

## THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TIME AND TIME MANAGEMENT: A SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC APPROACH

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**Purpose/Objectives:** The aim of this article is to investigate perceived cultural differences in the perceptions of time and time management, and the implications regarding productivity amongst socio-demographic groups in Gauteng. This study indicates that socio-demographic variables such as home language, gender, education, age and income are related to various factors of time perception.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions to be rated on a five-point Likert scale. Six dimensions of time were measured, namely, the sense of purpose, effective organisation, structured routine, present orientation, persistence and a global time perception. A multi-cultural non-probability convenience sample (n=804) was drawn from residents in the Gauteng region. Respondents were selected from upper- middle- and lower-income groups residing in various suburban areas and townships in the region. Students of the North-West University carried out the fieldwork.

**Findings/Implications:** The research study found that the dimensions *sense of purpose* and *persistence of time* obtained the highest mean factor scores: 4.05 and 3.95 respectively on the 1 (negative) to 5 (positive) scale, with 87,4% and 83,8% of the respondents obtaining high scores (above 3.40) respectively. This implies that most respondents felt that they spent their time usefully and meaningfully, while at the same time, would not give up until the task was completed. The dimension *present orientation of time* produced the lowest mean factor score of 3.09, with 29.4% of respondents obtaining scores below 2.60, indicating a lack of focusing on completing a task at a designated point in time. The study also found that organisations have to increase productivity and reduce costs. The consequences of this for many employees included increased workloads, longer working hours and greater time pressure.

**Originality/Value:** The findings of this study are original and innovative. The results suggest that instructors should be sensitive to cultural differences in time perception when introducing time-management programs. The five time dimensions identified in this study may further serve as guidelines for key focus areas in time-management programs. The impact relating to training means it is important to identify efficient and effective ways to measure learning transfer, particularly in those areas traditionally regarded as "soft" and impossible to measure.

**Key words and phrases:** Time management, socio-demographic, time perception, Cronbach's alpha, non-probability, anacova.

### INTRODUCTION

"Time perception" is the way people feel, experience, and evaluate time. Time orientation is derived from culture, and this orientation is reflected in the language used to describe time. Different cultures have different perceptions of time and may value different aspects of it. In particular, cultures have been identified as having relatively more concern for time past, time present, or future time (Hickson & Pugh, 2002:86). In the African language of Schambala, there are no words for past or future. There is only *today* and *not today*. In the English language time *flies*; in Spanish it *walks*. British politicians *stand* for office, but Americans *run* (Statt, 2004:77).

Time perception also involves a change dimension. Any reference to change actually implies change over time. Economic and social change is usually measured in terms of years, decades, or centuries. Geological change is measured in millions of years and cosmological change in billions. Humans are therefore used to thinking of the heavens and earth as fixed and unchanging because their senses cannot detect any change. In fact, change is a constant feature of everything in the universe. Only the time-scale of change differs. Time can be measured in terms of linear time and clock time. In linear time, time is experienced as flowing in a straight line from past to present to future. Clock time is time measured in hours, minutes, and seconds, and forms the external basis on which people organise their lives (Statt, 2004:82).

This article begins with the perception that time management affects every aspect of an individual's life, which includes work life, family life, social and private life, before examining the impact of productivity on time and decision-making. The article concludes with the suggestion that the five time-perception dimensions identified in this study serve as guidelines for key focus areas in time management programs.

### TIME MANAGEMENT

Time perception influences the way people manage their time. Traditional time management focuses on "doing more in less time" by teaching individuals to set realistic goals and prioritise activities that result in increased task performance, job satisfaction, and lower stress levels (Macan, 1994 and Taylor & Mackenzie, 1986). Time management affects every aspect of an individual's life, which includes work life, family life, social and private life. Employment time, for instance, is viewed differently by employees or workers on the one hand, and employers or managers on the other. Assembly line workers tend to operate in cyclical time, where time is viewed in terms of repeated events that occur at regular and predictable intervals. Management, on the other hand, operates according to linear time, where the clock dictates. Time is viewed as a commodity to be bought and sold like any other, therefore time becomes money.

