Taking Time Seriously as a Component of Employee Resilience

David K. Palmer
University of Nebraska at Kearney

Britt, Shen, Sinclair, Grossman, and Klieger (2016) recommend that our understanding of resilience would be advanced by making its temporal nature explicit. As a dynamic process, resilience is historical and temporal. The animating adverse event(s) and the resilient response(s) are dynamic and unfold over time; they often unfold as trajectories. This notion of trajectories implies a dynamic process, one progressing from one response or adaptation to another. These "temporal processes are a bit of a black box in I-O research" (Britt et al., p. 394). What would an extension of Britt et al.'s recommendation that researchers explicitly integrate time or temporality look like? Fully acknowledging the importance of time in this model may suggest worthwhile future research and potential interventions.

In the proposed model, elements composing "exposure to adversity" are specified; each can be conceived of as temporal in nature. Intensity refers to the peak-to-trough amplitude of an event(s). Frequency and predictability hint at its nature as a one-off event or as events reoccurring either randomly or regularly. Any event has a temporal duration, which within a specified time unit speaks to its frequency. All of these notions reflect time in the Newtonian sense of linearity: time as measured by clocks (McGrath & Rotchford, 1983) with the possibility of embedded cycles (Clark, 1985). However, time has been studied within industrial–organizational psychology from other perspectives, and these might be fruitfully integrated into resiliency research. One is an examination of various organizational processes that are explicitly temporal. Another is the psychological experience of time by organizational members. Both of these are tied to clock time but also exist independent of clock time.

Time Dimensions of Work
Schriber and Gutek (1987) posited 13 time dimensions of organizational culture and work. These dimensions either singly or in a myriad of combinations could influence and interact with the elements of adversity to weaken

David K. Palmer, Department of Management, College of Business & Technology, University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David K. Palmer, Department of Management, West Center 255W, College of Business & Technology, University of Nebraska at Kearney, Kearney, NE 68849. E-mail: palmerd@unk.edu

or strengthen the adverse event. These dimensions included schedules and deadlines, punctuality, future orientation, time boundaries between work and nonwork, quality versus speed, synchronization and coordination of work and others through time, awareness of time use, work pace, allocation of time, sequencing of tasks through time, intraorganizational time boundaries, autonomy of time use, and variety of routine. Lim and Seers (1993) tested a subset of Schriber and Gutek's (1987) dimensions and found relationships between future orientation, autonomy of time use, allocation of time, and in a post hoc analysis, awareness of time use and outcome measures of performance. These findings did not necessarily demonstrate causality, but they do speak to the applicability of the time dimensions of work as potential contributors to the outcome variables (e.g., job performance) that the model used to demonstrate resilience.

The focal article encourages us to focus on a narrower definition of adversity instead of on one where any aspect of organizational life that may, at one time or another, be stressful is evidence of adversity. Explicitly accounting for organizational processes that can affect exposure to adversity removes potential confounds and may allow researchers to identify adversity as opposed to stress. In addition, the model suggests as a modifier resources that influence capacity for resilience at the levels of the individual, unit, family, and community. Organizations' attention to addressing these dimensions may affect both the individual's and the unit's capacity to influence the severity or even the occurrence of the adverse event. For example, events experienced under extreme time pressure may be adverse, whereas lessening the time pressure may seriously scale back the adversity to a more manageable level with profound benefits for the individual and the organization. If extreme heat or cold (Britt et al., p. 383) can constitute a significant adversity, then extreme time pressure may as well. In addition, attention to these temporal aspects of organizations may also directly or indirectly influence family or community resources (e.g., time boundary between work and nonwork) and, in turn, influence the demonstration of resilience.

