

# THE ROLE OF STATUS DIFFERENTIALS IN GROUP SYNCHRONIZATION

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## ABSTRACT

*Drawing from findings in sociology and anthropology on time as a symbol of status, this paper examines the role that status differentials affect how group members internally align the pace of their activities over time (group synchronization). We examine the psychological process of group synchronization from the perspective of the individual, the nature of status differentials in work groups, and how one's status within a group affects a person's willingness to adjust the timing of his/her activities to match other people's timing. We then identify three types of status structures within work groups and analyze how each affects the group's ability to synchronize. We close by considering the implications of our approach for better understanding temporal dynamics in work groups.*

## INTRODUCTION

The control of time is a human symbol of status (Gell, 1992; Hall, 1983; Levine, 1997; Zerubavel, 1981). Across all known cultures, the control of calendars and schedules resides with the wealthy, political, and/or religious elite. Elite-controlled calendars identify feast days, harvest times, and rites of passage within individuals' lives. In more economically developed societies, they also

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specify the nature of work weeks, national holidays, vacation schedules and age-based driving, voting and drinking privileges. As Levine (1997) notes, with status comes the ability to control one's own and other people's time: "There is no greater symbol of human domination" (p. 118).

Within work organizations, too, time and status are intimately tied. Senior managers control the temporal goals for the firm; while mid-level managers coordinate their subordinates' schedules to adhere to them; and lower-level employees time their behaviors accordingly (Moore, 1963; Thompson, 1967). Even on a perceptual level, actors with high status have been found to evoke less negative reactions than do those with low status when they miss deadlines, take up extra conversational "air time," and arrive late to meetings (Blau, 1986; Hall, 1983; Owens & Sutton, 2001). The implication is that higher status actors are accorded more freedom in determining how their own and other people's time is used within work contexts. Lower status actors are not.

Further, among high-status actors, the control of time is a vehicle commonly used to assert one's power: "The longer people wait for you, the higher your status" (Levine, 1997). Thus, high-level executives have been observed to keep rivals waiting on hold before taking their phone calls, tacitly compete with their peers to be the last to arrive to a meeting or to phone into a group conference call – all as a means of competing for more status (Owens & Sutton, 2001).

These observations point toward a central thesis of this paper: Status differentials naturally occur in human groups, affecting group temporal dynamics. Low-status members' time tends to be less valued than high-status members' time, and high-status members are sometimes tempted to use a group's time to assert their authority. As a result, understanding an individual's status within a group and the overall status structure of a group is central to understanding the temporal dynamics that occur within it. In this chapter, we focus on the role of status differentials in group synchronization, that is, how group members internally align the pace of their activities over time. We argue that status differentials are a key mechanism affecting the process of within-group synchronization – sometimes facilitating and sometimes inhibiting it.

Specifically, we argue that status differentials facilitate synchronization when low-status members defer to high-status members to align the pace of their activities. For example, when work group members look to their supervisor to help them set timeframes, identify deadlines, and establish temporal work norms, group synchronization is enabled. Status differentials inhibit synchronization when high-status members use the group's time to assert their authority, or when the temporal goals of the high-status members do not reflect the group's best interests. Consider here the manager who interrupts the flow of a group meeting to satisfy his own timing needs. Members will be inclined to align with the manager's timing in order

to appease him. In the process, however, the group may end up working at a pace that runs contrary to the temporal needs of their task (e.g. because of the manager's interruption, group members may have to stay late into the night to complete their work). As a result, both member satisfaction and task performance can suffer.

To build our formal argument about the role of status in group synchronization, we begin by examining the psychological process of group synchronization from the perspective of the individual member. We examine both the personal (intra-individual) and social factors that influence how people naturally pace their activities. Next, we review the construct of status in groups; namely, what status is and how people get it. Third, we explore how having low vs. high status within a group influences a member's time pacing preferences. Finally, we consider how different status structures within a group aggregate to affect whether the group effectively synchronizes or not.

#### *Individual Pacing and Group Synchronization*

Conceptually, the process of group synchronization can be broken into two parts: (a) the task of aligning the group's temporal performance with that of the extra-group environment, that is, timing the group's activities to meet the deadline demands of its constituents; and (b) the task of combining individual members' activities to create a synchronized group pace, that is, internally aligning group members' paces over time. Two papers in this volume examine the phenomenon of extra-group alignment. Zellmer-Bruhn, Waller and Ancona (2003) focus on how external temporal markers influence the timing of group behavior through organizational entrainment. Bluedorn and Standifer (2003) examine how groups come to understand the temporal norms and expectations present in their surrounding environment, and how these understandings shape how the group behaves.