Research conducted by Ellwood (2005:56) at Pace Productivity Inc. in Canada, studying a sample of 1276 respondents, observed a desire for less employment time across all demographic groups in the sample. The study monitored time spent on various activities such as employment, sleep, family, television, meals, commuting, and spiritual and personal care. Men and women without children worked longer hours than couples with children. All the respondents wished for more private time to spend with their families and on personal activities. On average, adults slept less than seven hours per day and spent approximately fifty hours per week at work.

Managing private time affects decision-making and judgment in a broad sphere of activities. Assael (2004:67) reports that time pressures in American society have increased in the past thirty years, to the extent that people feel they have less free time than ten years ago. The most direct effect of greater time pressure is increased stress levels and an emphasis on timesaving conveniences. Time pressure also leads to consumers' failure to make intended purchases, or delaying decision-making because of uncertainty about how to get product information (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2006:44). Suri and Monroe (2003) investigated the effects of time constraints on consumers' judgment of prices and products. The authors found that time constraints reduced systematic information processing of prices and products. Availability of time, however, can stimulate consumers to process information when they might have little motivation to do so.

Consumer researchers (Gerwal, Mehta & Kardes, 2004; Kang, Herr & Page, 2005 and Huston & Finke, 2004) have also investigated various aspects of consumer time perception. Grewal, Mehta and Kardes (2004) studied the timing of repeat purchases of consumer durable goods. The authors found that, for consumers who regard a car as a status symbol, the latest and prestigious models would appeal, hence a shorter replacement cycle. On the other hand, for those for whom the product only serves a utilitarian function, replacement intervals may be longer. The authors theorise that attitudes towards the product (i.e. luxury versus necessity) can explain and predict inter-purchase intervals. Product ownership is therefore linked to time perception of the product life cycle.

Research conducted by Kang, Herr and Page (2005) on time and distance judgments showed that consumers in the USA are more likely to enquire about driving time to a particular store, than distance to the location. The authors found that time knowledge had a dominant influence on distance judgments. Huston and Finke (2004) investigated the effect of time perception on health food preference. Respondents with a high future discount rate (i.e. preferred present utility at the expense of future utility) were found to have a lower health-eating index than those for whom future health was important. Munasinghe and Sichermàn (2003), in a similar study on smoking behaviour, also found that those who smoked were willing to give up health and longevity in the future in order to engage in an activity that provided utility gains in the present.

Krishnamurthy and Kumar (2002) studied the effect of time perception on waiting time decisions and found that people believed others had valuations of time similar to their own. However, when faced with alternatives that involved risk in the duration of the wait, people reported greater risk aversion

themselves than they thought others would. Research conducted by the Department of Trade and Industry on time management and training showed that a long hours culture "results in stress and reduced effectiveness", making people feel less able to cope and to control their workload, their time and their lives in organisations. The cost of all this to individuals is impaired health, damaged relationships and poor quality of life (Davis, 1999; DTI, 2003 and Roger, 2004). The cost to organisations is alarming. For instance, stress is said to be undermining performance in 90% of UK companies (Industrial Society, 1997), costing industry £5 billion annually (Coran, 2002) and causing 13 million days sick leave in labour turnover in 2001/2002 (Roberts, 2003). In addition to the costs of stress, absence and related high labour turnover, many organisations suffer what Noon (2003:13) describes as the "corrosive effects of delay". Such delays result in missed deadlines or poor quality work, with potential costs to the organisation in relation to customer service, image and competitiveness. The need to "work smarter not harder" (Lakein, 2001:vii) is offered as the apparent solution to these increased pressures.

