A phenomenological study of time concept and management and productivity in a sub-Saharan African context

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Abstract
The purpose of this article was to investigate the concept of time and its management in relation to productivity. Consequently, this work employed phenomenological psychology to unearth the experiences of employees on the concept of time management and its impact on productivity using Ghana as a study. Participants involved both local and expatriate workers sharing their experiences on the subject matter in a conversational style. Results indicated that clock time is considered a flexible resource in both social and professional settings. Findings also revealed that time management drives productivity, and its orientation is consequential to the cultural behaviors of local employees in both public and private organizations based on the quality of their corporate cultures. Hence, rigid timelines can turn around public organizations in sub-Saharan Africa and the world as a whole.

Keywords
Culture, expatriates, Ghana, local employees, management, phenomenology, sub-Saharan Africa, time concept, timelines and timescales

Introduction
Time as a concept and a resource in work organizations has been approached in different ways by different cultures due to the inherent cultural rules that are used to guide these time systems and orientations. Time orientation refers to the value or importance the members of a culture place on the passage of time (Lustig and Koester, 2006). Time-related behavior involves both the attitude to prearranged time and the pace of carrying out tasks (McLaren, 1998). There are several other ways in which the concept of time varies between cultures—time as a cyclical or a sequence—past, present, and future; and time as a precious resource which must not be wasted versus a more
leisurely approach to time (Guirdham, 1999). The spectrum of time links the sociocultural concepts of time to the study of social organizations. Consequently, diverse groups and organizations or societies manifest differing time perspectives by situating themselves differently with respect to their history and development, and this variation can lead to an extremely difficult problem in terms of organizational integration (Gurvitch, 1964). Thus, employees in organizations can experience different rhythms with different temporal perspectives as they work together.

Time as a social concept has been defined by Anderson and Venkatesan (1994: 179) as a comprehensive framework that encompasses the rules, standards, practices, and customs of human behavior and interaction with respect to temporality. Thus, the concept of time is a cultural design that underpins the way people live. So how is the concept of time regarded in sub-Saharan African countries? Time concept and management in organizations in most African countries and in particularly Ghana have been described in various ways. For example, Woode (1999) describes time management in Ghana as an unstable commodity. Mugambi (2012) describes time in Nigeria as a product that is never respected by most workers as people are kept waiting for hours during appointments. Similarly, Debrah (2002) asserted that the African culture does not emphasize the importance of time in organizational life and therefore, lateness abounds in organizations. On the other hand, Harvey and Kamoche (2004) stated that due to the diversity of the African continent, time can be viewed differently from the different cultures. This presupposes that the concept of time in sub-Saharan Africa needs to be exploited further as it provides a wobbling and varying description from different encounters. Yet, social scientists in the region have given little or no attention to the relationship between time-based concepts and specific social organizations. More significant to this contention is the absence of knowledge on how time management and experiences of workers may relate to productivity in organizations. Hence, our understanding of the concept of time in Africa calls for a better appreciation of the subject, which is the core objective of this current work. Additionally, this work attempts to respond to Jackson’s (2004) assertion that there is a lack of cross-cultural analysis and understanding in much of the work devoted to organization and management in sub-Saharan Africa. To the extent that this work is able to explain the value of time as held by employees in work organizations, and the relationship between time management and productivity, then would management of work organizations understand the concept of time as held by employees in sub-Saharan Africa, and also be capable of maximizing productivity levels of employees through cultural knowledge and experiences.

This study therefore is significant and contributes to our knowledge in many ways. First, it will help fill the theoretical gap in workplace time management concept, as studies to date on time concept have been extremely limited in scope and quantity. Second, the use of phenomenology to unearth the lived experiences of participants in this study gives it a distinctive advantage. Thus, findings are anticipated to provide tangible insight for managers in Western organizations expanding to sub-Saharan Africa to understand better the phenomenological attributes of time management in non-Western contexts. This orientation can also lead to the establishment of an Afrocentric management approach (Mbigi, 2000), which is a potential source of competitive advantage (Mangaliso, 2001) for organizations. Third, the time management concept in organizations is a little known phenomenon, thus findings of this study seek to explore where and why the concept policy is at odds with productivity. Lastly, the context of this study makes it unique in that sub-Saharan Africa has been plagued with research drought, so a study of this nature adds to our knowledge of management approach in the region. Consequently, this study clearly positions the concept of time and its management as a motivational concept and emphasizes its relationships with individuals and organizational behavioral consequences.
The rest of the article is organized as follows: The next section provides a theoretical rationale and an understanding of time concept through reviews, then a broad overview of the link between time and culture and time and productivity. The research design of the study is explained subsequently, which then leads to the analysis, findings, discussion, and conclusion of this work.