Psychological Experience of Time

People experience time in a number of different ways, not all of which reflect a linear, clocklike conceptualization of time. Researchers in the area of organizational time (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001; Bluedorn, 2002) have identified a number of relevant aspects of time that influence organizational phenomena and individual performance. Some familiar variables that are often studied in organizational temporal research are pace, temporal focus and depth, entrainment, and polychronicity. These aspects, along with others, can be considered as characteristics of individuals; they may be useful in describing the nature of the adversity (e.g., as a

misalignment between the individual and the situation/event) as well as suggesting possible interventions. Further research may be necessary to determine whether these individual characteristics contribute to resiliency or whether they act as confounds to measuring resiliency. Employing the notion of fit (Kristof, 1996), if an individual's preferences or predisposition along one of these dimensions matches the demands of his or her job or situation, we should encounter a less stressful situation. Misfit, however, should predispose one to experience greater stress and, in turn, possibly be more susceptible to experiencing adversity.

The four aspects of temporality presented as examples of a multifaceted plurichronicity are briefly described below.

Pace or tempo refers to how quickly people do things. Some people prefer to move at a slower, unhurried pace, whereas others move at a faster, hurried pace. It could be argued that the dimensions of exposure to adversity in the model (i.e., intensity, frequency, duration, predictability) to a large degree describe pace. Further evidence of pace as contributory to adversity is found within the Type A behavior pattern where an individual is constantly battling against time, in a hurry to accomplish more (Wright, 1988). This "hurriedness" has been found to be toxic and linked to coronary heart disease (Landy, Rastegary, Thayer, & Colvin, 1991).

Time horizon typically refers to whether an individual takes a short-term or a long-term perspective in their lives. A related concept is that of time orientation, which describes an individual's predisposition to focus on the past, the present, or the future. Often this characteristic is driven by one's culture. Bluedorn (2000) combined these two related concepts as temporal focus and temporal depth in a two-by-two matrix yielding a deep past, a deep future, a shallow past, and a shallow future. This formulation may be more useful in describing individuals than either time horizon or time orientation alone.

Bluedorn (2002) noted that the concept of entrainment had its origins in the natural sciences. As applied to organizational settings and individuals it describes the capture or alignment of organizational and individual cycles. Ancona and Chong (1996) defined entrainment as "the adjustment of the pace or cycle of an activity to match or synchronize with that of another activity" (p. 253). For example, many organizations entrain their activities to tax cycles, and the majority of organizations are entrained to the cycles represented by the calendar with its weeks and months. As one is captured by a cycle, process, or organizational routine, one experiences a loss of autonomy or a lessening of control and discretion of action. A lack of autonomy can be a powerful stressor (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

Polychronicity refers to an individual's preference for engaging in either one activity at a time (monochronic orientation) or multiple activities at a

time (polychronic orientation; Hall, 1983). As the concept was further refined, it came to incorporate other dimensions as well, such as the aforementioned preference for either single or multiple task engagement, as well as a sense of time as either tangible or intangible and a low context or a high context communication style (Palmer & Schoorman, 1999). For most purposes, polychronicity is synonymous with multitasking.

These aspects of temporality may help to describe the adverse event; for instance, is it fast paced, does it require multiple simultaneous tasks or stressors, does it embody entrainment and attendant feelings of loss of control and autonomy, and/or does it involve conflicts between the reality or demands of the event and the individual's personal time horizon and orientation? Recognizing the extent to which these dimensions may contribute to adversity may allow for interventions by the organization or the individual to modify them. In addition, they represent characteristics of the individual, unit/organization, family, or community that may, according to the model, moderate the trajectory of resilience.

Individuals experience multiple "times" or temporal variables simultaneously, for example, individuals do face situations that are not just hurried or unhurried but hurried and polychronic (i.e., multiple simultaneous tasks), entrained to the time cycle of another department, and so on. To capture this notion Palmer (2003) suggested that it would be useful to consider aspects of individual temporality not in isolation but in combination, as the multidimensional, time-focused, individual characteristic of plurichronicity. Plurichronicity was defined as "the ability to function effectively and comfortably within multiple time systems and with respect to multiple time-related variables." This suggests a personal characteristic that facilitates an individual's ability to function in stressful (or adverse) circumstances that are (partially) caused by some aspect(s) of temporality. Whether or not these stresses that are rooted in temporality rise to the level of adversity would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. In turn, how an individual responds, which according to Britt et al. could be seen as a demonstration of resiliency, may be influenced by his or her plurichronic profile. Measuring these characteristics may provide insights into resiliency. Although it may not be fruitful to discuss "temporal resiliency" per se, as this would further muddy the definition of resiliency (Britt et al., p. 381), it may be a worthwhile to investigate the possibility of temporal hardiness, adaptability, or even temporal self-efficacy.