### **TIME AND PRODUCTIVITY**

The experience of time does not impact only on the way individuals manage their time, but ultimately also on their productivity. The latter is particularly important for employment time. Research by Hofstede (1980; 1995) has shown that the presence or absence of a particular cultural condition can influence the productivity of workers. Western culture, which considers time as linear, prefers monochronic behaviour. The latter implies that individuals are engaged in one activity at a time. Eastern cultures, on the other hand, often favour polychronicity, where individuals engage in two or more activities at once. Kvassov (2005:125) maintained that adoption of information technology (IT) by managers is a function of either a monochronicity or polychronicity temporal dimension, as well as individual personality factors. The author found that middle managers regarded the impact of IT on their productivity as positive, whereas senior managers found the impact significantly lower. This, according to the author, could be due to middle managers' tasks being pre-defined, repetitive, and well-organised (monochronic), whereas senior managers' tasks are more complex, ill-structured, and demanding the execution of various activities at the same time (polychronic).

Time perception in the work context can also be viewed in terms of duration, pace, and intensity. "Duration" refers to the subjective judgment of a period of time rather than the objective measurement of it. "Pace" has to do with how quickly or slowly time is passing, while "intensity" refers to the experience of time as being relatively empty or full. Management's view of increased productivity and improved quality is often determined by completed production units per hour. For this there is never enough time, the latter being chased ceaselessly. For production workers, on the other hand, time is endless; it often drags on when the job is monotonous, undemanding, and boring. Uncompleted tasks can be attended to the next day, according to production workers' time-frame.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME MANAGEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS**

Covey *et al.* (2002:110) usefully categorised four generations of time management in organisations. The first generation is based on reminders and characterised by simple notes and checklists. The second generation adds more planning, preparation, goal setting and scheduling, featuring calendars and appointments on paper or computer. The third generation adds prioritising and control with a review of values, the setting of long to short-term goals, and daily prioritising, often in electronic or paper-based organisers. Whilst these three generations may have improved people's effectiveness, Covey *et al.* (2002:110) still believe that these earlier approaches, with their emphasis on efficiency and organisation, have failed to enable people to match what they regard as important and how they actually spend their time. They therefore believe that these first three generations of time management simply do not work. Noon (2003:11) expresses similar sentiments, believing that "we cannot go on doing more work in shorter time just because the work is there to be done". Covey *et al.* (2002:110) propose a fourth generation of time management, which, they claim, incorporates the best features of earlier generations but focuses on identifying what is really important in life, and spending an increasing amount of time on that. In a similar vein, Noon (2003:88) advocates what he terms a "reductionist" stance, which involves eliminating all unnecessary work, learning to say "no" and, like Covey, focusing on what is important. In this regard the value added for organisations should be tremendous. Managers should become more aware of how they use their time, should identify and correct time-wasting behaviours, and should improve their time management skills overall. Effective time management strategies benefit everyone in the organisation. Managers who use time well are

better organised. They are able to spend more time with subordinates on the important elements of employees' jobs, thus helping to improve performance. Managers who are in control of their own jobs are likely to be viewed positively by their superiors. Managers can achieve a better balance between their organisational roles and personal lives while developing improved relationships with family and friends.

### TIME PERCEPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the African context, time perception can be strongly influenced by culture. Se-Sotho-speaking South Africans represent a more collective and relationship-oriented behaviour pattern, referred to as "Afrocentric". The latter conceives of a past, an ancestral, and a present time orientation. English- and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, on the other hand, represent a more Eurocentric culture that tends towards being more individualistic and materialistic, with a future-oriented time perspective (Mufune, 2005:37).

Mufune (2005:89) investigated the influence of African culture on managerial behaviour. The author was of the opinion that traditional communal responsibility among Black managers often leads to a managerial outlook of tolerance and kindness when dealing with subordinates, resulting from the principle of reciprocity and a present time orientation. The author concluded that ethnic group cultures are more relevant for the study of African culture- managerial behaviour than national cultures.

In a preliminary study on consumer time perception amongst a sample of 336 respondents in Gauteng, Venter (2004:24) observed significant differences between socio-demographic groups regarding time perception reactions to waiting for services. Se-Sotho-speaking respondents were, for instance, more patient about waiting in queues for service at municipal departments than were English-and Afrikaans-speaking respondents. The author suggested that cultural influences resulting from language differences might have caused these discrepancies. These findings support observations by McDonnell and Gatfield (2002:114) regarding cultural differences in time perception and reactions to waiting. The purpose of this study was to further investigate these preliminary findings and to explore the implications of time perception discrepancies for time management and productivity, both on a personal and an employment level. Based on previous research in the field (Venter, 2004 and McDonald & Gatfield, 2002), the following global research hypothesis was formulated.

