

Advancing the role of temporal experience in relation to workplace thriving

International
Journal of
Organizational
Analysis

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Received 19 November 2024
Revised 30 May 2025
4 September 2025
29 October 2025
Accepted 1 November 2025

Abstract

Purpose – This conceptual paper aims to explore organisational operating rhythms with a view to establishing a broader understanding of how they might be experienced in relation to wellbeing or thriving at both the organisational and individual levels. A model of operating rhythms is proposed, which integrates systems theory concepts alongside a new conception of individual and contextual enablers of thriving.

Design/methodology/approach – A literature review is conducted on temporal workplace processes with the addition of wellbeing and thriving related terminology. This review was then used to synthesise perspectives from organisational analysis and positive organisational scholarship, providing new conceptual frameworks for understanding organisational temporal experiences in relation to thriving.

Findings – Identifying limited prior research on temporal rhythms in organisations and the relationship to thriving and wellbeing, a conceptual link between these variables is developed to encourage and support further research in this area. This proposed model includes systems theory perspectives and suggests that workplace rhythms shape the flow of information, feedback, learning and interpersonal interaction, influencing the conditions that support thriving. Implications of this conceptualisation of organisational temporal experience provide potential approaches for use within organisational contexts.

Originality/value – Two novel contributions are introduced. Firstly, a two-axis model that maps organisational rhythms along a continuum from strategic to operational (Y-axis) and intentional to emergent (X-axis). Secondly, the concept of a zone of interaction, where personal and contextual enablers of thriving intersect, is proposed as a lens to understand complex variables that, including operating rhythms, influence lived workplace experience at micro and macro levels.

Keywords Organisational thriving, Positive organizational scholarship, Leadership, Employee wellbeing, Self-determination theory, Systems theory, Artificial intelligence, Organizational performance, Temporal dynamics, Organizational change

Paper type Conceptual paper



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International Journal of
Organizational Analysis
Vol. 34 No. 12, 2026
pp. 1-17
Emerald Publishing Limited
1934-8835
DOI 10.1108/IJOA-11-2024-5000

Introduction

Organisations are increasingly expected to deliver simultaneously on performance, wellbeing and workforce development; however, the approaches and structures used in an attempt to meet these demands often reinforce organisational fragmentation and workgroup silos (Khalid and Syed, 2024; Shaik *et al.*, 2022), often working in opposition to desired change. When considering these challenges of change within the broader systemic context, the lack of an established connection between organisational experience, workplace wellbeing, development and performance seems to warrant further attention. One area for consideration in relation to these concerns is that of strategic and operational temporal rhythms as they often are central to shared workplace activity. Temporal rhythms, being understood generally as the cadence of workplace activity, which while receiving specific academic attention (Hernes, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2023), have had very little scientific inquiry in relation to wellbeing and organisational experience.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify definitions of organisational operating rhythms with a view to establishing a broader understanding of how they might be experienced in relation to wellbeing or thriving at both the organisational and individual levels, and to identify opportunities for future research and potential applications within organisations. The key constructs of operating rhythms and thriving are defined alongside current challenges and perspectives, followed by a literature search, in line with previous researchers, with the addition of wellbeing and thriving as core constructs of interest.

Current perspectives on workplace operating rhythms

Over the decades, approaches to operating rhythms have evolved significantly, shaped by technological advancements, globalisation and shifting workplace dynamics. Evolving from rigid, hierarchical based structures in the 1980s aimed at organisational command and control (Mintzberg, 1980), to more seemingly adaptive approaches with the rise of lean and agile practices in the 1990s (McCurry and McIvor, 2002) and later to those found in the digital transformation, resilience, sustainability and hybrid work models of the 2000s and 2020s (Achour *et al.*, 2015; Bharna *et al.*, 2011; Grant *et al.*, 2013; Paine and Organ, 2000). Approaches to operating rhythms have tried to adapt to the organisational needs of a given time, however, currently require further evolution if they are to be adaptively responsive to current and emerging organisational challenges and demands.

The current move towards hybrid work models, combining remote and in-office work (Gratton, 2021), necessitates a rethinking of work routines towards balancing flexibility with collaboration and productivity. AI and automation are increasingly being integrated into business processes, influencing the rhythms of workplace experience and process through enabling more data-driven decision-making and efficiency (Dumas *et al.*, 2023). For these reasons, established workplace behavioural rhythms, and approaches to managing them are being forced to evolve, placing new demands on how organisations structure time, coordinate activities and align human behaviour with operational requirements and strategic intent.

