time. Clearly, the primary reasons for individuals to organize in the first place would stem from a desire to accomplish a task that could not be accomplished alone or from a desire to increase the speed at which a task might be accomplished.

Organizational technology is appearing more rapidly than during any other historical period. The most successful organizations today are those that have internal mechanisms to interpret and respond to sweeping changes in technology. Organization theorists have had a long and sometimes contentious disposition towards technology. Whether it is Marx urging the modern workers of his time to follow in the footsteps of the Luddites and smash their machinery or McPhee and Poole (2001) acknowledging that "information technology enables organizations to 'perfect' classical structural parameters by providing rapid, accurate, and monitorable communication" (p. 524), the multiple facets of technology have been of central concern for organizational scholars. Examples of the multifarious nature of technology for researchers include the proliferation of communication technologies (fax, email, etc.) and the impact these technologies have on the workplace, production technologies (more efficient assembly lines, computers, Internet

product ordering, etc.) and their impact on organizational communication and structure, and, from a critical perspective, increased methods of monitoring employee activity.

It is in the second half of the twentieth century that another technological achievement occurs relating to time and efficiency. Where the clock increased synchronization, the invention of the computer, and later the Internet, heralded in a new age of instantaneous access to information and increased communication through interconnectivity. Certainly other technological advances, from the phone to the assembly line, seriously affected organizational structure, but the clock and the computer will be the principle inventions discussed here. Only eighty years after F. W. Taylor's landmark time and motion studies, his stopwatch has evolved into computerized productivity readouts. Hatch (1997) identifies three distinct types of technology: "(1) physical objects and artifacts, (2) activities and processes, and (3) the knowledge underlying the development and application of the objects and activities" (p. 130). While it is obvious how clocks and computers fulfill the first two of Hatch's technology types, they are both objects which coordinate activities and processes, the knowledge of the development and application of these two technological examples is much less apprehendable, until one recognizes how subtly the clock and the computer structure our organizational experience.

Perhaps the most commonly investigated aspect of communication and technology is the relationship between technology and organizational structure (Yates, 1989). So, the computer and the clock function, to borrow from Bourdieu (1977), as structuring structures, guiding us down more efficient paths of goal attainment and production. Postman (1992) stated that Taylor's scientific management and Postman's technopoly share many basic assumptions. These assumptions include "the primary, if not the only, goal of human labor and thought is efficiency," and "that technical calculation is in all respects superior to human judgment" (p. 51). This is further evidence that we have elevated

the importance of efficiency to a dangerously high level.

It is necessary to discuss one additional characteristic of time in relationship to the clock and the computer. Many people experience time as something that controls experience and of which we seldom seem to have enough, however, the speed in which the computer enables us to communicate and access information may make us feel as if we have been able to conquer time. The idea that an individual no longer has to wait for information often creates the illusion that we can be more efficient and productive. Just as the automobile, which enabled us to cover the same amount of distance we would walk to work but in a fraction of the time, eventually gave way to moving to the suburbs or heavy traffic, which resulted in no time savings between driving and walking, so too has instantaneous access to a wealth of information increased the amount of information we try to process in a day and the amount of time it takes to read, analyze, and interpret the information has increased exponentially.

Understanding how time and technological advances, such as the clock and the computer, act to standardize efficiency and synchronize activity is necessary to understanding how each of them adversely effects innovation and relationship building in organizations.

### THE CHANGING FACE OF ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are a fundamental aspect of humanity. Philosophers and scholars have long extolled the virtues and importance of relationships. Maslow (2001) situated relationship and social belonging behind only physiological and safety needs. Man "will hunger for affectionate relationships with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal" (p. 171). Business leaders emphasize the crucialness of positive, productive relationships in business, and this has always been the case, with few

exceptions. Families, tribes, and nations succeed or fail depending on the strength of internal and external relationships. Yet, even as relationships are elevated as the firmament of past and modern business practices, a more powerful ideology has been at work eroding those very foundations.