Two other papers consider the topic of within-group temporal alignment. Bartel and Miliken (2003) examine the broad diversity in members' temporal perspectives present in ongoing work groups. As Gevers, Rutte and van de Lien (2003) observe, all groups must overcome such differences in order to achieve coordinated action. They propose that both non-conscious entrainment processes and more explicit group behaviors, including goal setting and temporal planning, allow groups to develop shared cognitions about time which lead to coordinated action.

Our current paper also considers the topic of within-group temporal alignment. Similar to Bartel and Miliken (2003), we start with the premise that members will exhibit individual differences in how they perceive and value time. However, rather than examining how group-level processes influence members' perceptions (e.g. Gevers et al., 2003), we focus on how status differentials implicitly influence

how group members construct their own timing preferences and consequently pace out their activities in the group context.

#### *Individual-Level Pace*

To build our argument, we begin by examining how people form preferences about the timing of their activities. We propose that people assign an implicit value (or utility) to the pace or velocity of their activities over time (Chapple, 1970, 1982; Loewenstein, 1987; Loewenstein & Elster, 1992; Varey & Kahneman, 1993). People have preferences regarding how slowly or quickly they work and how slowly or quickly their social interactions proceed across time. These pacing preferences often result in temporal goal setting regarding the velocity at which particular activities occur. For example, a person may hope to complete an editing task within an hour, or wrap-up a conversation with a colleague within 15 minutes.

Our interest is group settings, where the individual's time pacing preferences correspond to how quickly or slowly the group member seeks to perform group tasks and resolve group interactions over time. So we start with the assumption that group members often having time pacing preferences and set corresponding goals (either implicitly or explicitly) regarding the realization of group outcomes and events within specified time periods (Blount & Janicik, 2002; Carver & Scheier, 1999). Thus, Jane may want her team to complete three activities during their 2:00–4:00 p.m. meeting, and may plan for the group to spend less time on the first activity and more time on the other two. If the first activity takes longer than she wanted, Jane may experience frustration because her pacing goals for the meeting are not being met.

Note that for any group task or event, a member can have preferences regarding both how much time is allocated and how hard and intensely he works across the allocated time period. This means that people's pacing goals encompass two elements: (a) the absolute amount of time (e.g. an hour, a day, or a week) allocated to the task (duration preferences); and (b) the rate at which associated activities are spaced out across the available time (intensity preferences), that is, will the person work intensely at the beginning and then "let up," or will she work a little bit each day (Blount & Janicik, 2002).

#### *Individual-Level Factors in Pacing Preferences*

A variety of factors can influence how the individual group member forms these duration and intensity goals. These include: personal traits, prior experiences, and personal extra-group demands. A person's pacing preferences, therefore, can be thought of as a composite construct, to which a number of different individual-level factors are conceived to contribute.

The duration component of personal pacing preferences will incorporate, for example, *individual trait tendencies* toward need for closure (see Webster & Kruglanski, 1994 for a review), time urgency (see Conte, Landy & Mathieu, 1995 for a review), as well as poly- vs. mono-chronicity (i.e. the desire to pursue multiple tasks at once vs. focusing on one task at a time; Hall, 1983; Slocombe & Bluedorn, 1999). The intensity aspect will be influenced by factors such as the individual's cognitive processing speed and working memory capacity (see Conway, Cowan, Bunting, Theriault & Minkoff, 2002 for a review), as well as self-regulation and impulsive tendencies (see Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Rastegary & Landy, 1994 for reviews). For example, a person's innate cognitive capacities can affect how easily a person maintains focus on a task involving a high cognitive workload before needing a break.

Past research demonstrates that pacing preferences for a particular task also will be influenced by a person's *prior experience*; that is, they may be the product of habit. Kelly and McGrath (1985) demonstrated this by giving individuals a set amount of time, ranging from 5 to 20 minutes, to solve anagrams. They found that as the allotted amount of time increased, rates of work speed decreased. In subsequent rounds, when time frames were changed, people continued to work at the pace they had set during their original time limit. Thus, people's pacing tendencies at solving anagrams were shaped by how much time they had spent on a similar task in the past – even if the prior timing of that activity was arbitrarily determined.

In the group setting, the individual member's preferences regarding the pacing of group activities also will be influenced by *personal extra-group demands*, that is, personal situations outside the group that require the member's time. These extra-group demands can affect both the amount of time that the individual has available to devote to group activities and the intensity with which the individual cognitively and emotionally engages in group activities. Extra-group temporal demands can include, for example: (a) job demands made by the organization beyond the group context; (b) family and other personal life demands that limit how much time the individual has available for work (see Blount & Janicik, 2001 for a review); and (c) broader social, ethnic, and cultural influences that affect how a person understands, interprets, and allocates time for work (see Hall, 1983; Levine, 1997 for reviews). The underlying issue here is the degree to which the member perceives that he or she has temporal slack. When people have low levels of temporal slack, they will have less time available for group tasks.