In response to these shifts, recent scholarship has aimed toward deepening our theoretical understanding. Hernes (2022) introduces the concept of temporal scaffolding, highlighting how organisations use structured rhythms to manage time and align activities across multiple organisational levels. This scaffolding provides stability while enabling flexibility, allowing organisations to navigate the complexities of modern environments. Bansal *et al.* (2025) build on this by theorising on organisational time, emphasising how rhythms integrate strategic priorities with day-to-day execution, creating coherence in dynamic contexts. Zhang *et al.* (2023) contribute further by examining strategic rhythms, which include cycles of reflection and adjustment that foster employee growth and organisational learning.

These contributions reinforce the notion that rhythms are not static or uniform but instead exist along a spectrum of design and scale emphasising the multi-level dynamics of rhythms and their implications for individuals, teams and organisations. These researchers' insights underscore the importance of viewing rhythms not as static routines, but as evolving patterns shaped by broader organisational and environmental forces.

Current challenges within organisational context

Considering the broader context, scholars have described the current era as part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an age defined by accelerated digital transformation, the integration of artificial intelligence, geopolitical volatility and rapidly evolving workforce expectations (Manda and Dhaou, 2019; Skilton and Hovsepian, 2018; Spöttl and Windelband, 2021). These shifts are thought to be leading workplaces to a potentially significant qualitative shift (Gopinath, 2023) in terms of workplace tension, experience and function. Within these evolving workplace environments and expectations, strategic and procedural cohesion is increasingly challenged, with process often working against longer term strategic initiatives in attempting to meet emerging and more immediate challenges. These challenges reinforce a need for a deeper understanding of organisational temporal rhythms in relation to organisational change and experience.

While discussions on change are essential when considering organisational experience, within an organisational context careful consideration of the importance of continuity is also required. As Hernes (2022, p. 151) observes:

What one experiences as continuity at one time may, when viewed retrospectively, be seen as change. And what one experiences as change at one time may, in hindsight, be perceived as continuity.

While Hernes seems to focus here on the changing perspective of experience, this paper argues that understanding organisational dynamics requires a dual focus: recognising the impact and importance of change while remaining attuned to enduring patterns of organisational continuity.

This tension between continuity and change plays out in real time across contemporary organisations under increasing pressure to ensure operational stability while simultaneously adapting to immediate and often unpredictable strategic disruptions (Gopinath, 2023; Moşteanu, 2024). The evolving demands on global supply chains have intensified the need for adaptability, clarity and alignment across organisational systems (Grossman *et al.*, 2024). These macro-level shifts are not confined to policymakers or industry leaders, they are felt throughout an organisational hierarchy, impacting experience at all levels including that of teams and individuals. A recent OECD report, OECD (2023) found that nearly one in five financial services workers and 14% of manufacturing employees are highly concerned about job security due to AI-driven disruption. At a global level, the World Economic Forum (Leopold *et al.*, 2025) estimates that by 2030, 170 million jobs will be eliminated while 92 million will be displaced. This research underscoring the scale, volatility and urgency of change organisations must now navigate, particularly given the inverse relationship between job insecurity with both physical and mental wellbeing (De Witte *et al.*, 2016; Llosa *et al.*, 2018), as well as both individual (Darvishmotevali and Ali, 2020; Ford *et al.*, 2011; Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018) and organisational (Krekel *et al.*, 2019) performance.

In response to these rapidly evolving workplace demands, including the need to balance the duality of continuity and change, it is important to question the role of how time and rhythmic workplace behaviours are structured (Hernes, 2022; Moşteanu, 2024). An additional concern to these competing needs is the responsibility of organisational leaders to safeguard the wellbeing of individuals and teams that contribute to organisational performance and success.

Operating rhythms, wellbeing and thriving

Operating rhythms have been defined broadly within the literature as the habitual cadences in which teams meet and share information to perform work tasks (Poels *et al.*, 2017), or as repetitive temporal patterns through which work activities unfold (Katila *et al.*, 2020). Zhang and colleagues (Zhang *et al.*, 2023) focus specifically on strategic rhythms as repeatable, intentionally instituted organisation level rhythms aimed towards long-term organisational performance. While these definitions vary to the degree that they focus on intentionality of design, they all highlight in common the importance of design and its relevance to performance. While performance is important, these practical definitions of temporal work patterns leave out the relationship between performance, wellbeing and development limiting their potential utility and failing to acknowledge the complex interactive context of workplace experience (Stacey, 2003).

A number of meta-analysis indicate that both psychological wellbeing and physical health, as measured through a variety of variables, correlate with individual work performance (Ford *et al.*, 2011), employee productivity and customer loyalty, as well as business unit level performance (Krekel *et al.*, 2019), generally concluding that there are a range of wellbeing variables significantly correlated to individual and organisational, performance and development outcomes (Warr and Nielsen, 2018; Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2020). Thriving, a specific organisational construct relating wellbeing and performance, is defined by Brown *et al.* (2017) as:

The joint experience of development and success, which can be realised through effective holistic functioning and observed through the experience of a high level of well-being and a perceived high level of performance (p. 174).