Time, efficiency and technology collaborate to undermine the human element of organizations. As is often the case with underlying structures, time and technology have been erected through human agency and embraced as the standard operating procedure that is invited and unwittingly embraced by modern organizations. In this manner, the standardization of efficiency has replaced the social network as the perceived fundamental structure and has distorted and masked the importance of relationships. Contrary to popular belief, time and technology, in the guise of efficiency and standardization, are both in opposition to relationships, as well as to innovation and creativity and, in the end, reduce the most vibrant and human employees to raw performance data—something to be plotted, graphed, and judged by a detached, wholly objective, and perhaps faceless, employer.

This assertion that time and technology work in opposition to relationship development is not stated as an absolute. Clearly there are some people who are very skilled at communicating via the Internet, and who take the necessary time and energy to create personal messages to a variety of people. In this way they are able to broaden their social network and reach more people than they would have minus the Internet. However, the number of contacts is not at issue, it is the quality of the relationships that is of principle importance. Internet communication is characterized by quick, poorly composed, impersonal messages. "In general, electronic communications are void of personal nuances characteristic of face-to-face interaction" (Zalewski & Rezba in Poster, 2002, p. 349). Twenty five hundred years of communication research has taught us to recognize and value the importance of these personal nuances. Face

to face interaction, while not as immediate as email interaction, is important to the development of healthy organizational relationships. Instead of improving connectivity and relationships, electronic communication, though timeless in its instantaneous nature, often results in further dissociation.

## ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The critical importance of improving our understanding of the impact of time on organizations is apparent upon examining the effects of standardization on organizational relationships and experiences. Precise timekeeping leads to greater efficiency and standardization. Although goal completion or attainment is the fundamental purpose of organizing, efficiency itself has also been standardized and becoming a teleological aim of organizations. According to Ellul (1964), "standardization creates *impersonality*, in the sense that organization relies more on methods and instructions than on individuals" (p. 12). This creates an environment where personal satisfaction and fulfillment are subsumed by the organization and clearly become secondary or even tertiary concerns. The impersonality brought on by the elevation of efficiency as the *sine qua non* of organizing, dehumanizes the worker and dissociates him or her from colleagues. Sheldon, in Ellul (1964) defines organization as "the process which consists in assigning appropriate tasks to individuals or to groups so as to attain, in an efficient and economic way, and by the coordination and combination of all their activities, the objectives agreed upon" (p. 11).

In order for organizations and organizational researchers to adequately meet the challenges imposed by modern business structures, particularly those created by the drive towards efficiency, researchers and organizations must recognize the importance of human connectivity and genuine relationships. In discussing the impact of time regulating technology on individuals in the workplace, Poster (2002) states,

*Changing cultural configurations of time and space transform the individual's sense of self. Since the self is composed of relations with others that serve to orient the individual in the world, new linkages such as remote intimacy upset the stability and coherence of everyday life. (p. 348).*

Devaluing the importance of face-to-face interpersonal interaction which helps to orient the individual to the organizational world, would prove detrimental to organizational fulfillment and satisfaction. While dissatisfied individuals may for a while maintain a satisfactory level of efficiency, it is almost a certainty that in the long run both the organization and the individual will lose.

Now that we have examined the ways in which our understanding of time has led to the current organizational conceptions of time and the implications such conceptions have on modern organizational experience, it is important to examine the ways in which time is conceptualized and experienced in modern organizations. The following section will discuss time and relationships by specifically examining the changing nature of the stock market.

## DEVALUATING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE STOCK MARKET

One example of how efficiency has altered fundamental business relationships can be seen in the changing nature of investing. On the surface, the Internet has clearly increased the availability of information for both the casual investor and the professional broker. Stock market information is available instantaneously as it continuously streams onto the computers of investors. Whereas the mechanical clock was mentioned previously as the key instrument in synchronizing human activity, the computer, and, more specifically, the Internet, takes efficiency to an even higher level. By creating an environment where anyone with a computer can receive up to the minute stock information, the nature of investing shifts from relationship building between the investor and the organization in which the investment is made, or the investor and his or her broker, to the pure logic of the system. Of

course it would be naïve not to acknowledge the empowering aspects of this fundamental shift.