In sum, we use the personal pacing preferences construct to conceptualize how individual-level trait differences, past experiences, and personal extra-group demands jointly influence how members approach the pacing of group activities. Rather than detailing the vast array of individual-level factors that might affect how members perceive and value their time in group contexts, we focus our

analysis on the ways in which these factors jointly influence the individual member's pacing preferences.

#### *In-Synch Preference*

In addition to having personal duration and intensity preferences for how group activities are paced out over time, there is a great deal of evidence which suggests that people have a preference for aligning pace with others. That is, they like to feel in tempo, in rhythm when interacting with other people. Chapple (1970, 1982) provided the original foundations for this idea, and multiple lines of empirical research have provided subsequent support for it. For example, research on oral synchrony has shown that individuals speaking with each other tend to fall into cyclical rhythms (see Davis, 1982 for a review). More recently, Chartrand and Bargh (1999) and Sanchez-Burks (2002) have demonstrated that people tend to subtly and unconsciously align their behaviors with those of their interaction partners. Moreover, Chartrand and Bargh's (1999) results show that people report increased levels of liking for interactions in which their behaviors are subtly mirrored compared to when they are not mirrored. Similarly, Blount and Janicik (2002) report the results of two laboratory studies which found that people prefer interactions in which they perceive that their own and other actors' pacing goals are aligned than interactions in which they are not. Moreover, partners who perceived that they were temporally aligned performed more effectively in joint decision making tasks and liked each other better than did partners who perceived that their pacing goals were not aligned.

In sum, we suggest that members enter group interactions with two types of preferences regarding the pacing of group activities. These are: (a) their personal pacing preferences; and (b) the preference to synchronize with others, to be "in-synch." The member's personal pacing preferences represent a composite construct that combines individual-level traits, past experiences, and extra-group temporal demands to determine how long and how fast the member wants to work on group tasks and participate in group interactions. The in-synch construct, as we have suggested, represents a universal human tendency to prefer that those around us interact at a pace that matches our own.

#### *Group-Level Pace*

In discussing the implications of individual preferences for group-level dynamics, we begin with the observation that groups often have a natural pace or rhythm to their activities (e.g. Brown & Eisenhardt, 1998; Gersick, 1989; McGrath & Kelly, 1986). In fact, many researchers have theorized that, like other biological

organisms, members of human groups naturally synchronize their activities through social “entrainment” (Ancona & Chong, 1996; McGrath & Kelly, 1986; McGrath & Rotchford, 1983). The central insight of biological entrainment models is that the timing of cyclical or repetitive patterns of behaviors can be heavily influenced by rhythms generated by surrounding environmental stimuli, such that the beat or cadence of groups of organisms performing related activities naturally becomes synchronized over time (see Ancona & Chong, 1996; McGrath & Kelly, 1985, for reviews). Familiar examples include the synchronized chirping of crickets and flashing of fireflies, or, alternatively, the alignment of a human body’s physical systems (e.g. circulation, breathing and nervous systems).

A distinguishing aspect of physical and biological entrainment processes is that the coordinated activities occur with a high degree of reliability and their timing is determined on a non-conscious level. Organisms intuitively align the rate of their activities to match surrounding cadences and rhythms. One obvious limiting factor in applying entrainment models to human work groups is that the timely and reliable completion of a specific task by an individual in a work group cannot be taken for granted in the same way, for example, that a heartbeat can (Blount & Janicik, 2002). Individual group member’s work motivation may wax and wane during a day, across a week, over months. Effort and performance variability also can arise non-motivationally, as individuals’ cognitive abilities experience peaks and valleys within a day or over a week (Bodenhausen, 1990). Thus, to understand synchronization in work groups, a more complex understanding of human behavior is needed.

Consistent with entrainment theorists, we make the assumption that groups do develop their own temporal norms and rhythmic patterns as members interact together and with their environment over time. However, we suggest that groups are not as tightly prescribed as entrainment models would imply. Given the broad diversity of people’s pacing preferences, asynchrony can be quite common in groups.

When one or more group members have difficulty adapting his or her pace to the group’s pace, the group will experience asynchrony. This can happen when members disagree about the appropriate milestones or deadlines for accomplishing the group’s work. Even if members agree about how to allocate and segment the group’s time, a group can get out of synch if members disagree about how intensely to work at a particular point in time. For example, some members may want to work hard now and ease up later, while others prefer to procrastinate until later. These work style differences can lead the group to feel out-of-synch, particularly if the group tasks require on-going coordination across members (Blount & Janicik, 2002). The more that a group finds that its members’ work pace preferences do not converge, the higher the degree of asynchrony. Under high levels of asynchrony,

task performance can suffer. The group may miss important deadlines. Coordination failures may affect the quality of the group's outcomes, and group cohesion can fall as members experience ongoing temporal conflict (Blount & Janicik, 2002; Jehn, 1995). Simply put, asynchrony imposes costs on work groups.