While alternate definitions of thriving exist, such as Spreitzer *et al.*'s, 2005 socially embedded model, this definition was selected as it not only integrates psychological wellbeing and learning, two core dimensions of individual thriving broadly (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005), it also captures performance observable at individual, team and organisational levels (Brown *et al.*, 2017). As such, this definition provides a strong conceptual fit for examining how behavioural operating rhythms influence workplace experience in line with the focus of this paper.

While this integrative framing positions wellbeing, performance and development as interdependent outcomes rather than discrete initiatives, Brown *et al.* (2017) also caution that the construct remains under development stating: "Future research should examine the applicability and utility of this conceptualisation in various settings and refine it if appropriate" (p. 175). As such, this definition provides a theoretically grounded yet evolving foundation upon which to explore the role of organisational rhythms in enabling workplace thriving.

Given the wellbeing to performance relationship identified earlier, and the intention to explore these relationships to temporal concepts of organisational experience, we now review existing research on the link between organisational temporal rhythms and thriving, with an aim towards further conceptual development and identification of practical approaches to workplace intervention to support wellbeing and performance.

Methodology

The methodology applied here draws heavily from a recent review on strategic operating rhythms (Zhang *et al.*, 2023), which in turn based their definition on Ancona, Okhuysen and Perlow's (2001) work on temporal constructs, as the initial broad stages of the review were relevant to our defined purpose. As in the previous research (Zhang *et al.*, 2023), all titles,

keywords and abstracts in Web of Science were searched using the search terms: frequenc*, regular*, rhythm*, cycle*, interval*, sequence*, order*, synchron*, entrain*, pattern*, *symmetry, allocation time and relocation activit*.

The scope was then similarly limited to high-impact scholarly journals in the domains of strategic management and international business (see [Zhang et al., 2023](#), for further details) published from 2001 to 2024. These results were then further limited to only those that contained reference to wellbeing, wellbeing or thriving. This resulted in four articles. Each of these articles was then independently reviewed to ascertain the relevance to organisational temporal rhythms.

Results

A systematic literature search was conducted across the Web of Science database, to identify empirical studies addressing the relationship between thriving or wellbeing and terms related to organisational operating rhythms incorporated combinations of keywords as identified in the methodology. The results were then limited to high-impact organisational and business journals similarly to searches conducted in previously published research ([Zhang et al., 2023](#)) and then further limited to those including wellbeing and/or thriving.

The initial search yielded 79 articles. After limiting to those related to wellbeing, wellbeing and/or thriving four articles were identified. After the independent review to ascertain the relevance to organisational temporal rhythms, specifically, no studies were found that directly examined the connection or relationship between operating rhythms and wellbeing or thriving.

One paper was found to be adjacently relevant ([Stephenson, 2023](#)), providing a qualitative case study focused on how strategic change can impact working rhythms and how four main strategies of coping are used. While this paper identified the impact change has on wellbeing, the focus is more on individual approaches to coping with rhythmic changes rather than specifically identifying connections between wellbeing, thriving and organisational operating rhythms of interest in this research.

The absence of relevant literature underscores a notable gap in current research, suggesting that this area remains underexplored. This finding highlights the need for future empirical investigation to better understand the relationship between organisational operating rhythms and wellbeing or thriving, alongside the need for deeper theoretical development of the potential connection, to support further empirical endeavours in this area.

Discussion

After conducting a literature review of existing work on the relationship between workplace thriving, wellbeing and organisational operating rhythms, the lack of relevant findings highlight a need for further research, investigation and conceptual development. This paper now builds on existing distinctions between strategic and operational organisational rhythms ([Zhang et al., 2023](#)), introduces the additional concept of emergent and intentional rhythms integrating concepts from systems theory. These new conceptions provide a broader framework for understanding workplace rhythmic experience and the potential relationship of operating rhythms to wellbeing and performance. It is hoped that these additions will enable organisations to better engage with and design to these challenges. When viewed through this added dimension, the focus of this paper is directed to how organisations have the potential to better curate these cadences of experience ([Hernes, 2022](#)), to more positively influence performance and capability development ([Grant and Ashford, 2008](#); [Pavlov and Bourne, 2011](#); [Zhenjing et al., 2022](#)), while also fostering the psychological and emotional

needs of their workforce (Brown *et al.*, 2017; Nielsen *et al.*, 2017; Paais and Pattiruhu, 2020).

