Hede Helfrich, Erich Hölter and Igor V. Arzhenovskiy, eds.

This book represents the conversations that took place at the international symposium “Time and management in Germany in Russia” on September of 2009. The chapters included in this book thus represent diverse conversations that may promote further discussions about how different cultural and technological backgrounds lead to different perspectives on time. The chapters that focus on how temporal orientations relate to cultural values draw on Hofstede’s (2001) typologies of cultural dimensions. Consistent with Hofstede’s view, most chapters in this book acknowledge the influence of demographic, technological, and cultural structures on these cultural dimensions. Some chapters also present potential management system interventions to promote linear time, considered appropriate for global organizations.

The first chapter in this book, by Geert Hofstede, lays out the dimensions of national cultures from his research. Power distance refers to “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (such as the family) tend to accept, and expect that, power is distributed unequally” (6). The individualism-collectivism continuum represents “the degree to which individuals in a society tend to be integrated into groups” (6). Uncertainty avoidance implies “to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in structured situations” (7). Masculinity-femininity reflects “the distribution of roles between the sexes” (7), whereas long-term orientation reflects “thrift, adaptation, and perseverance” (8) and short-term orientation implies “respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one’s face” (8). As Helfrich (chap. 12) and Arzhenovskiy (chap. 13) note, temporal orientations based on cultural backgrounds are not confined only to nations but also to vocational groups and to regions. Helfrich finds that different vocational groups in Germany have different orientations to time. Similarly, Arzhenovskiy notes that different regions in Russia have different temporal orientations. Thus, the depictions of temporal orientations based on national cultures depicted in several chapters of the book need to be considered as a first step in the conversation, with the need to take into account regional and professional backgrounds.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are a foundation for the discussion of temporal orientations in several chapters of the book. Bhagat and Vickrey (chap. 2) relate collectivism to polychronicity and suggest that Russian organizational members tend to be more polychronic than their German counterparts. Similarly, Khokleva (chap. 4) combines individualism-collectivism with power
distance to consider four cultural dimensions related to time dimensions: horizontal individualism (low power distance and individualistic), vertical individualistic (high power distance and individualistic), horizontal collectivistic (low power distance and collectivistic), and vertical collectivistic (high power distance collectivistic). She finds that Germans are higher in monochronicity than Russians. Although she does not find relationships between the four cultural dimensions and mono-/poly-chronicity, she does find that the vertical orientation (high power distance) relates to time scheduling of activities regardless of individualism or collectivism.

Besides considering power distance and collectivism, Srivastava (chap. 6) also includes Hofstede’s (2001) long-term orientation and uncertainty avoidance. Based on uncertainty avoidance, Srivastava introduces the concept of uncertainty absorption as a buffer to unreliable schedules and unstructured situations in Indian society. Srivastava illustrates this uncertainty absorption through examples of how people in India avoid trying to do multiple errands in “one mission” (105) and avoid rushing by planning to “reach the station one hour early” (105). Srivastava’s concept of uncertainty absorption as commonplace in India is consistent with Gupte’s (chap. 7) observation of misunderstandings between Indian and German managers. Similarly to Srivastava’s view of unreliable schedules, Gupte’s chapter focuses on how appointments and deadlines seem to be more of a guideline in India in contrast to a binding commitment as viewed by German managers. Gupte suggest this nonbinding view of deadlines in India relates to a cyclical view of time and to a face-saving strategy of avoiding saying no.

Similarly, Srivastava’s suggestion that Indian society prefers to do one thing at a time in a non-hurriedly pace relates to Glazer and Palekar’s (chap. 3) findings. Glazer and Palekar find that non-Asian Indians in the United States prefer polytasking more than Asian Indians in the United States and in India. Glazer and Palekar also explore how polytasking relates to individual outcomes such as well-being and job satisfaction. Glazer and Palekar’s focus on how temporal orientations relate to outcomes such as well-being and job satisfaction outcomes are a critical next step in the conversation about the role of time in management.

Glazer and Palekar’s findings of relationships between temporal orientations and outcomes such as job satisfaction illustrate how our views of time have consequences. Given time’s consequences, Datkhin’s social time (chap. 5), a collective memory where the past is constantly recreated and its duration and distance from the present shortened, has consequences to the present social self. Datkhin’s view of the duration and tempo of social time as background time and frontier time parallels Romanelli and Tushman’s (1994)