Therefore, in contrast to entrainment theorists, we argue that given the natural diversity present in people's temporal preferences, asynchrony is quite normal in human groups. The more interesting question, we would suggest, is: How do groups overcome high levels of asynchrony to achieve coordinated action? As we have noted earlier, entrainment models that rely on non-conscious convergence do not accurately portray this phenomenon. Gevers et al. (2003) posit several explicit, group-level cognitive processes that can facilitate synchronization. In this paper, we consider how the status structure of a group will affect group synchronization. We begin, first, with an overview of what status is and how it affects interaction in work groups.

#### *Status in Work Groups*

Sociologists have long observed that when humans gather, status orderings naturally emerge: some members gain higher social standing than others (Blau, 1986; Fiske, 1992; Homans, 1950). When an actor is judged to be comparatively superior to oneself in an important domain (e.g. more intelligent, articulate, attractive, wealthy or athletic), he or she is perceived to have relatively higher status than oneself. Status judgments also form at the group level when one member is perceived as more esteemed by other members, based on an attribute that is valued by the group (Blau, 1986; Homans, 1961; Ridgeway, 1997). Thus, when multiple members hold a particular member in high regard, it is because they agree that that member is legitimately "better" in some way with higher organizational rank or superior technical skills (Blau, 1986; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994). Indeed, a key indicator of the degree to which a status structure exists within a group is whether or not shared rationales exist for how status is assigned.

In this sense, status is context-specific. The specific nature of the group and its context will determine how group members assign status. "Earning superior status in a group requires not merely impressing others with outstanding abilities but actually using these abilities to make contributions to the achievement of the collective goals of the group or the individual goals of its members" (Blau, 1986, p. 126). Thus, a group member with high task competence but low social skills will probably be accorded high status in performance-relevant contexts and relatively lower status in the group's social events.

*Sources of Status*

The sources of status within work groups can be categorized into three general types: performance competence, organizational power, and behavioral dominance. The performance competence perspective argues that people gain status when they demonstrate the ability to enhance the achievement of the group's and/or individual members' goals. For example, the member is seen as particularly articulate or technically competent in ways that allow the group to perform more effectively (Bales, 1950; Berger, Rosenholtz & Zelditch, 1980; Homans, 1961; Ridgeway, 1984, 1987). The literature on organizational power predicts that people will gain status in groups based on the power or authority that they hold in the broader organization context within which the work group is embedded (Pfeffer, 1992; Kramer & Neale, 1998). Here, for example, the member may hold a high rank in the organization or perhaps be well-connected with other people who do. A final perspective, offered by ethological theorists (Lee & Ofshe, 1981; Mazur, 1985), argues that status hierarchies in groups result from the innate human impulse for dominance over others. In the battle for dominance, attributes such as attractiveness, physical size, personal demeanor, and genealogical lineage are all important sources of status.

Note that unlike the performance competence and organizational power perspectives, the behavioral dominance perspective suggests that status differentials can be created independent of the group's goals. Further, these differences result from contests among individual group members who share a generalized need to gain superiority over others. Thus, the behavioral dominance perspective highlights the pervasive human tendency to create social hierarchies based on personal attributes such as size, attractiveness, and facial features, as opposed to competences directly relevant to group tasks.

Numerous authors have observed that early in the existence of any group, status orderings tend to reflect generalized means of social differentiation, such as those based on personal and social characteristics and organizational power (Berger et al., 1980; Mazur, 1985). Research also shows that once a status system has developed, it can be slow to change. This is because those who have status within the initial group hierarchy often determine the course of the subsequent group activities – both what takes place and what is seen to take place (e.g. Berger et al., 1980; Messe, Kerr & Sattler, 1991; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Logically, their goal is to direct these activities in such a way that they maintain their status (Fiske, 1993; Pfeffer, 1992). However, research also finds that the longer a group exists and more information becomes available about each member's actual contributions to the group, status orderings often adapt to reflect the role of actual performance competence (Goffman, 1957; Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000; Wageman & Mannix, 1998).

It is worth noting here that status, power, and influence are terms that are often used interchangeably in the psychological and management literatures (e.g. Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, *in press*; Kramer & Neale, 1998; Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Pfeffer, 1992). Here, we have defined status as a perception of comparative social esteem that is context-specific and consensually defined. We intentionally distinguish this definition of status from definitions of organizational power, which we define as “an individual’s capacity to modify others’ states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments” (from Keltner et al., 2002). We also distinguish it from authority, which we define as derived from institutionalized roles or arrangements (e.g. hierarchies, Weber, 1947). We further distinguish our definition of status from the interactive processes of influence and persuasion that occur when people use communication to change other people’s perceptions and preferences (e.g. Cialdini, 1993). Thus, in this paper, the label of high status refers to enhanced social standing that some group members have based on either their group-relevant performance competence, access to organizational power or authority, and/or behavioral dominance attributes.