For many investors, the idea of being more knowledgeable or more in control of investment decisions is both empowering and fulfilling, and, in fact, many investors use this knowledge to make better decisions and improve communication with their stockbroker. Certainly, financial gain has been and will always be the overriding goal of investing. However, many people make investments because they trust or believe in an organization or because they trust or believe in the advice of their individual broker.

Although the first electronic stock trade is said to have occurred in 1983 (Lim, 2000), it is only since 1996 that Internet trading has become common. There were an estimated 7 million investors in 2000, and that number is estimated to increase five fold in 2003 (Lim, 2000). In an article discussing Internet investing, Nocera (2001) states that the initial advantages and democratization of the stock market, have given way to greed and a conceptualization of investing as convenient and easy. On the matter of convenience, this is undoubtedly the case with the exception of possible connection challenges and system crashes. However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that investing, on the Internet or otherwise, is not easy, particularly as individuals not knowledgeable or gifted in investing attempt to do so. The landscape has changed from the time when investors assumed that the corporations they worked for or trusted in were managing their money wisely, to an environment where up to the minute information has caused "too many people to become fixated on the market to an unhealthy degree, as if the act of making money with their money was the highest good they could perform as human beings" (Nocera, 2001, p. 58). Nocera (2001) further argues that, while day trading is the most visceral example of the downside of Internet investing, other examples, such as the physician who checks his portfolio multiple times per day, exist.

The Internet has served as the technological tool which has allowed time to intrude even further into our lives. The initial

efficiency of real time stock information has been replaced by a time consuming, unhealthy fixation on the market.

Perhaps no area of investing better illuminates the impact of time, and the elevation of efficiency and logic over relationships, than the phenomenon of day-trading. Day trading is the buying of stocks with the goal of quickly unloading the stock for a profit. It is called day trading because the idea is for the purchaser to buy low in the morning and sell high in the afternoon. However, the truth is that day trading is an extremely risky endeavor.

*In cyberspace, trades happen by the click of the mouse, and there are no advisors to offer their wisdom. This can give the feeling that one may be playing a game, without regard to the risks associated with such actions. In fact, this behavior, and the dreams of striking it rich with more frequent trades is what has given birth to the "day trading" industry . . . many in the investment community have attributed a significant portion of recent market volatility to these day traders. (Sharma, 2000, p. 61)*

Here we see time, in the form of instantly accessible information, and efficiency, in the form of one click trading, supplanting the traditional relationships involved in investing. Day trading reduces the entire investing transaction to a form of pure logic, completely void of relationships. Day trading creates a situation where investors are no longer partnered with an organization or broker—the environment, the employees, and the products of the organization are no longer of concern. Day trading investors are totally dissociated from the organization in which they invest, and they have no relationship with a stock broker. The function now becomes one of gain/loss logic, rather than relationship building and trust.

This brief examination of on-line investing, and day trading in particular, is just one example of how time, technology, and the drive towards efficiency has altered traditional organizational relationships. This example focused on the relationship between an investor and either an organization or a stock broker, but is experientially generalizable to other organizational relationships, both internal and external, that time

and the focus on increased efficiency have wrought.

### MODERNITY, POST-MODERNITY AND GLOBALIZATION

Various scholars have been ready for quite some time to move beyond the modern conceptions of organization theory. Scholars such as Hassard (1993), Mumby (1997, 2001), and Alvesson and Deetz (1996) have written about postmodern approaches to organizational studies. Some scholars such as Calas and Smircich (1999), and Kramer (1997), have even questioned whether or not it is time to move beyond post-modernism. And while these authors are all concerned with approaches to the study of organizations, it is important to realize that the vast majority of the world still operates from a very modern, classical management perspective. While postmodern perspectives can certainly lend insight to our understanding of organizations, it is necessary to use these theories critically to promote organizational improvement through increased worker participation and organizational fulfillment. Differing cultural conceptions of time serve as excellent examples of how heterogeneous the global organizational ecology is. Greider (1997) commented on life within each of the three planes of time consciousness.