From the standpoint of practice, an explicit integration of temporal variables and dimensions suggests a number of ways to improve outcomes. On the one hand, they suggest possible interventions (e.g., reducing time pressure, reducing scheduling problems) that may mitigate an adverse situation or lessen its likelihood of occurring. This could be accomplished through, for

example, changes in policy, information flow, job design, physical layout, or organizational design. It also suggests possible variables to consider during selection (e.g., an applicant's polychronic orientation) or training (e.g., ways to allocate time as a scarce resource/time management, e.g., Claessens, van Eerde, Rutte, & Roe, 2007).

Organizational temporal research provides a potential rich source of concepts for informing the integration of time into the study of resiliency. Britt et al.'s call for the methodology of resiliency research to more fully recognize time (e.g., longitudinal studies) is well founded; however, the contribution that "time" could make to our understanding of and practitioners' ability to facilitate resiliency is much broader.

References

Ancona, D., & Chong, C.-L. (1996). Entrainment: Pace, cycle, rhythm in organizational behavior. In B. M. Staw & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 18, pp. 251–284). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Ancona, D. G., Goodman, P. S., Lawrence, B. S., & Tushman, M. L. (2001). Time: A new research lens. *Academy of Management Review, 26*, 645–663.

Bluedorn, A. C. (2000). Time and organizational culture. In N. M. Ashkanasy, C. P. M. Wilderom, & M. F. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational culture and climate* (pp. 117–128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bluedorn, A. C. (2002). *The human organization of time: Temporal realities and experience.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Britt, T. W., Shen, W., Sinclair, R. R., Grossman, M. R., & Klieger, D. M. (2016). How much do we really know about employee resilience? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 9*(2), 378–404.

Claessens, B. J. C., van Eerde, W., Rutte, C. G., & Roe, R. A. (2007). A review of the time management literature. *Personnel Review, 36*, 255–276.

Clark, P. (1985). A review of the theories of time and structure for organizational sociology. In S. B. Bacharach & S. M. Mitchell (Eds.), *Research in the sociology of organizations* (Vol. 4, pp. 35–79). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1975). Development of the job diagnostic survey. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 60*, 159–170.

Hall, E. T. (1983). *The dance of life: The other dimension of time.* Garden City, NY: Anchor.

Kristof, A. L. (1996). Person–organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. *Personnel Psychology, 49*, 1–49.

Landy, F. J., Rastegary, H., Thayer, J., & Colvin, C. (1991). Time urgency: The construct and its measurement. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 76*, 644–657.

Lim, Y. M., & Seers, A. (1993). Time dimensions of work: Relationships with perceived organizational performance. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 8*, 91–102.

McGrath, J. E., & Rotchford, N. L. (1983). Time and behavior in organizations. In L. L. Cummings & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 5, pp. 57–101). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Palmer, D. K. (2003, April). *Multiple organizational times and the concept of plurichronicity.* Paper presented at the 46th Annual Conference of the Midwest Academy of Management, St. Louis, MO.

Palmer, D. K., & Schoorman, F. D. (1999). Unpacking the multiple aspects of time in poly-chronicity. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 14*, 323–344.

Schriber, J. B., & Gutek, B. A. (1987). Some time dimensions of work: Measurement of an underlying aspect of organizational culture. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 72*, 642–650.

Wright, L. (1988). The Type A behavior pattern and coronary artery disease: Quest for the active ingredients and the elusive mechanism. *American Psychologist, 43*, 2–14.