Specifically, the concept of a *zone of interaction* is introduced as a dynamic space where individual and workplace environmental enablers meet (Brown *et al.*, 2017). Within this zone, workplace enablers such as these temporal and behavioural rhythms shape key experiences like autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci *et al.*, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2024). By integrating these perspectives, the paper highlights rhythm design and engagement as foundational yet underutilised tools for fostering thriving in adaptive organisational systems (Lizier, 2017).

With very little research in top organisational journals on the relationship between organisational operating rhythms and workplace thriving or wellbeing, it is important to consider the conceptualisation of these constructs. The definitions of both operating rhythms and thriving given earlier provide context for this discussion to critically examine their role in workplace experience. These definitions form the foundation for the conceptual framework proposed in this discussion. The following sections examine how operating rhythms, as both purposeful and emergent patterns, interact with individual and environmental enablers to influence workplace thriving.

A systemic conceptualisation of workplace operating rhythms

To build on this, the systemic concept of *emergence*, from within the science of complexity, provides a useful dimension to operating rhythms, potentially enriching our understanding of workplace experience. Informed by scholarship on complex adaptive systems (Dooley, 1997), *emergence* refers to the spontaneous formation of patterns or behaviours that arise through local interactions rather than through centralised planning or top-down design (Stacey, 2003). Combining the concept of operating rhythms with that of emergence, a definition of an emergent operating rhythms is provided here as:

A set of communication and interaction processes that coalesce organically to shape organisational behaviour. These processes are guided by implicit, undocumented or assumed patterns that can significantly influence the functioning of an organisation at various systemic levels.

Emergence is an important augmentation to the understanding of operating rhythms as it introduces a definition that recognises the necessity of adaptive organisational evolution whilst also highlighting often unseen pressures on organisational performance and individual experience within the workplace. Both purposeful and emergent rhythms of organisational experience are essential constructs requiring consideration when attempting to ensure that various parts of an organisation are working effectively towards common goals or purposes. Outlining the definitional difference between purposefully designed and emerging rhythms provides an opportunity to assess, not only their relative merits on organisational experience and outcomes but to consider also the forces of tension at play between the two. This consideration allows for a more holistic approach to workplace design and engagement that can support both the performance and wellbeing of organisations, teams and individuals.

When applied to organisational contexts, this concept of emergent operating rhythms help to explain how some rhythms develop organically, shaped by culture, habit, necessity or informal practices, rather than through deliberate strategic intent. Recognising this dynamic allows for an understanding of rhythm design, where formal, strategic rhythms coexist with, and are often shaped by, emergent and adaptive behaviours embedded in everyday practice.

To better conceptualise the diversity of temporal organisational experience, Figure 1 illustrates a proposed two-axis model. The Y-axis represents a continuum from *strategic* to *operational*, capturing whether rhythms are designed to steer broad organisational direction

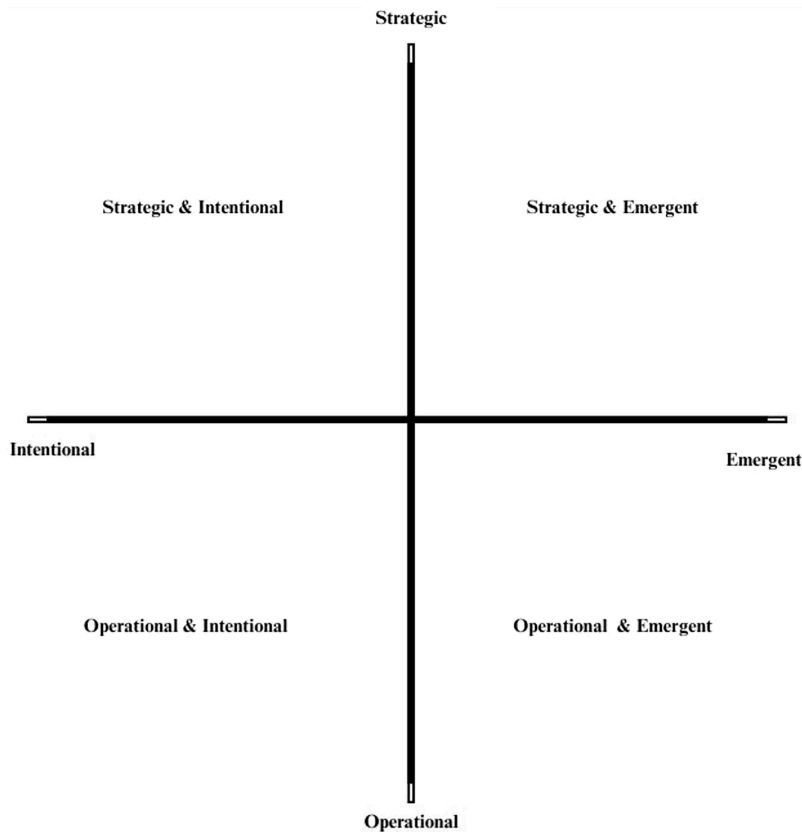


Figure 1. Organizational rhythms in practice: a framework for understanding intent and scope