*The world, one could say, was now divided by three different planes of consciousness in terms of how people thought about time. The global financial market and its electronic participants traded continuously around the clock and no longer paused to recognize day or night. Most people in modern society measured time in segments of hours and days, weeks or months. But the primitive among us, still existing in many places, continued to think and function according to the ancient cycles of the seasons. (p. 349)*

Clearly, any discussion of time and organizations that focuses solely on the highly coordinated and mechanized time of advanced industrial society is overlooking a significant portion of the population which experiences time differently. Therefore, it is necessary to touch on the interconnectivity of globalization in order to illuminate the vastness and reiterate the importance of understanding organizational

conceptions of time.

The growing interconnectivity among organizations across the world through communication technologies is the driving force behind the globalization movement. As organizations move from local, to regional, to international, to global entities, new questions and problems (as well as previously unsolved questions and problems) surface that must be addressed by both organizations and organization scholars. According to Parker (2001)

*There is a growing sense that events occurring throughout the world are converging rapidly to shape a single, integrated world where economic, social, cultural, technological, business, and other influences cross traditional borders and boundaries such as nations, national cultures, time, space, and industries with increasing ease. (p. 484)*

But what impact will this rapid integration have on and between all of the divergent countries, religions, economies, and cultures of the world? Though many acknowledge that globalization is occurring, few have agreed on the definition or the definitive aspects of the globalization process (Pieterse, 1995). Parker (2001) offers a few conceptualizations of globalization from the existing literature. From a sociological perspective globalization may be viewed as "compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992, p. 8). A business perspective might offer that globalization is a shift in the way that international trade and production is conducted (Dicken, 1992). These are only a few of the possible definitions and interpretations of globalization. If globalization is the increasing interconnectivity and interdependence on other countries and cultures, what are the implications of increased contact with different cultures? Is globalization ushering humankind towards homogeneity or will it simply make us more aware of our differences? Scholars such as Deetz (1992), Mander and Goldsmith (1996), and Korten (1999, 1995), to name a few, caution us to consider the impact of global organizations, which because of sheer size and fluidity of resources are no longer beholden to any national

government. Parrish-Sprowl (In Byers, 1997) characterizes globalization as a “communicative process that is both political and economic in nature” (p. 196), but he also sees globalization as “an attending perspective from which one may understand and frame communicative activity” (p. 196). Despite the diverse approaches to the study of organizations and globalization, organization scholars interested in globalization are situated at a unique time in history because the opportunity is there to study globalization as it unfolds. It is obvious that Parker (2001) is correct in her assessment that globalization studies need to be both interdisciplinary and international efforts. No study of globalization could be comprehensive if analyzed from only one perspective or country (Kramer, 2003). However, one issue should be obvious, increasing globalization and vastly different conceptions of time are likely to create much uncertainty, misunderstanding, and anxiety for organizational members regardless of whether they work in North America or China.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

##### *Reclaim the pre-modern organizational emphasis on relationships*

Based on the central argument of this paper which states that the manipulation of time to increase efficiency and control workers is essentially dehumanizing and contradictory to the human drive towards social networks, the following suggestion is presented:

*The satisfaction and fulfillment of organization workers must take precedence over technology and the standardization of efficiency.*

Earlier agrarian cultures emphasized the importance of the tribe or the village—yet, they were also highly efficient. In fact, fear of death was almost certainly a much more powerful and salient motivator, than fear of firing today. Therefore, earlier cultures which were reliant on efficiency for survival, never lost focus of the importance of communal relationships in achieving that goal. However, the characteristics of the modern organization include a drive

towards efficiency and productivity, role specialization (despite paeans to cross training), and hierarchy (despite paeans to horizontal structures and open door policies). There seems to be a modern organizational belief that relationships are contrary to efficiency, yet, earlier cultures seem to dispel that belief. Instead it is the opposite which is quite true; the emphasis on efficiency is contrary to relationship building.

Minus positive working relationships the workplace deteriorates into a collection of dissociated workers. A renewed emphasis on organizational relationships might be the most postmodern shift an organization could make. If postmodernity is characterized by a rejecting of the modern or that which comes after the modern—then what could be more postmodern concerning organizations than an affirmation of interpersonal relationships and emphasis on social networks? Relationships must become the most important organization variable.