#### *Uses of Status*

The presence of status differentials affects group members’ willingness to cooperate with each other and the group’s goals (Blau, 1986). It is well established that when people perceive status differences, they tend to defer to them (Goffman, 1957; Mazur, 1985; Ridgeway, 1997). Traditional psychological studies of cooperation in groups emphasize the role of collectivism (Chen, Brockner & Chen, 2002; Chen, Brockner & Katz, 1998; Triandis, 1995), social identification (Spears et al., 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), or alternatively, prosocial value orientations (McClintock, 1977; Messick & McClintock, 1968) in cooperation. Here, we highlight the role of status deference in explaining members’ willingness to cooperate with other members.

In contrast to the traditional group-based conceptions of cooperation listed above, status deference occurs when a group member yields to the wishes of a higher status group member and adopts behaviors that comply with the higher-status member’s wishes. In contrast to cooperative actions that are achieved through a member’s identification with the group’s goals or outcomes, cooperative actions based on status deference are dyadically motivated and involve exchanges between higher and lower status actors. This cooperation occurs regardless of whether the lower status member accepts or identifies with the goals that the higher-status member espouses or is collectively motivated. The key point is that

status deference induces cooperative behaviors when the higher-status actor's goals are aligned with the group's goals.

Recent research suggests that status deference can be motivated in two ways (Y. Chen, 2002). The first way is through obedience, because the low-status member fears retribution from the high-status member (i.e. cooperation is derived from the high-status actor's potential use of coercive power, reward power, etc.). The second way is through the experience of respect and the lower status member's positive regard for the high-status member (i.e. cooperation based on perception of the higher status actor's superior attributes, abilities or role legitimacy). In either case, when one group member defers to another member, that group member is agreeing: (a) to allow the higher-status member to define the group's goals; and (b) to cooperate with those goals.

#### *Cooperative vs. Competitive Status Construal*

In distinguishing between obedience- and respect-based compliance, it is important to note that there is not a single, universal way to construe status. As recent research by S. Chen, Lee-Chai and Bargh (2001) has shown, how people construe *high* status depends on their own social values (Clark & Mills, 1993). Specifically, S. Chen et al. (2001) found that people who are more exchange-oriented tend to exploit their high status in dyadic exchange relationships. In contrast, people who are more communal-oriented tend to give more weight to the needs of other actors when having high status in dyadic exchange relationships.

In fact, Y. Chen (2002) posits that how status is construed also varies across social systems (e.g. national cultures, industries, organizations, or groups) depending on the ideological beliefs, incentives, and norms embedded within these social systems. Specifically, she distinguishes between two types of status construal: *cooperative* and *competitive*. She suggests that when status differences are cooperatively construed, status is associated with differential role responsibilities rather than perceived differences in group members' "worthiness." Cooperative construals are more likely in communal social systems, in which each member's contribution is equally valued, and members share the same level of group membership regardless of status. Both those in high and low status positions bear mutual accountability toward each other and the group (King, 1991; Lunyu, 1991; Mao, 1994; Yang, 1993). High-status members work to ensure that they carry greater responsibilities for attaining group goals and show concern for lower status members' needs (Chen, Lee-Chai & Bargh, 2001; Confucius, 1938). Lower status members, in turn, work to ensure that they assist high-status members in their group efforts by showing respect and deference for the guidance from the high-status members

(Lunyu, 1991). As Y. Chen (2002) argues, in communal social systems, both high- and low-status actors share high levels of group identity and relational solidarity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Status differences are cooperatively construed, and status deference tends to be based on respect and esteem for high-status members.

In contrast, Y. Chen (2002) suggests that when status differences are competitively construed, high-status members of groups tend to perceive themselves as more worthy than and superior to low-status members. Competitive construals are likely in exchange and equity-based social systems, in which members compete to attain status-based rewards. In such systems, status is strongly associated with a perception of elite group membership, posing esteem threats to low-status out-group members while boosting the esteem of high-status in-group members (Fiske, 1993; Frank, 1985; Keltner et al., in press; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Given the transactive nature of such social systems, high-status members are more likely to construe their interactions with low-status members in an exchange manner and use rewards and punishments as influence strategies (Wilson, Near & Miller, 1996). Lower status members, in turn, are more likely to perceive social differentiation between themselves and high-status members (e.g. adopting an “us vs. them” relational schema, Kramer, 1996). They may consequently fear being exploited by the high-status members and engage in vigilant social information processing (Chen, Brockner & Greenberg, 2003; Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Van den Bos, Bruins, Wilke & Dronkert, 1999). Logically, in groups in which status is competitively construed, low-status actors will tend to obediently, rather than respectfully, defer to high-status others.