or support everyday workflow. The X-axis reflects a continuum from *intentional* to *emergent*, distinguishing between rhythms that are consciously designed and those that materialise organically. By situating rhythms within this matrix, we gain insight into how different types of temporal structures operate, each with distinct implications for alignment, adaptability and their potential to enable or constrain thriving in the workplace.

Intentional–strategic rhythms, such as quarterly business reviews for example, can promote organisational alignment and clarity. Through repetition and intentionally structured processes, these operating rhythms provide direction and focus for an organisation enabling a workforce to better position and direct activity and behaviour with purpose. However, they risk creating rigid and maladaptive strategies when considered in isolation and are not open and responsive to evolving external conditions, such as shifting market dynamics or emergent disruptive technologies. Historical examples like Nokia and Motorola (Abdou and Hussein, 2020; Gilad, 2011) illustrate how entrenched planning rhythms, once effective, became liabilities in rapidly changing environments.

Intentional–operational rhythms, like structured team check-ins and standardised time-cyclic processes, of which organisations such as Starbucks and McDonald’s are widely

known for are often thought to support role clarity and operational consistency. While providing structured team and individual-based learning and development, these approaches may become burdensome in some cases (Bray and Brawley, 2002; Karkkola *et al.*, 2019). The risk of becoming burdensome is particularly relevant when these structures are not considered in the broader context of workplace experience. This process rigidity can potentially lead to negative impacts on employee wellbeing (Chillakuri and Vanka, 2021) through lowering efficiency, increasing workload and stress.

Examples of *emergent-operational rhythms* include, but are not limited to, spontaneous regular interactions, adaptive informal rituals and self-directed peer learning interactions. These cyclic experiences may have the potential to enhance the autonomy and sense of competence of those involved, through less rigid exploration of role delivery and output. These emergent workplace experiences provide an opportunity for greater levels of innovation and creativity (Chen *et al.*, 2021; Penn *et al.*, 1999). However, negative impacts of *emergent-operational rhythms* may include uneven experiences across individuals and lack of procedural fairness with the potential to increase employee stress and inequity (Liang *et al.*, 2022).

Emergent-strategic rhythms describe the unplanned temporal experiences that may impact the strategic progress and direction of an organisation. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic provides a clear example that resulted in the requirement for rapid change. While these types of systemic shock can promote innovation, without clear coordination they risk creating confusion or misalignment. The COVID-19 example is one that is rhythmically chaotic and temporally unpredictable. Other emergent rhythms can affect strategy while being more predictable in their emergence. For example, changes in government often have an impact on funding to capital works in specific ways to particular industries such as transport, infrastructure, mining and engineering specifically. Yet, while these occurrences have specific predictable timelines and cadence, organisations may not include these emergent-strategic rhythms holistically in their intentional design. Such occurrences may significantly impact workload and other intentionally designed operating rhythms, leading to tension and potentially impacting workplace thriving (Bowling *et al.*, 2015; Pace *et al.*, 2021; Wang and Zhang, 2024).

Each type of rhythm as defined here has the potential to enable or inhibit wellbeing, performance and development, underscoring the need for conscious rhythm design and adaptive engagement of emergent processes to support thriving in workplaces. It is important to recognise that considerations of influence on experience extend beyond only operating rhythms traditionally contained within the organisational context. The broader social and cultural rhythmic experience is also important to consider in its interconnected relationship, through the experience of individuals, with organisational contexts. Critically, such design and considerations must be attuned not only to organisational imperatives but also to employee needs and may often be better optimised for contextual fit, balancing structure and adaptability to support both strategic coherence and optimal thriving alongside individual wellbeing.