*Increase understanding of conceptions of time as presented in organizational literature*

While this article has focused on the ways in which time works to shape organizational experience through efficiency seeking, it is important to recognize that other scholars have taken quite different approaches to understanding time in organizations. Primarily researchers have taken a more theoretical approach to the understanding and conceptualizing of time in organizations. An excellent overview of the cross-disciplinary nature of the study of time in organizations is provided by Ancona, Okhuysen, and Perlow (2001). According to Ancona, et. al (2001), the three principle categories of the study of time in organizations include, “conceptions of time, mapping activities to time, and actors relating to time” (p. 512). Their article serves as a summary of how researchers are using time to study organizations. Mainemelis (2001) takes a different approach to time by specifically investigating the phenomenon of timelessness in organizations. “Timelessness is the experience of transcending time and one’s self by becoming immersed in a captivating present-

moment activity or event" (Mainemelis, 2001, p. 548).

The issue of timelessness is directly related to the information presented in this article. Assertions made in this paper include how time controls and synchronizes behavior, and how this conception of time manifests itself in the worker's feelings of anxiety and dissociation. If timelessness is a possibility, then perhaps it is a key to addressing the problems associated with the drive to efficiency, and thus improving worker satisfaction, organizational relationships, and organizational identity.

Hassard's (1996) discussion of "how time and temporality have been portrayed in studies of work and organization" (p. 581), describes images of time as conceived by other academic disciplines, the impact of the industrial revolution on these conceptions of time, and how these conceptions of time structure our experience. In fact, much of Hassard's article is central to the present discussion. For example, Hassard asserts that organizational structure is predicated on "three temporal factors: synchronization, sequencing, and rate of activity" (p. 581). One caution identified by Hassard regarding present conceptions of time in organizations, is that we have increasingly focused on quantitative time—time as a divisible measurement that structures work activity. He argues for a renewed emphasis on understanding time qualitatively. "In concentrating upon temporal structuring, and thus in treating time as a hard, objective, and homogeneous facility, we have neglected how it is experienced as a soft, subjective, and heterogeneous abstraction" (p. 595). This call for a qualitative approach to how organizational workers experience time, is critically important to any understanding of time that seeks to improve the lived experience of the workplace. Sharing individual organizational narratives of the experience of time is a useful step in this endeavor.

*Pay attention to organizational narratives concerning time*

While it is clearly important to understand how researchers have approached, depicted and analyzed time and temporality in organizational studies, it is perhaps of more importance to understand how workers experience, make sense of, and describe time. Narratives, as a method for exploring experience, have proven useful to understanding. In fact, organizational narratives have increasingly gained in importance as an effective methodological tool for understanding experience. Organizational narratives concerning time allow the researcher to focus on the complex meanings created by the worker, rather than the rigid structure imposed by the organization. Narratives are present in all organizations and "are produced and reproduced in organizations as members make sense of a sequence of events, its causes, and its significance for the organization" (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996, p. 187). An empirical study directed at how workers experience and describe time through narrative would increase our understanding of time in organizations.

## CONCLUSION

Time has become increasingly utilized as a tool for organizations to increase productivity and control workers. The mechanical clock introduced a time consciousness into the world based on synchronization. This mass synchronization resulted in the structuring of organizational experience. As synchronization efforts increased, so too did the focus on efficiency—to the point where efficiency, along with task accomplishment, has become standardized as the ultimate goal of organizations. The struggle for greater efficiency creates an organizational environment where the worker is dissociated and dehumanized—subsumed by the machine. In addition to the mechanical clock, computers and the Internet have also contributed to the conquering of time in the organizational sense.

Social interaction is one of the fundamental drives of humanity, and this interaction is threatened by the standardization of efficiency. Conceptions of modernity, post-

modernity, and globalization illustrate the importance of understanding time and conceptions of time in an environment where cultures and organizations are increasingly connected, but increasingly impersonal. Re-emphasizing relationships, examining theoretical conceptions of time in organizations, and analyzing organizational member narratives are all suggestions for improving our present understanding of time and organizations.