**Theoretical approach: Cultural patterns and orientations to time**

According to Hofstede (1980), culture is to humans collectively as personality is to an individual; and thus personality is defined as the patterns of an individual’s behavior that takes place in a variety of cultural situations (Gilkey and Greenhalgh, 1991). An individual’s personality is thus derived from the cultural patterns of a society. Cultural patterns are the shared beliefs, values, norms, and social practices that are stable over time and would commonly lead to similar behavior across similar situations (Lustig and Koester, 2006). These cultural patterns become the national guide of early childhood and formative experiences of the individual through education, language, religion, and geography (Derr and Laurent, 1989) and therefore responsible for creating national differences. National differences can have the greatest impact upon cultural value orientations and represent the highest level of cultural aggregation (Ford and Honeycutt, 1992). These differences are created and sustained by a complex set of forces that are deeply embedded within the members of a culture (Lustig and Koester, 2006). Thus, cultural patterns and orientations are significant determinants of organizational behavior in that organizations cannot afford to overlook them. Moreover, the interaction between an environment and people’s subjective attributes shapes behaviors and outcomes in organizations (Venkatraman, 1989). Accordingly, Nadkarni and Chen (2014) have argued that environmental context is critical in determining how managers of an organization make decisions on time production and the production of a new product. Therefore, different environments impose different demands and determine how the concept of time is perceived by management and workers. This is because the concept of time can either be regarded as a clock or systems. As a clock, it is regarded as an instrument used in measuring moments or activities of a day. As systems, it is the implicit cultural rules that are used to arrange set of experiences in some significant ways (Lustig and Koester, 2006). There are three types of time systems: technical, formal, and informal (Lustig and Koester, 2006). The technical time systems are the precise, scientific measurements of time that are calculated in such units as nanoseconds. Formal time systems refer to the ways in which the members of a culture describe and comprehend units of time. For example, how time is segmented into seconds, minutes, and hours. Informal time systems refer to the assumptions cultures make about how time should be used or experienced. For example, how long should a person wait for another person within a specific period? This presupposes that time is a cultural variable that sets the pace, timing, and the tempo of how time is lived (Anderson and Venkatesan, 1994: 179). As a result, the concept of time and its usage may vary significantly across traditions due to behavioral differences in national cultures (Brodowsky et al., 2008).

Although interest in the concept of time and management in organizations has received less attention particularly in relations to productivity, research in national orientations to time and individual behavior concept have been sparingly observed by few researchers. For example, anthropologists have examined the variability of time from culture to culture and have indicated that different cultures can have very different conceptions about the nature of time (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2002). Similarly, while earlier anthropological studies (Gurvitch, 1964) argued that different societies and groups manifest differing time perspectives and behave differently with respect to their history and development, current and modern researchers on time concept (Brodowsky et al., 2008;
Legohérel et al., 2009) also agree to this assertion and state further that time consciousness provides different cultural views and the consumption behavior of time. Likewise, Hall (1959, 1983) explained that time is related to behavior and attitude of cultures to prearranged time and the rate of carrying out any tasks. Hall distinguished two ways of organizing times—monochronic and polychronic. In monochronic cultures, people do things at a time. A monochronic culture therefore assumes careful planning and scheduling and is assumed to be a familiar Western approach that appears in disciplines such as “time management.” On the other hand, a polychronic culture assumes that human interaction and material things are valued over time, leading to lesser concern for “getting things done” at a specified time. In this context, people would rather do things at their own time. In his later research, Hofstede (1991) introduced a preference for short- or long-term planning as a major cultural dimension for societies and groups. It is worth noting that short-term planning tends to occur with monochronic attitudes to time and long-term planning with polychronic attitudes to time. Equally, The GLOBE study highlights the future orientation dimension which can be found in many cultures (House et al., 2004: 283). Significant to the descriptions of future orientation beliefs by GLOBE include the desire for achieving economic success, having a propensity to save for the future, and valuing deferment of gratification, all of which are grounded in the concept of time. This is why Usunier (2000) espoused that cultural assumptions influence people’s relationship with others and shape attitudes toward actions and behaviors. These cultural assumptions are based on the “value orientation” of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961). According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), value orientation means a sense of time where people display their values and behaviors either as “past oriented,” “present oriented,” and “future oriented,” or their activities of “being,” “being in becoming,” and “doing.” It is people’s orientation to time that highlights cultural receptiveness to time. Therefore, time can be regarded as an extremely complex concept, and understanding how individuals differ in their perceptions of time requires an awareness of different time dimensions and orientations. Saunders et al. (2004) outlined the different time factors associated with cultural and social dimensions as in Table 1.

Each culture develops a dominant conception of time by developing along these dimensions, and every individual has an innate sense of time that is hidden in their minds. A distinguishing quality of high- and low-context cultures is therefore their orientations to time. In the former, time is viewed as more open, less structured, more responsive to the immediate needs of people, and less subject to external goals and constraints, while low-context cultures are almost forced to pay more attention to time in order to complete the work of living with others (Lustig and Koester, 2006). Although sub-Saharan Africa has been classified as a high-context culture, what is the inherent sense of time to the worker in a Ghanaian organization? How is time management viewed in work organizations in relation to productivity? Time and productivity are essential management concepts therefore, understanding the concept of time management and its implication to organizational productivity in Ghana would help global management to better appreciate cross-cultural management issues in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, Harvey and Kamboche (2004) have advocated for Western managers to deal with the varying perspective timescales in the multiple African environment. This study is therefore appropriate in providing empirical lessons to foreign managers of the concept of time management in a sub-Saharan African context.