Personal and contextual enablers of organisational thriving

The potential impact of organisational rhythms on workplace experience raises an important question as to the meaning of workplace thriving and the enabling factors that can support or hinder wellbeing, performance and development. As illustrated in Figure 2, Brown *et al.* (2017), in their model of human thriving, adopt an adjectival description of thriving, described as *effective holistic functioning* as the repeated experience of high wellbeing and performance, distinct from related concepts like resilience or flourishing and linked to long-

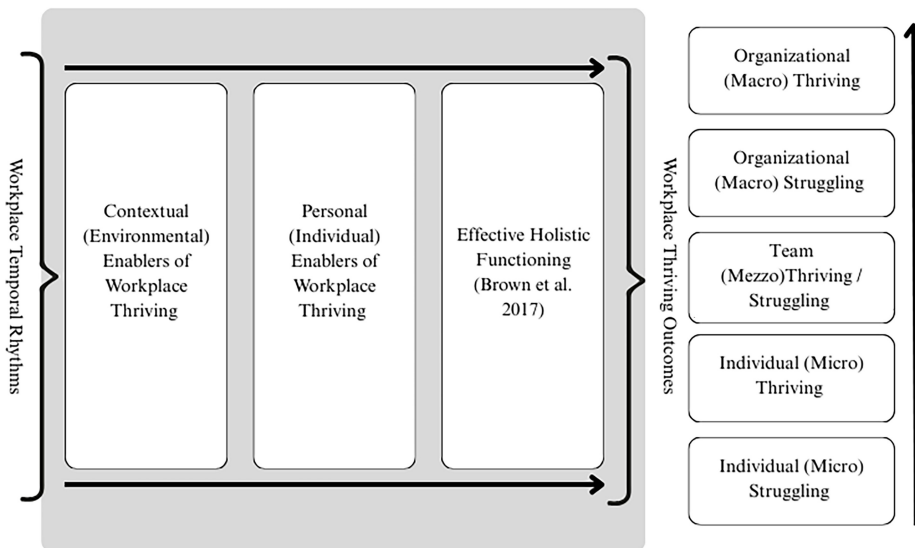


Figure 2. Operating rhythm as antecedent to workplace thriving

Source(s): Adapted from [Brown et al. \(2017\)](#)

term development and success. In addition, the authors distinguish between *personal enablers*, which include individual affective, cognitive and behavioural attributes, and *contextual enablers*, referring to environmental characteristics that interact with personal capacities to facilitate effective holistic functioning. Here we argue that personal and contextual enablers merit careful consideration in the design of operating rhythms when the aim is to sustain effective holistic functioning or thriving at the individual, team and organisational levels.

This proposition is grounded in the understanding that rhythms act as mechanisms through which the everyday activity of work is organised, interpreted and experienced ([Hernes, 2022](#)). They influence how information flows, the cadence and depth of feedback, the accessibility of learning opportunities and the quality of interpersonal interactions, each of which has been linked to wellbeing ([Calitz, 2022](#)), performance and development ([Kim and Jung, 2022](#)). When intentionally designed with holistic inclusion of emergent rhythms, operating rhythms can activate enablers of thriving by fostering coherence, psychological safety ([Newman et al., 2017](#)) and meaningful engagement ([Kim and Jung, 2022](#)). When neglected or misaligned, they risk becoming sources of fragmentation, disengagement and burnout ([Calitz, 2022](#)). In this sense, rhythm design and engagement is not merely an operational concern but holds strategic value in embedding effective holistic functioning within organisational experience.

[Figure 2](#) illustrates the growing body of theoretical and empirical research, suggesting that organisational behavioural rhythms influence both contextual and personal enablers of thriving ([Hernes, 2022](#); [Zhang et al., 2023](#)). Rather than a singular claim, this reflects a synthesis of insights showing how rhythms affect enablers such as feedback cycles, learning moments, relational trust and role clarity. These rhythms shape effective functioning across micro (individual), mezzo (team) and macro (organisational) levels. When aligned, they may

form a coherent system that fosters the emergence and sustainability of thriving across the organisational landscape.

While the model of human thriving outlined by [Brown et al. \(2017\)](#) provides a strong foundation for understanding the difference between personal and contextual enablers of thriving, this binary distinction can obscure the dynamic interplay between the two. In response, and as presented in [Figure 3](#), the concept of a *zone of interaction* is introduced. This zone of interaction is thought of as a conceptual space where individual attributes and environmental conditions converge and interact importantly across the defined domains of personal and contextual enablers. Within this zone, contextual enablers such as leadership style, working hours and workplace culture ([Coutts, 2021](#)) influence how personal enablers are activated or suppressed. The interacting nature of enablers is important to this discussion on workplace experience as it may well be that the temporal aspects of this experience, and the tensions that often exist between the different operating rhythms, provide the context in which the interactive nature of contextual and personal enablers are emphasised. Operating rhythms may provide the structural context that shapes important conditions of this interaction, affecting how individuals experience, respond to and engage with their environment. This framing highlights the importance of rhythm design and engagement in either supporting or constraining the emergence of thriving.