## REFERENCES

- Alvesson, M., & Deetz, S. (1996). Critical theory and postmodernism: Approaches to organizational studies. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organization studies* (pp. 191-217). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ancona, D. G., Okhuysen, G. A., & Perlow, L. A. (2001). Taking time to integrate temporal research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 26 (4). Pp. 512-529.
- Barnett, J. E. (1998). *Time's pendulum: From sundials to atomic clocks, the fascinating history of timekeeping and how our discoveries changed the world*. Harcourt Brace & Company: New York.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Dicken, P. (1992). *Global shift*. London: Guilford Press.
- Ellul, J. (1964). *The technological society*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fulk, J., & DeSanctis, G. (2001). Articulation of communication technology and organizational form. In J. M. Shafritz & J. S. Ott (Eds.), *Classics of organization theory* (pp. 499-518). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers.
- Goodman, P. S., Lawrence, B. S., Ancona, D. G., & Tushman, M. L. (2001). Introduction. *The Academy of Management Review*, 26 (4), pp. 507-511.
- Greider, W. (1997). *One world, ready or not: The manic logic of global capitalism*. New York: Touchstone.
- Hassard, J. (1996). Images of time in work and organization. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organization studies* (pp. 622-641). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hassard, J. (1993). *Postmodernism and organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hassard, J. (Ed.) (1990). *The sociology of time*. London: Macmillan.
- Hatch, M. J. (1997). *Organization theory: Modern symbolic and postmodern perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Heath, L. R. (1956). *The concept of time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Korten, D. C. (1999). *The post-corporate world: Life after capitalism*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Korten, D. C. (1995). *When corporations rule the world*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Kramer, E. (1997). *Modern/Postmodern: Off the beaten path of antimodernism*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Kramer, E. (2003). *The emerging monoculture: Assimilation and the "model minority."* Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Landes, D. S. (2000). *Revolution in time*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lim, P. J. (2000). Buy, sell, buy, sell. *U.S. News & World Report*, 129 (22), pp. 75-76.
- Mainemelis, C. (2001). When the muse takes it all: A model for the experience of timelessness in organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, 26 (4), pp. 548-565.
- Mander, J. & Goldsmith, E. (Eds.) (1996). *The case against the global economy and for a turn toward the local*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Maslow, A. (2001). A theory of human motivation. In J. M. Shafritz & J. S. Ott (Eds.), *Classics of organization theory* (pp. 167-178). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers.
- McLuhan, M. (1967). *The medium is the message*. New York: Bantam.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media*. New York: Mentor.
- McPhee, R. D., & Poole, M. S. (2001).

- Organizational structures and configurations. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* (pp. 503-543). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mumby, D. K. (2001). Power and politics. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* (pp. 440-502). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mumby, D. K. (1996). Feminism, postmodernism, and organizational communication: A critical reading. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 9, pp. 259-295.
- Mumford, L. (1970). *The pentagon of power: The myth of the machine, volume two*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.
- Mumford, L. (1934). *Technics and civilization*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
- Nocera, J. (2001). A fan's complaints. *Money*, 30 (5), pp. 57-59.
- Parker, B. (2001). Evolution and revolution: From international business to globalization. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organization studies* (pp. 622-641). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pieterse, J. N. (1995). Globalization as hybridization. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (Eds.), *Global modernities* (pp. 45-68). London: Sage.
- Poster, M. (2002). Workers as cyborgs: Labor and networked computers. *Journal of Labor Research*, 23 (3), pp. 339-353.
- Postman, N. (1992). *Technopoly: The surrender of culture to technology*. New York: Vintage books.
- Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization: Social theory and modern culture*. London: Sage.
- Sharma, M. K. (2000). The growth of web-based investment. *Information Systems Management*, 17 (2), pp. 58-64.
- Taylor, F. W. (1911). *Principles of scientific management*. New York: Harper.
- Thompson, E. P. (1967). Time, work discipline and industrial capitalism. *Past and Present*, 38, pp. 56-97.
- Thurow, L. (1983). *Dangerous currents: The state of economics*. New York: Random House.
- Yates, J. (1989). *Control through communication: The rise of system in American management*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Copyright of TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science is the property of Tamaraland Publishing and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.