**Time as a productive resource in organizations**

Undoubtedly, there has been an emphasis on time as a productive resource for management in organizations in time and motion studies. Dating back to early scientific management studies,
Fredrick Taylor (1856–1915) had advocated for efficiency in management and productivity through time and planning. For example, Doob (1971) stated that “Time is one of the three factors involved in raising productivity...the other two are the work or goal achieved or the energy expended...hence, an operation is efficient when it is accomplished with the smallest expenditure of energy and time” (p. 349). Likewise, Lee and Liebenau (2002) emphasized that time is a resource that can be measured and manipulated to make organizations more efficient and productive by reducing the overall time it takes to complete a given amount of work. Similarly, Schriber (1986: 47) argued that central managerial tasks are to set deadlines within the work unit, negotiate interdependent deadlines with other work units, set and modify schedules, configure task sets into jobs, and allocate temporal resources to them. Hence, time is an essential aspect of modern managerial task, and time as a resource would play a mediating role in organizational performance. Thus, an organization’s ability to compete would depend on time, and organizations that are not governed by time capabilities in a given competitive environment would face a significant disadvantage (Peteraf, 1993). Likewise, managers with time focus are able to help their
organizations introduce new product innovations faster than those without time focus (Nadkarni and Chen, 2014).

Thus, time as a concept is commonly associated with organizations and productivity. In fact, conventional organizations tend to look at time in linear and orderly terms (Burrel, 1992). The linearity and orderliness of time encourages organizations to adopt time as a commodity that can either be spent or wasted. Linear time in organizations means time is used to lead a way from a starting point to a termination. This conceptualization of time is referred to as the economicity of time, which is established as a significant contributor to the development of the industrial revolution (Ancona et al., 2001). The industrial revolution brought about specialized jobs which were broken into time units that allowed organizations to pay employees for the time they worked rather than on a piecework basis (Saunders et al., 2004). With this conceptualization, time is seen as a resource that can be measured and manipulated to make organizations more efficient or productive by reducing the amount of time it takes to complete a given amount of work (Lee and Liebenau, 2002). Similarly, this notion of time outlines the time management of organizations as planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on a defined activity in order to increase efficiency and productivity.

In all likelihood, modern industrial organizations are dominated by clock time or objective time as global competition has become a dominant feature of attractiveness. Hence, the concept of time can play an important role in organizational life and success. Consequently, the following research questions follow from the literature and guide the current study: (1) what are the attributes of the concept of time in Ghanaian organizations? (2) Is there a relationship between time management and productivity in Ghanaian organizations? (3) How is the concept of time regarded and managed in Ghana? Given the limited theory and research that speak to our research questions, this work adopted a phenomenological approach (Colaizzi, 1978) to gain a better understanding of the how, the why, and to what effect the concept of time has on work organizations.

Research design and data analysis

The significance of the topic demands an understanding of the whole phenomenon of time management concept. This requires intensive interviews in which the researcher is thoroughly involved in gathering information than resorting to quantitative perception of participants’ opinion. Consequently, the choice of phenomenology as a qualitative method of data gathering and analysis in which, with the application of fewer intensive interviews, the researcher can become intensively involved in the process to better appreciate participants’ daily use of time was employed. Phenomenology is concerned with human experience—a phenomenon that is known to us through our senses (Descombe, 2003). Phenomenology tends to look at data thematically to extract essence and essentials of participants’ meanings (Miles et al., 2014). Essence is what makes a phenomenon what it is, and the phenomenon of time concept which has been poorly and differently conceptualized necessitates a full understanding of lived experience of participants in a particular context. Additionally, the phenomenological approach is an attempt to understand empirical matters from the perspective of those being studied (Creswell, 1998). It serves as the rationale behind efforts to understand individuals by entering into their field of perception in order to see life as these individuals see it (Bruyn, 1966) and therefore considered an effective and appropriate method for this study. Hence, Colaizzi’s (1978) method of phenomenological psychology was used to guide this study. It involves everyday lived experiences of workers through interviews as the source of data for the study. As the concept of time management involves everyday life experience of people at work,
it is very appropriate to use Colaizzi’s method of phenomenological psychology to unearth participants’ knowledge of time management in this study. The procedural steps of Colaizzi’s (1978) method of data analysis which guided this study are as follows:

1. Read the participants descriptions (protocols) of the phenomenon under study to gain a feel for them in order to make sense of them.
2. From each protocol, extract significant phrases or sentences that pertain to the phenomenon being studied.
3. Formulate meanings for each significant statement by means of creative insight of what participants said to what they mean. In this step, creative insight, according to Colaizzi (1978), means the researcher does not sever ties with the original protocols but attempts to discover hidden meanings.
4. Organize the formulated meanings into clusters of themes to allow for themes that are common to the participants’ protocols to emerge. The clusters of themes are referred back to the original protocols to validate them (Beck, 2006). At this stage in data analysis, Colaizzi (1978: 61) warns the researcher to “rely upon tolerance for ambiguity” and not to give in to temptation to ignore data or themes that do not seem to fit.
5. All the findings from the data analysis are combined into exhaustive description of the phenomenon under the study.
6. The exhaustive description is tightened up into “as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible” (Colaizzi, 1978: 61).
7. The final step is validation, when the researcher can return to participants and ask them to review the results so far. The researcher can inquire, for example, if any aspects of their experience have been left out. Any new or relevant information provided at this stage of validation should be integrated into the final result of the research (Beck, 2006).

Sample

The sampled participants for this study involved workers in both public and private organizations in Ghana. The private organizations comprised of seven multinational companies (MNCs), one law firm, one quasi-judicial organization, one nongovernmental agency, one bank, and one international insurance company. The public organizations were drawn from the educational, health, judicial, and financial sectors of Ghana. The participants were purposively sampled and comprised of very experienced and well-educated managers who have knowledge in the management of time and its concept in the various organizations. The level of education and length of work indisputably demonstrates a person’s knowledge and experience of a phenomenon at hand, and therefore, the choice of the interview participants of this study. In all, 22 participants made up of 14 indigenous Ghanaian workers and 8 expatriate workers, all working in either a public or private organization in Ghana were interviewed. The sample of 22 interviewees is far more adequate for a phenomenological study as “typically, phenomenological studies involve a smaller number of study participants—often 10 or fewer” (Polit and Beck, 2010, p.267). All participants in the study were approached and explained to by the researcher the reasons for the study. The reason for the mixture of expatriates and indigenous Ghanaians was to find a balance and to offset the focus of data collection from one-sided informants (only Ghanaian). Particularly with a subject of time management and its implication to Ghanaian organizations, it was necessary to have some thoughts and experiences from foreign workers in the country too. The demographic characteristics of participants are given in Table 2.
Procedure

The participants in this study required the description of their day-to-day experiences of time and the management of time in their workplaces in as much detail as the participants wished to share. Thus, the participants shared their lived experiences with the researcher through audio interviews. Each taped interview lasted between 30 min and 1 h 12 min. A benefit of the audiotaped interview is that it enables the researcher to engage in long conversations and concentrate on listening and analyzing what is being said without having to think about note taking (Sacks, 1992). The taped interviews were transcribed one-by-one from each of the 22 subjects, and the significant statements extracted from these transcriptions became the raw data of this study for analysis. From the transcriptions, meanings were formulated from these significant statements. The formulated meanings were arrived at by reading, rereading, while reflecting upon the significant statements in the original transcriptions in order to get the honest meaning of the interviewees’ statements. The aggregated formulated meanings were then organized into (cluster) categories of themes which were emerged from the data and were common to all of the subjects’ descriptions. These categories are presented in Table 3.

Validation of the data

The categories were referred back to the original descriptions in order to validate them. A further validation of the categorized data was undertaken by contacting seven of the participant-interviewees since all 22 interviewees could not be contacted again. Three of the participants were revisited, while the other four were contacted through telephone (telephone numbers of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Job position</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Masters</td>
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<td>10 years</td>
<td>Public</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>Ghanaian</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>Lecturer</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>5 years</td>
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<td>HR assistant</td>
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<td>9 years</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Ghanaian</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Public</td>
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<tr>
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<td>American</td>
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<tr>
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</table>
Table 3. Categories of common themes.

1. Flexibility of time in Ghana
2. Timeline disparity between locals and foreigners and, public and private organizations
3. Time management as a driver of productivity
4. Time management as a cultural behavior in Ghana
5. Time management as a nonverbal communicative behavior

Participants were collected by the researcher during the interviews). This was done to ask them if the descriptions formulated validated their initial experiences in which they agreed.

Results

From the 22 conversations on time management and time concept in Ghana, several many significant statements were extracted, and analysis of these significant statements revealed five clusters of themes that captured the importance of the phenomenon of time concept in Ghana.

Flexibility of time in Ghana

All participants for this study strongly argued that clock time in Ghana is very flexible. Responses of the participants show that workers believe that time is owned by the individual, and therefore time should be managed as it suits the worker instead of the prototypical western rigidity of time scale. Thus, for the worker in Ghana, clock time ought to be flexible. This explains the reason why most employees convey this socially derived concept of time to work organization. The flexible nature of time management has therefore become an attitude and behavior of workers in Ghana. It is therefore not surprising as all interviewees passionately described the Ghanaian concept of clock time as very flexible in which people believe they own their individual time lines. This dimension of time concept is haphazardly managed and unstructured resulting from the elastic nature of the notion of time held by people which permeates through work organizations. The flexibility of time in Ghana is eloquently described in the following quotations by the respondents of this study.