### *Summary*

In this section, we have examined the construct of status in work groups. We have noted that status is typically defined as a perception of comparative social esteem across group members, and it is context specific and consensually defined. Status differentials are naturally occurring in groups – particularly when groups are considered within a social context, such as an organization. Further, when people perceive status differences, they tend to defer to them. Thus, status differentials can help groups to achieve cooperation and coordination among members. Finally, we described that status deference can take multiple forms. In certain groups, status will be construed more competitively and induce obedience from low-status actors. In other groups, status will be construed more cooperatively and induce respect-based compliance.

In the next section, we integrate our discussions of status and synchronization. Specifically, we examine how status differentials within a group can enhance or inhibit group-level synchronization.

*Status and Synchronization*

As a first step in examining how status differentials influence the group process of temporal alignment, we consider how having high or low status within a group affects an individual member's pacing preferences. Specifically, we focus on: (a) how a member's perceived social status affects how he or she constructs personal pacing preferences regarding group activities; and (b) when personal pacing preferences conflict with synchronizing, how a member's social status affects the weights that a member places on achieving his or her personal pacing preferences vs. being synchronized with the group.

*The Effects of Status on Pacing Preferences*

A broad body of research suggests that having high status is associated with increased perceptions of self-efficacy and control (Keltner et al., in press; Kipnis, 1972; Lee & Tiedens, 2001), and a desire to maintain the status quo (Chen, Brockner & Greenberg, 2003; Pfeffer, 1992). These findings suggest that high status group members will tend to have well-articulated personal pacing preferences, because they will know what they want temporally and will perceive that achieving their personal pacing goals in the group setting is viable. Because of their high perceived efficacy within the group, high-status members will not perceive conflicts between achieving their own pacing goals and synchronizing with the group. Instead, they are likely to expect that the group will, in fact, synchronize by adapting to their own preferences.

However, the distinction between cooperative vs. competitive status construals suggests an interesting nuance regarding how high-status members are likely to construct their preferences in different group contexts. If status is competitively construed within a group, we hypothesize that the high-status member's pacing goals will be influenced most by his/her own personal traits, experiences, and extra-group demands. When the group synchronizes, the high-status actor will prefer that it does so in line with his or her own pacing goals and will expect obedience from low-status members in order to do so (Chen, 2002; Chen, Lee-Chai & Bargh, 2001).

In contrast, when status is construed cooperatively, we posit that a strong sense of group identity and relational solidarity with low-status members will accompany the high-status role. The high-status actor will perceive the welfare of the group and its members as valuable to the self (Chen et al., 1998, Chen et al., 2002). In this case, the high-status member's own pacing goals will reflect not only his or her personal traits, experiences and extra-group demands; but also a perception of what is best for the group and its other members. Thus, when the group synchronizes, the high-status member will prefer that it does so in line with

his or her own preferences, but these will be based, at least in part, on what he/she believes to be in the best interests of the group (Chen, 2002).

For those low in status positions, we hypothesize that personal pacing preferences may not be as strongly held, because having low status is associated with low levels of self-efficacy and control (Keltner et al., *in press*; Lee & Tiedens, 2001). Thus, low-status members may assume and expect that the group's timing demands will infringe on their personal timing preferences (e.g. they will be expected to work later or faster than they would personally prefer on behalf of the group.) Further, we hypothesize that the tendency toward status deference and the role of temporal control in conferring status will heighten this effect. The net result being that low-status actors will weight the in-synch preference more heavily in group interactions, particularly as compared to how they weight their own pacing preferences (Blau, 1986; Keltner et al., *in press*; Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Simmel, 1950).

However, just as with high-status actors, we anticipate some interesting nuances depending on how status is construed in the group context. Namely, in groups where status is cooperatively construed, a strong sense of group identity and relational solidarity with high-status members will be present. Low-status members will feel comparatively high levels of personal efficacy and identification with the group. As a result, personal pacing preferences may be formed by low-status members which reflect a collective perception of the self. Here, achieving group synchronization can be perceived as personally motivating because it meets personal pacing goals, and as socially motivating because it satisfies the general preference to synchronize. In contrast, when status is competitively construed, the personal pacing preferences of low-status actors will reflect a more individualistic perception of the self. In this case, when synchronization occurs, it is more likely to be perceived as incongruent with personal preferences and be based on obedience. Thus, when a conflict is perceived between achieving one's personal pacing goals and group synchronization, it is likely to be more acute for the low-status member in groups where status differences are competitively, rather than cooperatively, construed (Chen, 2002).

#### *How Group Status Structures Help Synchronization*

Combining these observations with our earlier points, we note that: (a) the control of time is a well-accepted symbol of status; (b) status differentials are inevitable in groups; and (c) people generally like to synchronize. Correspondingly, we posit that the status differentials within groups facilitate the internal synchronization of group members' activities because they induce temporal deference from low-status group members. That is, low-status members will place a high value on synchronizing with the group. In order to synchronize, low-status members will seek to align the pace of their activities to match the pace set by high-status members.