H1: Respondents' perceptions of time are related to socio-demographic variables.

### METHOD

The measuring instrument, Time Structure Questionnaire (TSQ) developed by Bond and Feather (1988:98) as used in the preliminary study by Venter (2004:77), was extended for this study. New items, derived from the literature on time perception were added to the existing questionnaire. All items used in the study measured the extent to which respondents perceived their use of time as structured and purposeful. The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions to be rated on a five-point Likert type scale, as suggested by Malhotra (2004:67). Examples of the questions were:

- Do you often feel that your life is aimless, with no definite purpose?
- Do you ever have trouble organising the things you have to do?
- Do you have a daily routine that you follow?
- Do you spend time thinking about what your future might be like?
- Once you've started an activity, do you persist at it until you've completed it?

The following six dimensions of time were measured:

*Sense of purpose, Effective organisation, Structured routine, Present orientation, Persistence, and a global (the mean of the aforementioned factors) Time perception.*

*Sense of purpose* refers to the extent to which respondents felt that they spent their time usefully and meaningfully. *Effective organisation* refers to how well respondents were able to plan their time, while *Structured Routine* relates to how activities fitted together during the day. *Present orientation* refers to

focusing on completing a task at a point in time, while *Persistence* relates to not giving up until the task was completed.

The global *Time Perception* reflects respondents' overall score on the five individual dimensions of time. The questionnaire concluded with measures of several demographic variables: home language, age, gender, education, religion, and household income per month.

### Sample

A multi-cultural non-probability convenience sample (n=804) was drawn from residents in the Gauteng region. The sample used quotas to include all the important sub-populations (based on income) in the area. Respondents were selected from upper-, middle- and lower-income groups residing in various suburban areas and townships in the region. They were representative of the three main languages, English, Afrikaans and Se-Sotho spoken in the Gauteng region. Sample sizes for the various demographic groups are demonstrated in Table 4, with the exception of religion, for which it was found that 85.3% of the respondents were Christian, 4.0% Muslim, 1.7% Hindu, and 9.0% other.

### Data Collection

Students of the North-West University carried out the fieldwork. All the fieldworkers were properly briefed on sample selection and interview procedures. Households in various residential areas were chosen on a convenience basis for interviewing. Only one respondent per household completed the questionnaire. Although the questionnaires were available only in English, it should be noted that Afrikaans- and Se-Sotho students conducted the fieldwork and did the necessary translation where required.

### Data Analysis

To assess the reliability of the summated scale scores of the six dimensions relating to time perception, the statistical package BMDP programme 4M (Frane, Jenrick & Samson, 1979:118) was used to perform exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis with direct quartimin rotation) and to calculate Cronbach's coefficient alphas (reported in Table 1).

The Pearson Product Moment correlations were calculated by means of BMDP programmes 2D, 4F and 8D respectively. These programs use descriptive statistics as well as the mean and standard deviation and frequency distribution. These statistics are reported in Table 2.

The BMDP program 2V was used to perform an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to investigate which of the socio-demographic variables were significantly related to the various time perception dimensions with *Age* and *Income* the covariates. These results are shown in Table 3. *Religion* was omitted from the analysis because of the predominance of Christianity (85% of the sample) with insufficient representation of the other religions to meet the requirements of multi-variate data analysis.

Statistics relating to significant ANCOVA results are reflected in Table 4. BMDP program 7D was used to perform post-hoc Scheffé tests, and MS-Excel was used to calculate Cohen's d statistics to determine the practical significance of between-group differences.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the reliability of the summated scale scores for the five dimensions of time. Table 1 shows that all scales had Cronbach coefficient alphas above the threshold value of 0.6 which, according to Nunally (1978), although less than the recommended 0.7, can be regarded as adequate for exploratory research.