I think the time concept in Ghana is too flexible, in that everybody wants to do whatever they want to do at their own time without recourse to what the procedures are in terms of timelines for doing something. For instance, people want to come to work at their convenience and leave at any time they wish, which means they don’t have that time consciousness as should be in relation to their work. (Respondent 1)

Similarly, Respondent 2 observed that:

In Ghana, there is something we call African time, that is to say we are not so concerned about keeping to our timelines. If one has an appointment, the person thinks that the time will not be kept due to the flexible notion of time so there is no need for him to be there on the said time.

From the personal statements above, the flexibility of time permeates through most sectors of organizational life of Ghanaians. The malleable nature of time management in social and work organizations suggest that the dimension of clock time is not rigid, as people see time as being there always; and that time will wait for people, and there is no need for people to rush as they can respond to time as and when they like.
Timeline disparity between locals and foreigners, and also public and private organizations

It is widely acknowledged that there is cultural diversity and differences of people, and this difference is well demonstrated in clock time behaviors of employees in work organizations. All participants in this study agreed that timescale differences or timeline disparity is greatly manifested in Ghanaian organizations when local employees are working with foreign employees. Similarly, the results confirmed that there are discrepancies in managing timelines during work between private sector employees and public sector employees. Participants in the interview revealed that most expatriate workers get frustrated with local people due to pervasive time disparity between them. This is strongly illustrated by Respondent 11 as:

Working here in Ghana as a manager, I’ve seen many cases of divergence or differences of managing and using time between expatriates and local employees that has to do with point of reference and expectations. As an example, you might have an expatriate who expects that if a meeting is set one week in advance for 2 o’clock then the meeting will come off at 2 o’clock. But you get to the meeting at 2 o’clock exactly only to realize that it is empty. Then after 30 minutes to an hour or, perhaps after several phone calls to remind them, then you find that people have began to trickle in.

Similarly, Respondent 13 stated that:

I have worked in many different countries around the world and in business for a long time. But I have come to realize that expatriates display a sense of urgency than perhaps Ghanaians do. There is ‘what doesn’t get done today will get done tomorrow’ attitude among the local Ghanaian workers. Expatriates for most part come from the Western environment where the pace is a lot quicker and a stronger sense of urgency.

Likewise, Respondent 12 notes that:

There is too much greater comfort amongst local staff with regard to time management. I think it goes both ways as an expatriate coming here to understand the Ghanaian culture, but it is also equally important for the Ghanaians to understand the culture of the organization and the individuals that they are working with. That’s where I can say sometimes there is misunderstanding on both sides.

In the same way, the interview results of the study confirmed a disparity of time behaviors between respondents who work in public and private organizations. Although time management is rigidly structured in most private organizations, it is loosely structured or very flexible in public organization. Participants from private organizations believed that there was no compromise between supervisors and subordinates in terms of the approach to time for work. Private organizations have to meet the bottom line in response to the competition in the industry therefore; time must be rigidly adhered to. In fact, there was unanimous declaration of the importance of time management and its rigid application by both expatriates and Ghanaian respondents who work in private organizations. Thus, time value was of essence from production to consumption of the end user in both private organizations although the case was different in public organization. For example, Respondent 22 argued that:

The insurance companies are numerous and in serious competition. Both small and big companies are chasing the same clients and underwriting same policies in the same market. Consequently, if a client schedules a time and you miss it, another insurance company will take it. Additionally in making decisions
for claims, insurance agents must arrive at locations of accidents in time to protect property if not the people
could steal items or inflate the list of items, and this adds to cost to the company. Hence the private
companies are always on the ground in terms of promptness of time.

Similarly, Respondent 18 asserted that

Having worked at both public and private organizations in Ghana, I see that private organizations enforce
the laid down rules, while public organizations are relaxed with their policies. Hence, I see the difference
between working in the public sector and now working in the private sector. Nobody questioned me anytime
I was late in coming to the office while I was with the government sector. But here, even before I get to my
seat each morning almost everyone is already seated and so, you are compelled to also come early.

Equally, Respondent 21 complained about the different behavior pattern he encountered in
working at both public and private organizations. He emphasized that:

Previously as a teacher in the public sector, we were much more relaxed in carrying out our teaching
activities. Heads of departments were not serious in monitoring us. As a result many of us carried on with
the organization of extra classes for monies at the detriment of the normal classes we were employed to do.
But when I left there and started working at my current private organization, reporting time is 7.30 am
exactly daily, and there is no compromise to this.