Rather than viewing thriving as the result of either internal disposition or external support alone, this zone reflects a more nuanced systems perspective. It accounts for the ways in which time-bound organisational processes (e.g. regular team check-ins, performance reviews, coaching conversations, leadership maturity and collaborative rituals) actively influence and are influenced by the internal psychological, biological, social, financial and familial states of individuals. For example, a feedback loop embedded within a regular rhythm may reinforce a sense of competence and autonomy for one employee while generating disengagement or anxiety for another, depending on how that rhythm is experienced, interpreted and supported.

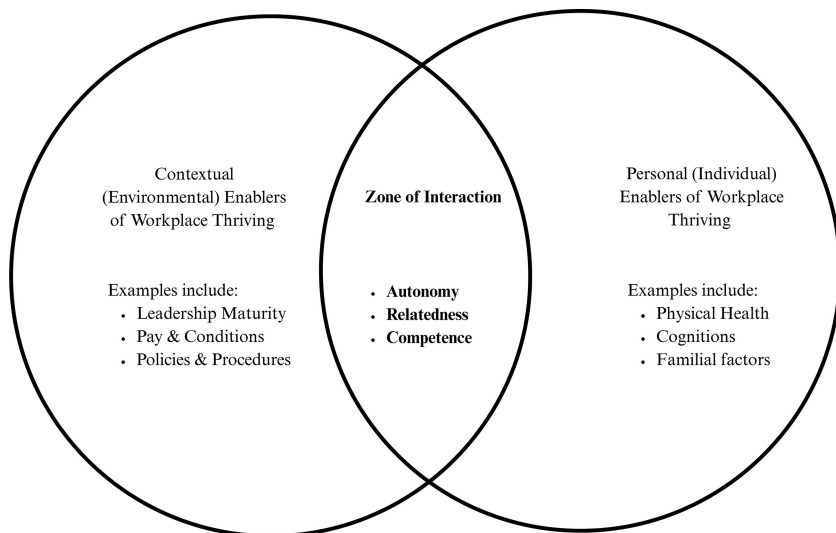


Figure 3. The zone of interaction

Crucially, the structural rhythms of work shape more than coordination and time management, they also may significantly influence how individuals experience connection, inclusion and psychological safety (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023). For instance, belonging is increasingly recognised as a vital outcome associated with workplace wellbeing, engagement and retention (Waller, 2020). Yet, belonging is not universally or automatically experienced, it arises through the interaction between an individual's identity, personality, lived experience and the surrounding environment. As Wise (2022) contends, belonging cannot be taught in a traditional sense; rather, it must be intentionally designed for and consistently nurtured. Rhythms that embed practices such as peer recognition, shared reflection, inclusive rituals or co-created planning cycles can help create the contextual conditions under which belonging may emerge.

The recognition of a zone of interaction invites deeper exploration into how personal and contextual enablers interact to support workplace thriving. For example, self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) identifies the three fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, which could be considered as key enablers of thriving within this zone of interaction. While these needs are often viewed as intrapersonal motivators, they are more accurately understood as emergent phenomena influenced by individual characteristics and the contextual factors that reinforce them (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2024). For example, autonomy may be enabled by rhythms that promote participative decision-making and role clarity; competence through structured feedback cycles and learning opportunities; and relatedness through consistent, high-quality interpersonal interactions. These constructs, like belonging, do not reside solely within the individual or the organisational system. Instead, they emerge from the dynamic interplay between the two, making rhythm design a critical mediating mechanism through which wellbeing, performance and development can be either enhanced or constrained.

Considerations for encouraging workplace thriving

The preceding discussion has argued that operating rhythms, whether strategic or operational, emergent or intentional, function not simply as coordination mechanisms, but as structuring forces that shape employee experience and organisational outcomes. Positioning operating rhythms as an important contextual enabler of workplace thriving and proposing the concept of a zone of interaction as a way to explain how personal and contextual enabling factors intersect, provides an opportunity not only for future inquiry but for purposeful organisational review and assessment.

The degree to which organisations review, assess and design for the cadences of workplace experience, both those purposefully designed and those emergent, is an important consideration for organisations that want to create a thriving workplace that supports both organisational and individual, performance and wellbeing. However, approaching this requires a degree of objectivity often difficult to maintain when mired within these very processes and the associated stressors, strains and biases. However, there are numerous useful approaches and practices that organisations might apply themselves. These include experience sampling, random interviewing, as well as examining existing organisational data on performance and wellbeing to identify current organisational experience. Applying the perspectives provided here on types of operating rhythms and the interaction between personal and contextual thriving enablers to internal organisational data and experience might provide opportunities to leverage change and reinforce positive adaptation. Further to this, organisations could take more active approaches to cadence review within workshops, development activities and other organisational planning sessions, being careful to consider not only the obvious intentional operational and strategic rhythms but also the emergent ones

at both the strategic and operational levels. Other approaches might include engaging an external coach or consultant to provide an objective position, particularly those familiar with system thinking and organisational development approaches. This external position might provide a scaffolding of more complex perspectives and less biased questioning of an organisation's current situation.