**Table 1: Reliability of summated scale scores**

Dimension	Sample Size	Cronbachs Alpha	Omitted Items	Inverted Items
1. Sense of purpose	799	0.72	-	1
2. Effective organisation	800	0.69	-	11,12,13,14
3. Structured routine	799	0.69	21	-
4. Present orientation	797	0.63	26,28	-
5. Persistence	802	0.64	-	33,35
Global (1 to 5 combined)	804	0.67	-	-

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and correlations for the sample.

*Sense of purpose* and *Persistence* obtained the highest mean factor scores: 4.05 and 3.95 respectively on the 1 (negative) to 5 (positive) scale, with 87.4% and 83.8% of the respondents obtaining high scores (above 3.40) respectively. This implies that most respondents felt that they spent their time usefully and meaningfully, while at the same time, would not give up until the task was completed. *Present Orientation* produced the lowest mean factor score of 3.09, with 29.4% of respondents obtaining scores below 2.60, indicating a lack of focusing on completing a task at a designated point in time.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics**

Dimension	n = 804		Frequency Distribution					
	Mean	S.D.	Low		Average		High	
1	4.05	0.61	25	3.10%	76	9.5%	703	87.4%
2	3.55	0.74	96	11.95%	219	27.2%	489	60.8%
3	3.13	0.81	209	26.00%	285	35.4%	310	38.6%
4	3.09	0.80	236	29.40%	323	35.4%	245	30.5%
5	3.95	0.61	26	3.20%	104	12.9%	674	83.8%
Global	3.55	0.47	22	2.70%	250	31.15%	532	66.2%
Correlations								
Dimension	1	2	3	4	5			
1	-							
2	<b>0.425*</b>	-						
3	<b>0.241*</b>	<b>0.554*</b>	-					
4	<b>0.355*</b>	<b>0.187*</b>	0.009	-				
5	<b>0.366*</b>	<b>0.379*</b>	<b>0.287*</b>	<b>0.101*</b>	-			
Global	<b>0.697*</b>	<b>0.783*</b>	<b>0.663*</b>	<b>0.525*</b>	<b>0.612*</b>			

\* Significant at 95% C.L. (r \* 0.069)

Table 2 further shows that all the dimensions were positively related except for structured routine and present orientation. This implies that, in general, a high (low) score for a particular factor corresponded with high (low) scores for the other factors. The implication of the only insignificant correlation was that respondents with a present orientation do not necessarily follow a structured routine in their time perception

Table 3 gives ANCOVA results, reflecting the relationships between socio-biographic variables and factors. The table indicates which of the socio-biographical variables are significantly related to the time perception factors.

**Table 3: Relationship between socio-biographic variables and time dimensions – ANCOVA results (n = 688)**

Dimension	Home Language	Gender	Education	Age	Income
1. Sense of Purpose	0.054	<b>0.049*</b>	<b>0.000*</b>	0.206	<b>0.004*</b>
2. Effective Organisation	0.678	0.107	0.148	<b>0.000*</b>	<b>0.002*</b>
3. Structured Routine	<b>0.015*</b>	0.631	0.053	<b>0.000*</b>	<b>0.016*</b>
4. Present Orientation	0.182	0.452	0.227	<b>0.000*</b>	<b>0.000*</b>
5. Persistence	0.690	0.333	0.199	0.082	<b>0.002*</b>
6. Global (1 to 5 combined)	0.899	0.795	0.154	<b>0.002*</b>	<b>0.000*</b>

\* Significant at 95% C.L.

From Table 3 it can be seen that the following relationships were found:

- *Home language and structured routine*
- *Gender and Sense of purpose*
- *Education and Sense of purpose*
- *Age and all factors except Sense of purpose and Persistence*
- *Income and all factors.*

Table 4 reflects the results of additional analyses that were conducted to investigate the nature and extent of the significant relationships:

- Descriptive statistics for socio-biographic groups
- Post-hoc Scheffé test results to determine the individual differences among home language, gender, education, age, and income groups
- Cohen's d statistics to establish the practical significance of the between-group differences.