From the lived experiences of respondents above, we see clear variations of how time is observed
and managed in both private and public organizations in Ghana. This explains why corporate culture
impacts the behaviors of employees in work organizations. In situations where private organizations
have strict and nonflexible policies regarding time management and timelines, local employees are
enforced to adhere to these rules and work goes on well without many excuses. On the other hand,
organizations like those in the public sector which have relaxed their rules and policies on employ-
ees’ time management are faced with constant excuses and absenteeism of the workers and this
certainly affects productivity. These differences of timescales or schedules between private and
public organizations are caused by the orientation of time concept held by management and
employees in organizations.

**Time management as a driver of productivity**

The view that clock time and its management are associated with organizational productivity was
reflected in the conversations of all the interviewees. Narrating from their individual lived
experiences, all respondents agreed that effective time management is linked to productivity within
organizations. Interviewees claimed that if employees are less efficient in the management of
organizational time, then organizational resources would be underutilized leading to inefficiency
and unproductive organization. For most participants, if shops, work organizations, and institutions
are supposed to be opened and closed at specific times of the day yet, this is not observed by the
workers, then the government or owners of these institutions suffer the consequences because the
workers are paid for less work done. The interview data showed that time drives productivity and
the efficient use of time will certainly lead to better performances of organizations. The reason is that
organized time indicates time that is measured and regulated in the pursuit of organizational
objectives. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate these points:
Here, it is normal to visit work organizations or shops and it is written ‘this shop will open at 9 o’clock’, yet at 9 o’clock the shop is not opened for business. You go to the State Transport Corporation (STC), they will tell you that departure time is 9 o’clock. At 10:30 to 11 o’clock you are still there not even sure of when the buses will depart, and this affects business and productivity. People who pay attention to time are very successful because time is money. (Respondent 7)

Time drives productivity because if you are able to organize yourself well in terms of timelines, you are able to get to the people on time, you are able to work effectively and efficiently, and you are able to produce good result. (Respondent 9)

**Time management as a cultural behavior in Ghana**

In the course of the interviews, respondents frequently mentioned that employees’ comportment to time in Ghana is more of a cultural behavior than an individual’s arranged behavior. Data from the interview revealed that time is highly unstructured and planning of time among employees in work organizations is flexible and subjective. This behavior stems from the cultural socialization of Ghanaians as it pervades in the Ghanaian social systems. Hence, labels like “Ghana-man time,” “Ghanaian time,” “African time,” and “African punctuality” are all embedded in our cultural milieu and manifest during the celebrations of funerals, festivals, traditional durbars, and so on. For instance, it is perfectly acceptable to be late for a ceremony but unacceptable to absent oneself. What matters is the presence of the person but the time of his/her arrival is insignificant. This is how members of the society perceive and comprehend the units of time (Lustig and Koester, 2006). Thus, it is common to see both traditional and political leadership, and even most managers arriving late at functions and events yet, their arrivals are welcomed because as family oriented or collectivist people, the presence of the person to a ceremony or an occasion is more important than his/her absence. This is echoed in the statement of Respondent 3 as follows:

> Our time management has something to do with our tradition and culture. This is because the chief is always the last person to arrive at a ceremony and nobody forces the chief to come to a program. For this reason, everybody will be seated, while the chief will still wait and come last and this culture has actually permeated through our management and administrative circles. Nobody questions the chief and nobody can punish the chief for any behavior.

Additionally, Respondent 2 stated that:

> Our management of time is routed in our cultural make-up, our cultural values, and our attitude towards work. In fact, it is common to hear things like oh! 5 minutes lateness is nothing, 10 minutes out of 3 hours is nothing so people are used to this lateness. I think it borders on leadership too and then our own cultural values and this explains our attitudes towards work and time.

**Time management as a nonverbal communicative behavior**

The organization of time in Ghana has become behavioral and attitudinal that is accepted by society. Participants in the study believe that attitude to time management in work organization has become a distinctive communicative behavior of employees resulting from the cultural orientation to time. The depictions “Ghana-man time,” “African time,” “Ghanaian time,” and “African punctuality” approve flexible time as an acceptable behavior. Therefore, most people in Ghanaian organizations who hold rigid time scales and display a sense of urgency to work-related activities are sometimes
seen differently and rather not behaving to the norms. Hence, time management in Ghana has become a nonverbal communicative behavior expressed in both social gatherings and organizations. Woode (1999) says that the lack of respect for time is usually and easily explained as African punctuality, which means it is African to be late for social events and organizations. Being late therefore communicates normality, and when time is given for an event, every attendee knows that an “invisible” additional time should be added to the official time, since time in the Ghanaian context is fluid. Respondent 10 explained that time management has become a communicative behavior in the following excerpt:

Generally, our behavior to time management stems from our attitude and behaviors, because our time management has become a regular behavior that communicates normality. For instance if someone is late to work and you happen to be the head and you decide to punish him or discipline him for being late, you find people coming to beg. They try to devalue what you are doing. For instance, you find people coming to say oh! The man was only 5 minutes late; the man was only 10 minutes late so why do you want to punish him for this?