As entrainment models emphasize, individuals within groups intuitively look for temporal markers with which to align their activities. We posit that the behavior of a high-status group member, who feels high levels of personal efficacy and control in the group setting, provides the temporal cues that others follow.

This line of reasoning has three important implications for work groups. First, it suggests that when a member with high performance-based status establishes a temporal agenda for a group, lower-status members will perceive that agenda as credible and seek to align with it. This will be true even if group members hold divergent personal pacing preferences, as long as they acknowledge the high-status member's rank and role legitimacy. In this case, low status group members may seek to influence how the high-status member sets the agenda, but ultimately should be willing to align with the duration and intensity cues established by the higher status member's agenda.

Second, in the absence of task-relevant temporal cues (i.e. the nature of the group task does not itself engender specific temporal pacing parameters – perhaps deadlines are ambiguous or the nature of how to pace the work is unknown), the presence of a high-status member can facilitate effective group performance. This will be particularly true if that member takes a lead in setting a pace through his or her own actions, which provides a temporal structure for the group. Thus, when temporal cues are otherwise ambiguous, high-status members can provide temporal reference points and salient rhythmic cues based on their own schedules, work styles and pace. Again, if low-status members acknowledge the high-status member's rank and role legitimacy, they will tend to synchronize their activities with those cues. A salient example of this type of synchronization would be the work-hour norms set by a group leader who works from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. everyday and, by doing so, implies that is a reasonable expectation for other members of his group. In this case, group members are likely to adopt similar hours in an effort to synchronize with him and others in the group. Here, the high-status member's personal temporal referents provide salient cues, which by virtue of his or her status gain legitimacy.

Third, in times of transition and substantial change, high-status members can provide temporal referents that allow groups to re-establish work flow more quickly. If a group finds its rhythms disrupted by unexpected events (a salient example for those of us at NYU was the events of September 11, 2001), the presence of high-status members can provide a critical "righting" function by providing new markers and pace-setting activities that allow groups to stabilize more quickly than if they were not present. Again, in the presence of ambiguity and unclear temporal markers from other sources, the presence of high-status members who clearly articulate temporal cues and ongoing rhythms can provide temporal clarity for a group.

In this sense, the presence of status differentials within a work group can be highly beneficial to temporal performance. This is because the behaviors of

high-status members act as temporal cues with which other members naturally look to align and pace their own activities. Yet, as we note below, the effects of status differentials on group synchronization may not always be beneficial.

#### *How Group Status Structures Inhibit Synchronization*

Implicit in our argument, thus far, has been the assumption that a clear status hierarchy exists within the group, which delineates one group member as having legitimately higher status than the other members. In contrast to that model, we can imagine three types of status hierarchies that could inhibit, rather than facilitate, effective intra-group synchronization.

The first situation occurs when the basis used for determining status does not reflect the task-relevant capabilities of the group, a result consistent with the behavioral dominance perspective. This can happen when behavioral dominance or personal connections, rather than performance competence, determine status. Here, a high-status actor may emerge within the group who sets a temporal agenda for the group that does not reflect the true performance needs of the group. The high-status actor may be the one who is most attractive or has a well-connected social network, but lacks the temporal leadership skills that the group needs. Alternatively, if organizational power determines who has high status, but that actor, while generally competent, is over-extended and distracted by other organizational responsibilities, he or she may not be able to set the most effective temporal agenda for the group. Unless another informal leader emerges, a group can languish, and group members will have difficulties synchronizing their activities.

A second problematic situation can occur when two or more actors emerge (depending on the size of the group) as having high status. When multiple actors occupy equally high status positions, an internal status contest can emerge, particularly if one or more of the high-status actors construes status competitively and seeks domination. The temporal coordination of the group's activities can become a forum for them to engage in status contests. As numerous authors have observed, high-status actors often compete to arrive appropriately late to meetings, such that either the meeting is held up until their arrival or alternatively, the meeting is restarted when they arrive (e.g. Owens & Sutton, 2001). These types of actions can quickly impede a group's effective temporal functioning. The co-CEO model in mergers and acquisitions is another example that illustrates the difficulties inherent in such a status distribution structure (Sirower, 1997, 1999). This type of leadership model more often fails than succeeds, precisely because numerous temporal and other conflicts often emerge. If two CEOs have strong divergent pacing preferences (e.g. regarding when to make a post-merger layoff announcement), critical decisions may be delayed, slowing the realization of synergies between the two companies (Sirower, 1997).