### Home Language

The largest group of respondents (41%) were English-speaking, followed by Afrikaans (27%) and Se-Sotho speaking respondents (18%). The English group had significantly higher scores on average than the Se-Sotho group with regards to Structured routine. The difference between the Afrikaans and Se-Sotho group, although of the same magnitude and of practical significance, was not statistically significant.

### Gender

There were more female (57%) than male (43%) respondents in the sample. The only significant difference between the gender groups was observed with respect to *Sense of purpose*, where the males obtained a higher mean factor score, although this difference was not found to be of practical significance.

**Table 4: Statistics relating to significant ancova results**

Dimension	Descriptive Statistics – Mean (S.D.)				Scheffé p<0.05	Cohen's d>0.2
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4		
3	<b>Home Language</b>					
	<b>English</b> (n=331)	<b>Afrikaans</b> (n=218)	<b>Se-Sotho</b> (n=143)			
	3.21 (0.82)	3.19 (0.83)	2.87 (0.75)		1:3	1:3 2:3
	<b>Gender</b>					
	<b>Male</b> (n=346)	<b>Female</b> (n=458)				

1	4.10 (0.60)	4.10 (0.62)			n.a.	
	<b>Education</b>					
1	<b>Secondary</b> (n=214) 3.91 (0.73)	<b>Tertiary</b> (n=587) 4.10 (0.55)			n.a.	
	<b>Age</b>					
	<b>&lt;20</b> (n=98)	<b>20-29</b> (n=406)	<b>30-49</b> (n=211)	<b>50+</b> (n=89)		
2	3.36 (0.77)	3.43 (0.73)	3.74 (0.68)	3.89 (0.66)	1:3 1:4	1:3 1:4 2:3 2:4 3:4
3	2.90 (0.82)	3.05 (0.77)	3.23 (0.79)	3.53 (0.85)	1:3 1:4	1:3 1:4 2:3 2:4 3:4
4	2.99 (0.76)	2.91 (0.74)	3.34 (0.83)	3.44 (0.75)	1:3 1:4	1:3 1:4 2:3 2:4 3:4
Global	3.46 (0.34)	3.44 (0.34)	3.60 (0.35)	3.60 (0.32)	1:3	1:3 1:4 2:3 2:4
	<b>Income</b>					
	<b>&lt;R1000</b> (n=119)	<b>&lt;=R3000</b> (n=167)	<b>&lt;R5000</b> (n=141)	<b>R5000+</b> (n=376)		
1	3.93 (0.67)	4.02 (0.59)	3.98 (0.66)	4.12 (0.57)	1:4	1:4 3:4
2	3.31 (0.77)	3.46 (0.72)	3.53 (0.71)	3.68 (0.72)	1:4	1:2 1:3 1:4 2:4 3:4
3	2.91 (0.83)	3.03 (0.76)	3.09 (0.81)	3.26 (0.80)	1:4	1:3 1:4 2:3 2:4 3:4
4	2.86 (0.75)	2.89 (0.82)	2.99 (0.72)	3.29 (0.79)	1:4	1:3 2:4 3:4
5	3.79 (0.68)	3.85 (0.64)	3.98 (0.85)	4.03 (0.54)	1:4	1:3 1:4 2:3 2:4
Global	3.40 (0.37)	3.44 (0.35)	3.48 (0.37)	3.57 (0.32)	1:4	1:3 1:4 2:4 3:4

n.a. = not applicable when two groups only are compared  
 i : j = significant difference between Groups I and j

**Education**

The largest proportion of respondents (73%) indicated that they had had a tertiary education. ANCOVA revealed that respondents with a tertiary education had a significantly higher score for *Sense of purpose* compared to those without a tertiary education. This difference was found to be of practical significance.