Time management as nonverbal communicative behavior is equally highlighted in the following words of Respondent 4:

I think it’s because we perceive time to be flexible in Ghana therefore, the notion that if somebody doesn’t meet a given time, it doesn’t mean the work can’t be done. It’s just like be a little patient for the other person to come along and then we all go together. This has become a normal behavior even with foreigners in Ghana, in that most of them now appear to relax with their time management because they think that every Ghanaian is relaxed about time.

Hence, time management in Ghana is widely acknowledged as a distinctive behavior and, the Ghana-man time is very much now accepted in our social lives.

Discussion

This study contributes to our current understanding of the concept of time and time management which is considered to be an important phenomenon in driving productivity because clock time management makes it easier to estimate and account for labor cost in organizations (Saunders et al., 2004), thereby making organizations more efficient (Lee and Liebenau, 2002). This was achieved through a phenomenological examination of the experiences of 14 indigenous and 8 expatriate workers in Ghana who have a better understanding of time management practices in Ghanaian organizations. The study found that time is very flexible in Ghana, and this arises from the orientation of people to the concept of time and how they define time management. Specifically, the flexibility of time in Ghana predicts the fluidity of time with regard to public activities. Though there is a standard reporting time for work and then for checking out of office in public organizations, these time schedules are mostly not adhered to due to the contextual perception of time as an expansive resource. The implication is that most organizations in Ghana lose substantial amount of productive time to social loafing arising from late arrivals and early departures to and from work organizations. The flexibility of time also explains the reasons for the excessive excuses workers give to their supervisors when they absent themselves from work or arrive late at official functions. For those who get to work early enough, the reason is not because they are conscious of time management but because they want to avoid the peak time traffic, and so in order to avoid the
chaotic traffic and conserve fuel or exhaustion on the roads, they leave home very early to escape the traffic. At the same time, they leave their offices early to avoid the late evening traffic.

The study also found timeline disparities between local employees and expatriates in work organizations. Findings revealed a clear divergence of work behavior in relations to time management of local Ghanaians and expatriates during work. Although most expatriates express their discontent with the time management of local employees with regard to project timelines, local employees see the inability to complete work on time schedules as a normal thing. The explanations given by local employees for not strictly following time schedules is that, after all the projects or schedules would definitely be completed, and therefore strict adherence to time should not be a panacea for completion of work. The implication is that contextually, time should not be seen as a rigid commodity but one that enables an individual a little comfort or space. Differences in timelines between workers in an organization can create rifts and frustrations as the approach to work become very divergent between the groups, and this can affect organizational output. Work organizations are meant to have goals and visions which drive all employees to achieve these goals. Thus, efforts to respect timelines of production by both local and foreign employees should be encouraged rather than accepting their differences in expectations, and approaches to work as businesses have unique missions to be accomplished by all employees. Similarly, the findings demonstrate the marked differences in the approach to time management between public and private organizations in Ghana. The public sector’s culture of time management appears to focus on procedures and the way work can be completed with flexible time focus. On the other hand, the private sector culture of time management appears to focus on achieving organizational outcome based on exigency and fixed time focus since its goal hinges on financial survival of the organization. Thus, we see the urgency in which private sector employees approach their work as opposed to the flexible manner in which public sector workers approach their work behavior. This explains why the same citizens working in public and private organizations have different time management approaches to work because a strong corporate culture with the values of rigid timescales will enforce its rigid behavior on employees, whereas an organization with a fluid corporate culture would be affected by flexible timescales. This difference in approach to time management results from the cultural orientation of the organization. It is therefore not surprising as both expatriates and local employees from private organizations were unanimous in their views about the respect for time management in their respective work places.

Another major finding that is highlighted by this study is that time management drives productivity. Respondents indicated that “time is money,” and the efficient use of time in organizations would lead to effective and resourceful organizations. This means the proper management of time and its rigid application to schedules will lead to organizational success. This finding supports Peteraf’s (1993) assertion that organizations’ ability to compete depends on time and organizations that are not directed by proficient use of time in a given competitive environment face a significant disadvantage. As a result, respondents lamented that many problems of inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of public sector management are caused by disregard for scheduled time management in Ghanaian organizations. This finding answers our research question 2 which states that “is there any relationship between time management and productivity in Ghanaian organizations?” Consequently, the finding reinforces the fact that time as a resource can be used to make organizations more efficient and productive if organizations use their time management profitably. This is consistent with Nadkarni and Chen (2014) who stated that managers with rigid time focus are able to innovate faster and are more efficient. The implication of this finding is that for organizations in sub-Saharan Africa to be more efficient and competitive globally, they (organizations) must improve on
their time-bound activities through a modification of the current condition of the flexible time management approach at work place, to a more structured and rigid application of time lines on organizational production.