A third type of status hierarchy that can impede the internal synchronization of group activities is an equal status structure, where group decision-making is characterized by consensus. Whether temporal consensus can be easily achieved depends on an array of factors. For example, if none or only one of the group members holds strong personal pacing preferences, then the first temporal suggestion that a particular member makes might serve as a salient anchor that sets the pace (Kramer, 1991). Such a tendency is more likely in groups where social harmony is a dominant value (Janis, 1982). Temporal consensus within an equal-status group also can be facilitated when there are salient task-related temporal cues associated with the group's work (e.g. a clear imposed deadline from an important client or a professor's due date for a group project). In contrast, when there are strongly-held, divergent personal preferences among multiple group members, temporal conflicts can emerge. Members with opposing temporal preferences might use the opportunity to compete for status in the group, and members who share similar preferences might form coalitions to collectively compete against each other (Rubin & Brown, 1975). After an internal struggle, a new status structure with a clear hierarchy might emerge. For this reason, the actual existence of an equal status distribution structure is rather rare and often relatively short-lived (Blau, 1986; Simmel, 1950).

#### *Integration*

These three examples emphasize that the role of status in group synchronization is complex. Sometimes the presence of status differentials can facilitate synchronization; sometimes they will inhibit it. Again, we posit that the degree to which different status structures inhibit synchronization also may depend on whether status is cooperatively or competitively construed within the group context. When status is cooperatively construed among all members of a group, we predict that, on average, synchronization will be less problematic because members' personal temporal goals are more likely to coincide with the group's goals. Thus, when conflicts emerge, they will be readily resolved. However, in group settings in which status is competitively construed, these issues will be more problematic. Here, the control of time will be central to how people gain standing in the group. When time-based conflicts emerge, the agreement to go along with the group can be perceived as a loss of face and lead to more contentiousness and dissension.

## CONCLUSION

We began this chapter with the observation that time is a symbol of status (Blau, 1986; Hall, 1983; Levine, 1997; Owens & Sutton, 2001). We used this

observation as a launching point for examining the role of status in how group members temporally align their activities. While psychologists have examined the effect of relative status on many facets of people's emotions, cognitions, and behaviors (e.g. Chen et al., 2003; Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998; Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Keltner et al., in press; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), here we have focused on the role of status in the social process of synchronizing group members' activities. Our central thesis has been that understanding status and the status structure that exists within a group is central to understanding the temporal dynamics that occur within the group.

We developed this thesis in several stages. First, we reviewed Blount and Janicik's (2002) model of within group synchronization that posits people have both: (a) personal pacing preferences; and (b) a general preference to feel temporally in-synch in social interactions. Despite the in-synch preference, we described how individual diversity in pacing preferences presents a challenge for achieving group synchronization. We then introduced the notion of status and how status differentials within a group can both facilitate and inhibit the realization of group synchronization. Status was defined as a perception of comparative social esteem across group members that is context-specific and consensually defined. We described two ways in which people defer to status differences: obediently or respectfully (Chen, 2002). When status is construed competitively, it induces obedience from low-status actors, and when it is construed cooperatively, it induces respect-based compliance. In both instances, we have argued that status differentials matter in groups because they affect member's temporal behavior vis-à-vis group goals. Whether competitively or cooperatively constructed, we have argued that status differentials lead low status group members to align the timing of their activities with that of high-status members in order to synchronize.

When a clear status structure exists with one member holding more status than the others, group members will naturally synchronize with that actor. This situation will be good for the group as long as the high-status actor's temporal cues reflect what is best for the group. When the actor is not competent, or perhaps distracted by other activities, this type of status structure can negatively affect group temporal performance. Further, when a clear status structure does not exist, or when multiple actors are engaged in status contests, group members may be inhibited in their efforts to synchronize effectively.

Overall, we posit that the degree to which status differentials become problematic for a group will be determined by the degree to which status is cooperatively or competitively construed within the group. When status is cooperatively construed, we hypothesize that, on average, synchronization will be less problematic. This is because member's personal goals are more likely to, at least in part, reflect the group's needs. This will be true for both low- and high-status members. In

contrast, in groups in which status tends to be competitively construed, personal temporal goals will tend to reflect a more individualistic perception of the self, and synchronization with the group is more likely to be perceived to be at odds with personal interests.

Status differentials across members are common to work groups, and they affect how groups internally align their activities. Low-status members' time tends to be less valued than high-status members' time, and high-status members are sometimes tempted to use a group's time to assert and confirm their existing high status. As a result, how status is distributed across members affects how readily a group synchronizes.

To effectively understand the temporal dynamics of work groups, therefore, we suggest that the following elements must be considered: (a) the underlying status structure of a group; (b) the nature of how status is achieved within the group; (c) how individual group members perceive and construe their own status; and (d) whether status is construed cooperatively or competitively at the group-level. By considering these factors, further advances can be made into the understanding of temporal dynamics of any work group. We advocate that the study of time in work groups must incorporate the study of status. Status differentials are a ubiquitous aspect of social life, and with status, comes the control of time.

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