

Building temporal resilience into jobs can help employees thrive when schedules turn upside down: Study

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Managers can do much to help their workers become more resilient to inevitable time disruptions in today's workplace, says new research from

The University of Texas at Austin.

With intricate supply chains and operations that sprawl across [time zones](#), workplace time disturbances are only increasing. Such temporal disruptions aren't just inconvenient, says David Harrison, Texas McCombs professor of management professor: They can carry tangible business costs, such as [impaired health](#), [increased mistakes](#), and [reduced productivity](#).

In a new study with Liliana Pérez-Nordtvedt of The University of Texas at Arlington, Harrison looks at how to make such disruptions less disruptive by fitting individuals' workflows and psychologies to new arrangements in time.

"There are different patterns of resilience to different kinds of changes in time," Harrison says. So, rather than a one-size-fits-all strategy for resilience, he finds three: adjusting, absorbing, and adopting. Each has strengths and weaknesses, depending on the length and severity of a [disruption](#):

- **Adjusting:** Outwardly, workers change their schedules. But psychologically, they resist change, expecting that routines will soon return to normal.
- **Absorbing:** Employees absorb disruptions by shifting tasks around to accommodate them.
- **Adopting:** When a disruption looks to be long-term, some people accept the new normal and reorganize their lives around it.

Harrison offers several ideas to foster temporal resilience in the workplace—before disruptions strike.

- **Flexible Deadlines:** "The more you can loosen up tight time cycles, the better able people are going to be to rejigger their cycles to meet the demands," Harrison says.
- **Margins:** Include flex in schedules so minor interruptions don't wreck an entire day. For example, Harrison himself leaves at least a half-hour between meetings. "Build in that little buffer," he advises. "If everything's super-duper wound tight, then nobody's ever going to be on time."
- **Bite-sized Shifts:** If a manager needs to make a major time change, Harrison suggests breaking it into a series of smaller changes, giving workers time to adapt to each stage.
- **Patience:** Finally, he advises, don't expect superhuman performance. When there are shocks to schedules, allow for short-term dips.

"Recognize that it's not people being resistant to change," he says. "It's people being organisms for whom time is a fundamental element of dealing with the environment. Time has a learning curve, too."

The findings are [published](#) in the journal *Academy of Management Review*.

More information: Liliana Pérez-Nordtvedt et al, From Time Wrinkling to Time Razing Disruptions: Understanding Temporal Resilience, *Academy of Management Review* (2024). [DOI: 10.5465/amr.2022.0452](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2022.0452)

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