Considering this discussion on emergent operating rhythms, the cadences that exist outside of an organisation can be seen to interact with those internal to an organisation, often creating unpredictable workplace tensions. Supporting this position, the aim generally should not only be to identify and then plan around temporal conflicts and rhythmic experiential congestion but to also consider leveraging emergence in ways that help move the workplace towards a more thriving culture. By identifying emergent experiences that are cyclic in nature that align with an organisation's value set or cultural change intention, these then might be integrated, emphasised, aligned with and even celebrated, creating potential leverageable pathways for intentional directive organisational cultural development. While some organisations may be leveraging these opportunities, for example, through alignment with large-scale socio-cultural activities through creating related activities in the workplace, the question can still be asked as to whether these alignments are conducted with an intention for cultural and experiential workplace benefit.

The position here is not that organisations do not align with these broader socio-cultural occurrences already, but that organisations might do this much better, and that considering carefully the interaction between personal and contextual enablers alongside the dynamic interplay of operating rhythms across the strategic, operational, intentional and emergent dimensions, provides tools to support organisations to intentionally nudge themselves towards creating thriving workplace cultures.

Taken together, the propositions outlined in this paper suggest that the impact of rhythm structures extends beyond workflow management into the psychological and developmental domains of employee experience. Importantly, rhythm design and engagement should not be seen as a neutral practice but as a strategic lever for embedding thriving at micro (individual), mezzo (team) and macro (organisational) levels.

Limitations and areas for future research

While this paper is conceptual in nature, there are a number of limitations important to recognise. Very few existing papers were discovered in the literature review concerning both operating rhythm and wellbeing. While limiting the search to top organisational journals focused the review, consistent with previous research, a broader search may find relevant research to further shape the conceptualisation of these temporal experiences in ways relevant to organisational thriving. Additionally, alternative definitions of thriving that exist in the broader literature have not been included here; however, reviewing these definitions more broadly may provide additional insights.

While personal and conceptual enablers have been highlighted as important considerations, particularly in relation to how they crossover and interact, only a limited exploration has occurred here. Future research focusing on specific enablers, as well as research on the broad range of thriving enablers, may help to fill the gap in understanding between workplace temporal occurrences and impacts on wellbeing and performance. To this last point, while the focus here has been on organisational thriving, a deeper review of specific definitions of organisational and individual wellbeing as it pertains to development may provide benefit to the operating rhythm research base and provide for specific intervention focused research design.

Other future directions for empirical inquiry include the development of a validated taxonomy of operating rhythms, capturing their intentionality, scale, function and degrees of influence. Such a taxonomy could help standardise language and support cross-contextual comparisons while linking future research to performance and wellbeing.

Building on [Brown et al., \(2017\)](#), there is also a need to refine the measurement of thriving outcomes in workplace settings, with particular attention to the interdependencies between wellbeing, performance and development. Future studies might also consider longitudinal and multilevel designs to examine how rhythm alignment or misalignment influences thriving over time. Lastly, given the current rise of hybrid and AI-augmented work environments, investigating how both operating rhythms change and how approaches to design adapt in contexts characterised by digital acceleration, distributed teams and shifting employee expectations would seem an important area of inquiry.

Conclusion

In an era of accelerated change driven by digital transformation, AI integration and global uncertainty, organisations must balance the urgent need for adaptability with the enduring need for stability. This paper has argued that workplace operating rhythms, both emergent and intentionally designed, serve as a crucial mechanism for navigating this tension. By carefully considering these experiences and, where possible, equitably structuring the cadence of work, rhythms influence how people experience wellbeing, performance and development amidst change and disruption. By doing this with a more holistic intention and through a more systemic perspective of emergent influences on tension, workplace thriving may be better prioritised.

The dynamic interplay between contextual and personal thriving enablers, as represented here through the concept of the zone of interaction, presents a view of thriving as a lived experience dependent upon the cadences of experience being attuned to both individual and organisational needs. As global uncertainty intensifies, so too does the need for operating rhythms that are not only efficient but human-centred and adaptive.

This paper has identified a clear gap in our current understanding of the relationship between organisational operating rhythms with wellbeing and thriving at both organisational and individual levels. It is hoped that the frameworks developed here and perspectives explored encourage future research and practical inquiry into how organisations can embed rhythms that promote thriving at the individual, team and organisational levels.

Acknowledgements

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