

# Incorporating the “Self” and the “Home”: Sociology of Remote Work Time

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Work-Nonwork Interface and Corporate Social Responsibility

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Prevalent remote work, the rapid adoption of remote collaboration tools, high time flexibility, and blurred work-life boundaries brought by COVID-19 have challenged knowledge workers' understanding of time. While working remotely via digital tools offers high autonomy on when, where, and what to do, the high job control also poses challenges for effective worktime control, boundary management (Biron & Van Veldhoven, 2016), and a healthy adoption of digital technologies (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019; Skjølsvik et al., 2018), all of which are crucial aspects of corporate social responsibility.

Perlow (1999) posited a “sociology of work time” that highlights the interdependent work patterns and suggests that existing time management literature's heavy focus on individual-level change does nothing to the synchronization among group members (Perlow, 1999). Such a framework implies that individual subjective time management needs to be entrained by the interdependent work temporal structure to optimize group results. However, it may not apply well in the remote work context as remote workers face high autonomy and multiple temporal structures to coordinate (e.g., independent work, interdependent work, home).

Further, time management is not a well-defined construct in research (Claessens et al., 2007). Organization research on individuals' subjective time management is still at an early stage and remains unsystematic (Shipp & Cole, 2015), with inconsistent findings on the relationship between time management practices and critical outcomes of well-being and performance (Aeon & Aguinis, 2017; Claessens et al., 2007). Further, the majority of past time management studies used student samples that may not generalize to work settings (Claessens et al., 2007). Most importantly, many apparently reliable temporal patterns and routines dissolved because of the pandemic, with new ones forming in a digitalized remote work context (Kunisch et al., 2021). In short, the time management literature has a loose grasp on individual subjective time management, especially in a digitalized remote work context.

To better understand the sociology of work time in the post-COVID flexible remote work era, this paper explores: *How do knowledge workers manage their time in remote work compared to office work?* We adopt a temporal structuring approach with a practice perspective to view time—through everyday actions, individuals produce and reproduce temporal structures that shape the temporal rhythms in organizations, which, in turn, reshape individuals' practices (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). We conduct inductive analysis based on a survey, interviews, and diaries on computer-based knowledge workers who can flexibly choose how often to work remotely. While the primary level of analysis is individuals' subjective time use, we also analyze how individuals' time use interplays with their work settings and the collective uses of time to better understand the individual-level phenomena—since individuals' subjective time use inevitably affects and is affected by their belonging teams and the organizations.

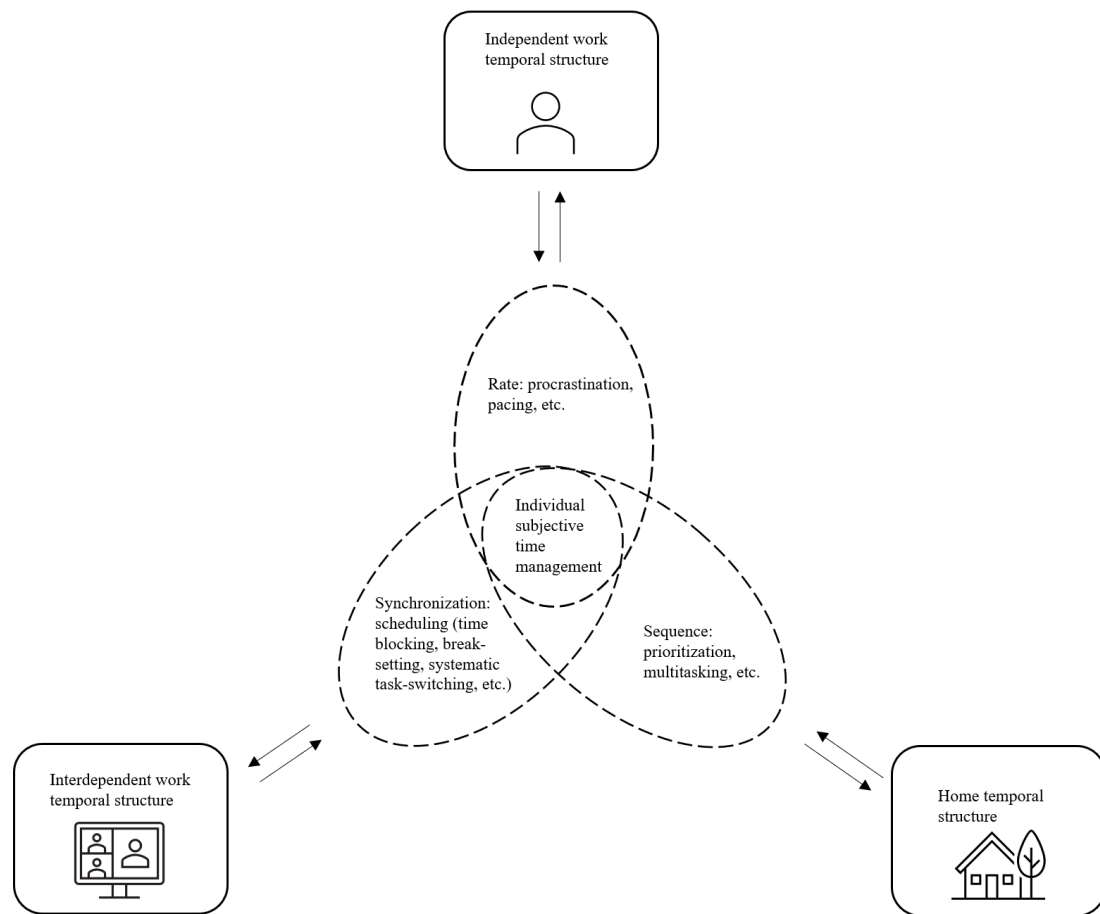
Our key finding is that individual subjective time management is essential in remote work due to the unique challenges of synchronizing multiple heterogeneous temporal

structures, i.e., independent work temporal structure, interdependent work temporal structure, and home temporal structure, to perform better at work and achieve better work-life balance. Building on Perlow's (1999) framework of sociology of worktime, we propose a new framework for the remote work context (Figure 1) by incorporating the independent work temporal structure and home temporal structure, with individual subjective time management at the center—individual remote workers have the autonomy to subjectively decide how to coordinate with coworkers, household members, and their individual preferences of temporal structures. This contradicts Perlow's (1999) opinion that individual-level change in time management behaviors does not affect the synchronization of interactions among individuals in collective settings. Expanding on the literature on entrainment (Ancona & Chong, 1996; Bluedorn, 2002) and temporal uncoupling (Blagoev & Schreyögg, 2019), we show that synchrony and asynchrony between multiple heterogeneous temporal structures can coexist in the remote work setting without independent work and home temporal structure necessarily being entrained by interdependent work temporal structure—individuals have the autonomy to decide how to prioritize or balance different temporal structure subjectively. Further, building on Moore's (1963) classification of temporal order (synchronization, sequence, rate), we add nuances of individual subjective time management under each class.

We suggest that putting individuals at the center of the sociology of work time has important implications in the era of flexible remote work and high autonomy at work. Proper time management is critical for handling high time flexibility and mitigating work-life conflicts under an integrated work-life boundary infused with technologies. As an inherent aspect of work, we hope to draw attention to the study of flexible remote work from the perspective of time.

(745 words)

**FIGURE 1 SOCIOLOGY OF REMOTE WORK TIME**



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