**Age**

The majority of the respondents (77%) fell into the age group 20-49 years. A general trend observed, based on positive ANCOVA regression coefficients, was that the mean scores with regard to Effective organisation, Structured routine, and Present orientation tended to increase with age, with a concomitant effect on the global time perception score. This implies that, as respondents grow older, they become more effective in managing their time, by following a structured routine and focusing on completing a task at a certain point in time. Statistically significant differences as well as practical significance were observed for the different age groups with regard to the aforementioned factors.

**Income**

Respondents were predominantly (47%) in the upper- income category. Comparing the income groups' mean factor scores, it was found that income was significantly related to all time perception factors. Based on the positive ANCOVA regression slopes, it can be concluded that respondents in the higher-income brackets regarded themselves as more competent in their perception of time and



the management thereof. Practical significance was observed for the different income groups on all the time perception factors in most cases.

### Hypothesis Testing

Based on the results reported in Tables 3 and 4, the research hypothesis stating that *respondents' perceptions of time are related to socio-demographic variables* can be accepted. Table 3 shows that home language, gender, education, age, and income influenced various factors of time perception. Table 4 shows significant differences between the various socio-demographic groups and selected time perception dimensions.

### Shortcomings of the Research

Despite these results, the study has some limitations. Five out of the six dimensions had reliability coefficients below the recommended 0.70 threshold value (Table 1). This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that the questionnaire was available only in English. Furthermore, the sample, although using quotas to include all the important sub-populations in the area, were not well distributed in terms of education, age, and income. Religion (also regarded as an important indicator of culture) could not be used in the analysis as almost all the respondents indicated one denomination.

Bearing in mind the shortcomings of this study, the results did show that the ability to manage time productively increases with age and financial means. This finding suggests that the importance of time management cannot be ignored at an early stage in an individual's lifecycle. Time-management training should form an integral part of any career induction program. This will ensure growth in productivity as people progress on their career paths.

### MANAGERIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on previous research, it was hypothesised that respondents' perceptions of time and time management are related to socio-demographic variables. Results of the study support this hypothesis. Home language, gender, education, and particularly age and income were related to various factors of time perception (Table 3). The results furthermore suggest that, as consumers grow older and become wealthier, they attach more importance to the various components of time perception (Table 4), with important implications for improved proficiency in time management. Significant differences between socio-demographic groups regarding various time perception dimensions were also observed. These results support those of a previous study (Venter 2004).

With regards to cultural differences, home language can be regarded as a strong indicator of culture (Hickson & Pugh, 2002). In the present study, home language was related to only one time perception dimension, namely *Structured routine* (Table 3). A significant difference was observed between the mean factor scores of two language groups, English and Se-Sotho speakers, with the former obtaining the highest mean factor score (Table 4). This may suggest discrepancies amongst cultural groups in the ability to structure and manage time productively.

In an increasingly competitive business environment, organisations have sought to increase productivity and reduce costs. The consequences of this for many employees include increased workloads, longer working hours and greater time pressures which, the evidence suggests, are linked to stress, high rates of absence and turnover. At the same time there has been an increasing emphasis on the desirability of achieving work/life balance for individuals. In pursuit of these apparently conflicting demands, it has been argued that individuals must work "smarter" rather than "harder" and that individuals need to develop the ability to manage their time effectively to achieve this.

### CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to investigate perceived cultural differences in the perceptions of time and time management, and implications regarding productivity amongst socio-demographic groups in Gauteng. The study formed part of an international investigation of time within and between cultures. It further sought to investigate preliminary findings by Mc Donnell and Gatfield (2002) and Venter (2004) regarding cultural differences in time perception. The results suggest that instructors

should be sensitive to cultural differences in time perception when introducing time-management programs. Language and religion are important socio-biographical variables that may point to cultural diversity. The five time- perception dimensions identified in this study may further serve as guidelines for key focus areas in time- management programs. The need to “work smarter not harder” is offered as the solution to these increased pressures caused by a climate where “more has to be done and it has to be done now”. An important factor in the ability to “work smarter not harder” is argued to be the ability of an individual to manage their time effectively.

Time management appears to offer an obvious solution.

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