Additionally, findings of this study show that time management in Ghana is a cultural behavior. Respondents in this study indicated that the notion of time is embedded in their culture. Thus, the behavior of workers to time management at work is derived from the cultural socialization of the indigenes as it pervades in the Ghanaian social systems. The labels “African punctuality”, “African time”, “Ghana-man time”, and “Ghanaian time” are all indications that time behavior and management are deep seated in the African culture. This means time is accepted as a contextual variable where people are not particularly concerned about the time guests arrive at formal functions, but the significance of their presence and participation. Thus, it is common to see many Ghanaians and Africans attending ceremonies and programs in mid-ways or towards the end, yet organizers of these functions are happy to announce their late arrivals with excitement. This is how time is manifested in Ghana and thus provokes such behaviors as the individual understands the concept of time as an intersubjective factor (Saunders et al, 2004) meaning, people should define the way time should be experienced.

Furthermore, findings show that time management in Ghana has become a communicative behavior. In fact, respondents in the study believe that attitude toward clock time in work organization has become a distinctive communicative behavior of employees resulting from the cultural and environmental moderation of time in Ghana. This posture of “African punctuality or Ghana-man time” has become acceptable by society as a behavior that communicates a clock time that is distinctive to Ghana or Africa and implies undefined but practicable. Accordingly, people in this context understand the concept of time as abstraction in which multiple events can occur at the same time but not time that is static and concrete. This finding is consistent with Saunders et al.’s (2004) dimensionality of time based on the sociocultural background of people. Thus, findings of this study have demonstrated the link between cultural patterns and orientations to time concept and management of time among Ghanaians.

**Conclusion, implications, and suggestion for future research**

In conclusion, this study establishes that though time is an important resource that may determine organizational productivity, most workers in Ghana consider the concept of time as a flexible commodity that should not be measured rigidly due to cultural patterns and the Ghanaian orientation to time. Consequently, our research question 1 which states that what are the attributes of the concept of time in Ghanaian organizations? is answered. The leniency of employees’ approach to time in work organizations affects productivity especially in public sector organizations where these attitudes and behaviors of timekeeping are widespread. The social and economic implications of these attributes and attitudes shape organizational outcomes. Hence, findings of this study support the general assumption that most people in Ghana do not subscribe to rigid timescales, and this provides an answer to our research question 3 which states “How is the concept of time regarded and managed in Ghana?” Also, results from the study indicate timeline disparities between public and private organizations. This may be due to the orientation of corporate culture on employees’ behavior. A corporate culture with rigid time scales will influence employees’ behaviors on effective time management as observed in this study by most private organizations, whereas a corporate culture with flexible time scales and policies will encourage the elasticity of time as experienced in most public sector organizations.
Additionally, the study findings demonstrate that time management is closely associated with organizational productivity. This means if clock time is considered as an organizational resource and planned appropriately in the pursuit of organizational goals based on timelines, then organizational output would improve positively. This finding is consistent with Doob (1971) who argued that time is one of the three factors involved in raising productivity because production lines become efficient only if people expend a little more of their time and energy. Similarly, the findings of this work show that time management is linked to cultural behaviors. The fundamental cultural differences among people are connected to their orientations to time and therefore their differing behaviors to the management of time. Ghana and for that matter Africa lie within the high power distance and collectivist dimensions (Hofstede, 1980), and these traits are associated with polychronicity or polychronic time scales (Hall, 1959). It is therefore not surprising that most Ghanaians or Africans value human interactions over time scales leading to lesser concern for “getting things done” at a specific time. Therefore, managers ought to explain to local employees the importance of timelines on productivity and, at the same time, encourage expatriates to try to accommodate the local culture and playing soft with local employees as differences in time schedules can result in conflict. Finally, findings of this work indicate that time management has become a nonverbal communicative behavior of Ghanian employees. The concept of time and its management is bonded in the social behavior of the indigenes in that it is perfectly normal to be late for work and functions and yet complete schedules on flexible timescales.

There are a number of theoretical and practical contributions of this research. Theoretically, this research contributes to our understanding of time management approach in at least four ways. First, time as a resource is flexible in Ghana. Therefore, understanding the behaviors of how people approach time management in work organizations is critical in sub-Saharan Africa management theory and thus represent an Afrocentric managerial approach (Mbigi, 2000). Second, this work relates time management behaviors to both national and corporate cultural activities and explains that a corporate culture that determines to meet its expectations on time management can shape the employees’ dimension of time to the corporate expectation. Third, this work theorizes that time management demonstrates a communicative behavior of people in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. An individual’s approach to time mirrors his/her attitude to work and activities. Fourth, this work clarifies the variations of timeline disparities between local employees and expatriates on one hand and public and private organizations on another and calls for management’s acceptance of hybridization of management systems and cultural interface (Jackson, 2011) in order to address the different perspectives on time management of employees. These lessons on the administration of time management behaviors of employees highlight the practical and managerial lessons for both local and international companies working in sub-Saharan Africa. Future research will need to use this exploratory study as a guide to frame questions that can be used quantitatively for a wider population and sample on the subject. Similarly, extending this study to other sub-Saharan African countries to validate these findings should be encouraged by future studies.

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